

<b>Surname:</b> Musgrave	<b>First Name(s):</b> Sylvia Harvey	<b>Army Number:</b> W/192373	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Say	<b>Name used during service:</b> Say	<b>Rank:</b> L/Cpl	
<b>Main base:</b> Newtown Welshpool Chester Wilton	<b>Training base:</b> Droitwich	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Volunteered - Bristol	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b>	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> Royal Engineers	<b>Command:</b> Eastern Southern
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 18/9/1942 to July 1946	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> End of hostilities	<b>Trade:</b> Class I Clerk	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> (List of items issued)	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Give details of the sorts of things done in a typical day. Include details of shifts, when PT was undertaken, when fatigues were done and what sort of thing had to be done. What tasks did your trade involve.)</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		

<p><b>Pay book:</b></p>	<p>(Send me a picture of the double page in your paybook – AB64 -where personal details are given. These are the pages that start with the Army Number. Alternatively relevant pages from the Release Book, if available.)</p>
<p><b>Memorable moments:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wanted to join the army after I finished Grammar School in the summer of 1942. My mother was very much against it and you couldn't join until you were seventeen and a half and then only with your parents' permission. My father gave his permission so I got in in September 1942. I would have been 18 in December anyway and after 18 you could join up and your parents couldn't stop you.</li> <li>• I was sent to Droitwich and was billeted in a requisitioned a hotel which, in a way, wasn't a good idea, because when you were posted to camp it was a shock after being in a very nice hotel.</li> <li>• A lot in my intake were conscripted and we had some bother with them. I know in the next bedroom we had three girls and they were fuming about being called up. One was engaged to a civilian fellow and she didn't like having to come in. Another one went missing. I don't think they found her. We were supposed to work together to be runners and things like that and because she went missing I was left on my own to do the work. I always remember her because she let me down. There were daily orders with her name and AWOL (Absent Without Leave). We trained for 6 weeks at the hotel at Droitwich, the Norbury House Hotel.</li> <li>• There were 4 in my bedroom with two bunks. One girl from Trowbridge on the bottom and me on the top bouncing off the ceiling, I nearly knocked myself out. The other two came from London; they had been waitresses in some café or something and they knew each other. We were all volunteers in my room. We were divided into squads and the Sergeant in charge of our squad said, "Well I can see from you lot that we aren't going to win the award this time" because they had competitions at the end of each course. We had a girl called Kimber who couldn't march, when she walked she moved her arm and leg on the left side and then her arm and leg on the right. The Sergeant went mad.</li> <li>• We had 4 squads and we marched around at the back of the hotel. They also took us on a route march even though we hadn't all got our uniform. Some of the girls were still in their high heels, they hadn't got shoes. They were falling by the wayside because it was 7 miles. I was used to walking as I belonged to a hiking club at school so it was alright for me and I had got flat shoes. They had quite a few staff going along picking them up. So that was the first initiation. Absolutely scared some of them stiff.</li> <li>• That was the first week. We were kitted out at Brine Baths in Droitwich. All the kit was there but they didn't have everything to fit us all, so some people had to wear their civilian clothes for a couple of weeks or more until they got the right things.</li> <li>• We had inoculations done in the ballroom. We stood in a circle and the MO, who had a cigarette hanging out of her mouth puffing smoke, jammed the needle into the girl in front of me, and the girl behind me fainted. She sort of came over my feet and the doctor looked at her, and said "For God's sake pick her up", jabbed the needle at me and broke it in my arm. I had to wait until they got some forceps to pull the needle out.</li> <li>• The commanding officer's name was Place, so she was called 'the fish'. She had been in the first world war, so she was elderly and she had a leather sam brown.</li> </ul>

A very smart woman but she was definitely in her late 50s. She did come round the first night to every room and say "Are you alright" and "Are your pillows wet with tears". I always remember that. I think she was quite a compassionate lady really.

- During basic training we were interviewed by an officer who obviously was a psychiatrist I realised afterwards and she asked if I knew library work. Well, we had a library at Smiths, where I had worked whilst waiting to join up, so she thought the best thing for me was clerical work. We were also tested by a man, I realised afterwards, for Bletchley. We had these things on our heads trying to pick out different sounds ... I couldn't do it at all, I couldn't understand it. Then when we heard that it might be working underground taking messages, I thought no way. I think only two girls passed out of the lot, it was very difficult. It was tap, tap, tap, tap and you had to pick out the different sounds. So I always admired our girls that were at Bletchley.
- We did our six weeks basic training at the hotel and then we were posted. I was posted to Newtown in Wales, which was a terrible awakening because the camp was muddy, it was raining and we had to march a long way to get our food and the mess was horrible. It was a great big shed which I think had previously been used for agriculture and was commandeered. We weren't very happy there, it was so cold. We were half way up the Dulver Mountain. The camp was for the 27<sup>th</sup> Field Training Regiment, the men's RA and they also had the 36<sup>th</sup> Primary Training Wing where the men went to be trained. I went there with another person from Droitwich, although I hadn't known her at Droitwich, she was in another section. We had to go with our kit from Droitwich to this place and we didn't arrive until terribly late at night and the station was quite some distance from the camp. We got to the camp some how and it was probably between 8 and 9 at night when we arrived. There were Nissen huts there and when you opened the door, the lights went out, and then when you shut the door the lights came on. So we were pushed into a hut, and the lights came on and there was an officer sitting there, she was a Junior Commander, and she was very annoyed – she had been called out because we were late. She said right "Salute" there were three of us, because another girl had joined us ... and then we were taken by a Sergeant to a new hut where there was a Corporal from Cardiff. She had been in longer than us and she was in charge of the hut but ATS kept on arriving all through the night. Two or three came from Scotland, they had all trained at Dalkeith and came to take over the telephones on the camp to release the men.
- Three of us, were sent to the Primary Training Wing which was in an old mill. A very large mill, which had apparently been flourishing before the war. We marched in and although they knew they were going to get three clerks, they didn't know that we were women. The first thing we had to do was walk through past all the latrines, and then we had to go through a great big room - the mill itself - to get to the officer's room which was at the back. Well they were all in their bunks and in different stages of undress, it was really embarrassing. We got to the room and there was a Lance Corporal there and he said "Good God, women – ooh" he said "I don't know what the Commanding Officer is going to say". Anyway, he said "Line up. You will have to march in" he said, "You will have to salute and everything". So we were facing him and he gave us 'left turn', marched us into this room 'right turn' and this Major, Major Kenyon of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, he was taken aback and he said "My God, not women!" He couldn't believe it "What are you doing here". We said "Well, we have been posted to you" and he couldn't get over that, he was very upset about it. Very upset. He got used to it in the end, but he was very anti having women in the army. His office was off our office, and every time he walked in and out we had to jump to attention. We did nothing but keep on jumping up and sitting down again. It was difficult. One of us, piped

orders and instructions and things like that and we had to keep a list of the people, the men coming in and checking that they were there and that sort of thing. We were there I think about 3 months and then they closed it down and we were then moved from Newtown, to Welshpool which was a few miles up the road. We were then attached to the Royal Engineers and I stayed with the Royal Engineers for the rest of the time I was in the ATS.



- This picture shows me during Fire Drill at Newtown. We were in a three storey building and the fire brigade came to help us with our fire drill. We had to climb by rope out of the top window and lower ourselves down. We were doing this whilst wearing our Service Dress shirts and skirts. Only three of us ended up doing this, with a female officer standing at the bottom watching. Unfortunately, one of the girls taking part, called Pte Wolfe, was not wearing her khaki 'issue' but had on a pair of cami-knickers! The officer, looking up, noticed this and shouted "Wolfe, Wolfe" ... "You are not wearing the correct issue!!" Poor old Pte Wolfe suffered on two counts. One, she was put on a charge by the Officer and two, she had to suffer the firemen going around shouting 'woof, woof' at her, imitating the officer!
- That first posting to Newtown was memorable. It was a funny town. I think I am right in saying that they had 48 pubs and 48 churches and each church took it in turns each week to provide food for us in the evenings and entertainment. We had card tables and dominoes and things like that. After we had been there a bit on a Sunday night at 8 o'clock the local cinema would put on a film show for us. One place got one of their people to help teach us to type. I don't know where she had got them, but they had three old typewriters and I learnt to type like that. But that is what we did in the evenings. We used to have to walk. There was no proper baths there or anything like that. We all turned up at Church on the first Sunday we were there in the evening and the Vicar's wife she came up and said "What are you doing here". She'd never seen girls before, we were the first lot to start to go the church there apparently. And so, we said we had been stationed there and she said "What was it like" and we said it wasn't very good because the

roof leaked, we had got damp and goodness knows what. So she said, "right you must come to the Vicarage and use the bathroom". She tried to make us comfortable, though they had no electricity though. It was a bit rambling old house no electric, she had oil lamps there and I remember once I was coming down the stairs and their huge cat it jumped out at me ... I nearly fell down the stairs. I've never forgotten that because it really frightened the life out of me, because I had forgotten my torch. We used to go there for Sunday tea and occasionally an odd meal, but she was very very kind. She would never call us by our Christian names she always called us by our surnames and we never knew why.

- One of the people in the hut invited us to go to her place in the week and her neighbour kept a shop. She offered to do our washing, our smalls, because we had a terrible job with washing our little bits and pieces. The shirts and pyjamas went to the laundry, but not our pants and bras. It made all the difference to us that we had someone to do our washing like that.
- Newtown was terrible and the snow was really very grim, that winter of '42. It wasn't funny with damp beds and things like that but that aside, it was alright.
- At Welshpool, we lived in private houses, most of the time. We got moved out of the camp at one stage because of this terrible damp and the rats and things and we went to a hostel place. There were lots of civilians there. They had been evacuated from London but there were spaces and they put us there and the civilians didn't like it. So we were ostracized and the cook there used to put food down the back so that we could get something to eat.
- In the Attery at Welshpool, there was about 8 of us in one room. We had an Irish girl there. She had a brother who was a priest at the Vatican and she got up every morning at the crack of dawn and went off to the catholic chapel and then came back for our parade. She developed some kidney trouble and she died. She was only about 23. Nice girl.
- There were some nice walks around Welshpool. It was very nice being able to use Powys Castle grounds. I think it is now National Trust. We used to be able to sit on the terrace, they used to allow that. Now we had a girl there who had a home posting. She had an invalid mother and she used to have to cycle every day and just turn up at the office and then go home. She was Welsh speaking and we all went into a shop one day, I think it was the bakers. Anyway, we stood waiting, somebody was being served and they were talking in Welsh. All of a sudden we didn't realise this girl could talk Welsh, she never spoke to us in it. All of a sudden her colour came up and she went forward and she talked loudly in Welsh. We were stood there with our mouths open and these girls sort of looked behind the counter and she turned round said to us "Come along, we're not stopping in here" and we got outside and we said "What was that about" and she would never tell us. We never knew what it was about. We were all taken back ... this spate Welsh suddenly came out. I mean she was a tiny little sole.
- We had a Sergeant and a Lance Corporal who was a draughtswoman, and three drivers. There wasn't more than 12 of us there, and we lived in an Attery. The office was an old chapel that had been taken over and the commanding officer was an officer who had been in the first world war, so he was elderly and he was a bit upset having women. His name was Clayton, so we called him Auntie Clayton - he really was a funny old stick. He had obviously been called back into the army. Royal Engineers were usually Architects and things like that in civvy life, or Civil Engineers, so they were professionals. There was, Major Clayton (Auntie Clayton) Captain Todd, and Lieutenant Hindmarsh. Captain Todd marched us to the chapel each day and inspected us. He took your hat badge out and turned it around to see if you had cleaned the back and he would peer at you. It was really disconcerting, it really was. The Sergeant Major did most of the drawings and we

had a Lance Corporal who helped with the drawings and then there were three or four of us checking vouchers and things to do with the Royal Engineers stores.

- There was always a garrison engineer on every camp of course, even the American camps, so when I got moved to Nesscliff I was in the garrison engineer's office there and used to have to go on the American camps and take the notes and all things like that. Also I had to go to the Ministry of Works, they were building and I had to take down their progress reports and things. We had a civilian in charge of us there but he got moved to Manchester and then we had a Major Grey who had been in the army all his life as a Royal Engineers officer. He was in charge of the big command ammunition depot at Nesscliff, and he was in charge of the sewers and anything to do with water, anything to do that the RE's did. So we were in a little office and there was Private Coxall he was Royal Engineers, he was the clerk and myself and there was a Sergeant Major, and there were three of us and the rest were civilians. So I became a technical clerk. To be in the Royal Engineers you had to have training. There were less than 100 girls in the ATS attached to the Royal Engineers. It was very highly thought of to be in the Royal Engineers.
- I know at Nesscliff the food was ghastly. Awful food. When I was a Nesscliff we had the Princess Royal. They painted the stones outside the hut for her visit. We had to stand to attention and she came and stood at the door and said "Oh it is so nice in here I wouldn't mind living in here myself". And as soon as she had gone, about two minutes later, they whipped all the mats away that we had been given to stand on by the beds so it was ridiculous.
- I was then sent to Chester where the Chief Engineer's Headquarters were and there was quite a few of us there. We lived in a big house in Chester on the outskirts that belonged to the Bear Brand Stocking people, it was their home. Beautiful house. We used to have to march up, or cycle if you had a bike, to the command headquarters which was on the banks of the river at Chester, so we had quite a journey to our office every day. There was all sorts of officers there during the war, all engineers, I don't know what they all did, it was all little rooms with these officers in, but we were in a big room and we were checking the stores to go across to Normandy. We were there when they said they had landed. We used to have to go there at night, we were ever so busy. We were there from half past eight in the morning to very often nine at night working.
- We did occasionally get invited to American dances, because Alton Park which is the racing place now, was taken over by the Americans and all the Americans that landed in Liverpool, coming across to England were sent to Alton Park and they were there for perhaps two weeks when the war started, when the world war started on the continent, they were only there days. They passed straight through. In Chester the English Speaking Union had a club that we could go to and we also had the naval cadets at Eton Hall because Eton Hall wasn't far.
- We had tea dances in Chester. Frightfully select. Every afternoon tea dance which was where the naval cadets used to go. We used to have a dance and then they would take you back to your seat. And then next dance they would come back and say "Would you like this dance, ma'am". It was all frightfully correct. It was really funny.
- Chester was a nice place. If we went off at weekends we could get to Llangollen and into Wales. We all had bikes. I was very lucky because I used to have every third weekend off in Chester and we had family connections in Liverpool. I used to charge off Friday night, finish in work. Used to run to get the last bus to Birkenhead. Jump on the boat. Cross the Mersey. Run out to the tram shed and get the last tram along the Scotland Road and arrive at my Aunt's (she wasn't my Aunt, I called her my Aunt, but she was my mother's second cousin). I used to arrive there very late at night. She was a lovely person, and her husband. They

never had any children, I was really spoilt. She did a lot of entertainment, so I had quite a nice few weekends there.

- The house was in the charge of a Corporal who had been in the first world war. She didn't have much idea of discipline. We got out at night after we had cocoa and she hadn't got a clue, not a clue! There was a big garden which went down to the river. Then when it got near to D Day some of us were suddenly packed off to Salisbury to be nearer the coast so I got sent to Wilton.
- There is a big old furniture depository in Wilton and that was where we were billeted only it had been an old workhouse before, just before the war, so the rooms were ghastly. We even had people in the morgue in there. They had their palliasses on the slabs. It wasn't big enough so they put two or three Nissen huts in the grounds at the back and I was in one of the huts there. The food wasn't too bad there actually. We had a NAFFI up in the village which we marched to every day because our work was right out the other side of Wilton on the way to the race course. Some worked in Wilton House, but I was actually in the Nissen huts in the field at the end of the village, so we used to march every day. We could get into Salisbury at night. We could all cycle into Salisbury, about three and a half miles I suppose, so we went to different places from there.
- Kingway House itself wasn't very good. We had leave a couple of times when they gassed the rats out. The rats were everywhere, they were horrible We had them in our hut. In fact, one day, one of the girls got up and put her greatcoat on and her sleeves fell out. The rats had nibbled all round the arm holes in the night to get the padding. You opened the door and you could see them running around the shelves above our beds and then they would jump on the beds. One jumped on my face once. I can't bear them now, no. I also witnessed a rat attack the cat. It did a funny sort of turn around and then sprang at the cat's neck, and hung on. It was horrible. In the end it got so bad that they gave us 48 hours leave while they gassed them out. We all had to get out.
- The Americans had a red cross there and you could go and help out. I used to go and help stitch buttons on things like that. They had what they called the Doughnut Dugout and they were stationed at Codford. They used to invite us to the dances at Codford and we used to go and get nice refreshments there. That was quite nice. And Nook Camp we went to. The Norwegians were there, so we went there and the RAF were at Beverston. We went to things there.
- We went into Salisbury quite a lot and I had my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party there. I went to the King's Hotel. Salisbury was the place that everybody went into Saturdays from all around; Aldershot, Tidworth. There was a big restaurant on the corner of the market square and they used to have dances as well. We used to go everywhere on our bikes.
- They did try to get us to say that we would stay on in the office at Salisbury. They were collecting up the stores and trying to find out where things were, but after so many years on the army you just wanted to get out. And you don't realise until afterwards what a fool you were not to join up again.
- We had a German prisoner of war escape when we were stationed at Wilton because there was a prisoner of war camp up the road. We were told to be on the alert, because we had the red caps come into the hut to say you know, anybody under your beds and things like that. We all thought it was a huge joke. We had a girl there her name was Fiddler. She was a funny shape. She was all bust and tight sort of waist and she had been a waitress or something in Southampton before. Anyway, we were told to stay in you see and she said "Oh blow that" she wanted to get out, because we had a coal compound and you collected bits of coal to put in your stoves in the hut. She wasn't going to stay in, so she took the axe with her that she got to chop the wood. She ran straight into this German! And she stood there with this axe, the red caps ran up and there

she was standing over this poor old German who was absolutely terrified. This great woman with this huge bust holding her axe like that! It was funny. I've never forgotten her doing that.

- They had a very elderly German prisoner of war on our site there at Kingway House, he did all the odd jobs for us. Emptied the dustbins and things like that and he was always asking for tins, any tins, any cocoa tins and things, and he made the most fantastic toys. He used to make crocodiles and they used to open their mouths and move. We felt sorry for him really.
- There was a stone building on the right of the gate and this had been the delousing shed when it was a workhouse. This was turned into our recreation room, we could entertain our friends in there. There was a piano with about two keys missing.
- So I ended up there but I had to go to Guildford to be demobed. I went to Guildford, that's where we were demobed. Came out in 1946.
- My mother did some volunteer work and said that she would take in a lodger in order to help the war effort. She and my father were rather surprised to be allocated a middle-aged American Officer. He was very good to my mother and father, but they did have trouble understanding him sometimes. He was from Texas and would not go into the same room as anyone who was 'coloured'. He just could not understand why it did not bother English people and had quite a few arguments with my father about it. He was also a 'southern gentleman' and would take my mothers arm (and mine when I was home) in order to help us on and off the bus, or across the road. My father thought this was pretty awful – there was obviously a difference in what was considered 'good manner's between Texas and England!

**Photos:**



