

Surname: Rayner	First Name(s): Mildred (Milly)	Army Number: W/134178	
Maiden name (if applicable): Le Vesconte	Name used during service: Le Vesconte	Rank: Pte	
Main base: Scotland Abbey Wood Eccles Kent	Training base: Warrington Oswestry Ty-Croes Chester	Enrolled at:	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 537 (M) H.A.A. Battery 576 (M) H.A.A. Battery	Group/Regiment: Royal Artillery	Command: AckAck Command
Year(s) of service: 4/2/1942 to 4/2/1946	Reason for discharge: End of War	Trade: Predictor Operator	
Uniform Issued: 3 bras 3 white warm knickers 3 khaki silk knickers Ties Shirts Shoes Stockings Suspender belts Pyjamas Jacket Skirt Cap Greatcoat Groundsheet Leather jerkin Shoulder bag	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigues always early morning. Cookhouse: preparing veg and peeling spuds (spud bashing) for whole battery; cleaning ablutions; clean Sgts Mess and NAAFI hut; washing up huge breakfast containers which had been used for porridge. • General tasks – cleaning. • Lots of parades. Each morning we had to parade for breakfast after we had folded our sheets and blankets in a special way so they all looked uniform on top 		

of our beds. Biggest blanket wrapped around the outside of sheets and pillows which had been folded in straight lines. Then our gas mask and tin hat sat on top. Our barrack box at the foot of bed with “eating items” mug and plate on top – highly polished shoes in front on floor.

- We kept our skirts and trousers well pressed by folding them very carefully and putting time under the mattress every night. It worked too!
- Gunnery practice in Command Post.
- Square bashing most days.
- Kit inspections – keeping quarters sparkling clean.
- Keeping fit in A1 condition. Keep fit: sometimes running round country lanes. Once we were detailed to pick gooseberries for local farmer. (The man I married!)

Release certificate:

Memorable moments:

- I had a miserable home life – eldest of 10, often misused and abused so at 17 years old I decided to do ‘my bit’ towards the war. My first destination was Warrington where I was kitted out and had a medical. I was very shy and found the life so hectic. After my life at home with no social life to be suddenly thrust among hundreds of girls was very daunting. However, I learnt to relax a little especially at my next posting which was Oswestry. There we trained and marched, learnt to take orders, be smart and don’t complain. After six weeks we were ‘piped’ out. How I loved that feeling – it was wonderful to be marching behind Scotsmen in all their paraphernalia, kilts and pips. Super. I shall never forget that wonderful feeling.
- I was to be attached to gunsites. We were to practice our positions (I was on a Predictor) at a place called Ty-Croes in Wales for six weeks. I remember it was very regimental – we were told “you’re not girls any more – you’re now soldiers in the British Army!” It felt so strange to wear boots and gaiters but I loved my uniform. After abject poverty at home (Moss Side) it was something special to have all these clothes to myself.

- After Ty-Croes I was posted to Scotland and belonged to 537 H.A.A. Mixed Battery. It was here I made my very first friends and was enjoying my new life.
- One funny incident happened one night when we were under canvas somewhere. I had to get up in the early hours to go to the latrines. These were very primitive – just a bucket – with a plank of wood across. Some joker had removed the plank – it was a very dark night and no light. Consequently I sat in the bucket. You can imagine the rest. I was ‘booed’ out of my tent because of the smell but somehow managed to retrieve my clean pyjamas and make another trip to the ablutions.
- My next destination was Abbey Wood in London where we had 3.7 guns to fire. Again I enjoyed my life and became much more confident with everything. Unfortunately it didn’t last long. My mother was forever begging me to get a posting nearer M/C so that I could help with my brothers and sisters at weekend leave. Eventually I found myself at Eccles with 576 Battery. The first weekend on my way home I was run over by an army lorry and spent the next 3 months in hospital with a fractured femur. When it was time for me to re-join my unit they had moved to Kent. I had to make my own way there. The nearest station was a couple of miles away so I walking with full kit bag, gas mask and tin helmet to the camp.
- There was a pub which was in bounds because we were so isolated so most evenings A.T.S. and gunners went there. They had the warning bells installed for air raids. Now I never went in there mainly because I had no money – sent it all home, but one Christmas Eve my room mates insisted I go with them. Fate stepped in and I met a farmer there who lived locally (he became my husband). It was whilst at this place, we were told we had to move quicker during night raids. Clever me had all my gear ready to put on one night when I was on duty. I scrambled out of bed put on my boots, battledress top and tin hat and raced up to the Command post and stood at my position on the predictor. I was so pleased to be first until the Duty Officer called out ‘Le Vesconte’ where are your trousers? I felt so stupid, there I was ready for action in my pyjama trousers. I couldn’t leave my post so the spare girl had to get them for me and then somehow put them on me without me taking my eyes off the predictor!!
- We girls had photographs on shelves above our beds. One day the camp Commander decided to have room inspection. (Male) He was most irate to see these photos all around our hut and said, “I want all those pictures removed. I’ll be back at 10 o’clock this evening for another inspection.” Well, as it happened we had all been given oranges that day, so we took down the photos and put all our oranges in their place. We were all really giggling at the sight they made. This man came back at 10 o’clock as promised. He was so angry he wallop the side of his thigh with his little stick. I don’t remember what he said about that, but he immediately gave every one of us 7 days C.B. (Confined to barracks). I often wonder what he really thought. Silly man.
- One night I was on Fire picket duty walking round the camp with a little stick under my arm. I heard a strange noise and looked up in the sky and saw a long trail of light. I immediately reported this – no-one knew what it was – so the message was sent to HQ. It was the first ever doodle bug.
- Sometimes it was very cold standing at our posts in the Command Post, especially if the alarm went in the early hours of the morning. We had to remain on duty until the “All Clear” was sounded. When this happened the duty cooks had to go to the cookhouse and make hot sweet cocoa for us when the air raid was over. Nothing every tasted so nice or was so welcome after perhaps a couple of hours shivering during the early morning in winter time. Often we would not be long in our beds when the alarm would go again. It’s really amazing how we coped with it all and still had to be up and dressed for the 7.30 breakfast parade. It was hard but we were all in the same boat and we did have some fun among

ourselves when we were off duty.

- We had to queue for everything. Pay day, cookhouse, NAAFI – even to have a bath. I fell asleep in the bath once and was woken by a hammering on the door. “What the dickens are you doing in there Levi”. I scrambled out in a hurry I might add.
- It wasn’t all hard work and war. Once we had a fancy dress competition and could only use Army issue. I decided I would try to go as “Britannia”. I used a sheet, found a Union Jack, somehow fashioned a helmet from cardboard and silver paper. Held a huge rake and a dustbin lid for a shield. I won first prize.
- Another time my friends persuaded me to get up on stage and sing. I loved “Madam Butterfly” so I took a deep breath and forgot my shyness and sang ‘One fine day’. To this day I don’t know how I did that, but I’m so glad I did – it’s a lovely memory.
- We had lots of sing songs too and told each other about our lives. It really was interesting.
- When the war was over I went to Chester to learn to drive. This was magic for me. I enjoyed every minute and passed my test easily – been driving ever since.
- Eventually I was discharged on 4 February exactly 4 years to the day. I went back to Kent and married the farmer – our local pub was The Fenn Bell which was beside our camp.
- In my hut we all made the best of our days – so many friendships were made – I really missed all my friends when we split up and went our separate ways.

Photos:



Evie Thorpe Gnr Yardley
Pat Baker Vera Smith
534 Battery Ty Croes - 3 September 1942



576 (M) HAA Bty – Liverpool 1945



576 (M) HAA Bty – Liverpool 1945
End of War Celebrations



Celebrating the End of the War 1945