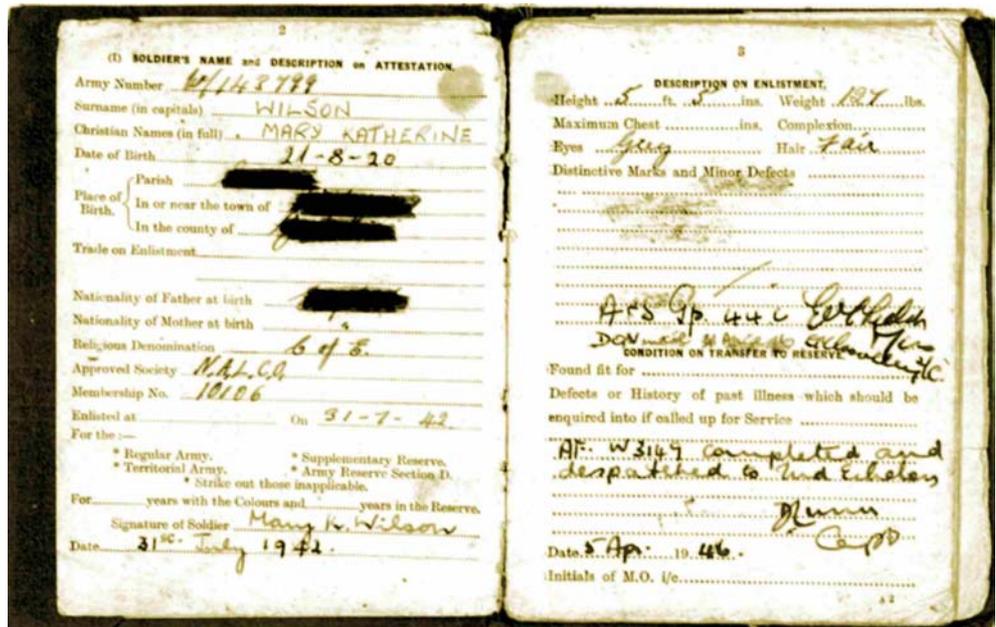


Surname: Wilson	First Name(s): Mary Katherine	Army Number: W/143799	
Maiden name (if applicable):	Name used during service: Wilson	Rank: Sgt	
Main base: Newport Eindhoven Breda	Training base: Halifax Bude Oswestry Catterick Anglesey Bristol Porthcawl Hampstead	Enrolled at: Conscripted - Halifax	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 612 (M) HAA Battery	Group/Regiment: Royal Artillery	Command: Ack Ack Southern Command
Year(s) of service: 31/7/1942 to 2/5/1946	Reason for discharge: Demobilized	Trade: Radar Operator Clerk	
Uniform Issued: Skirt Jacket Cap Shirts, collars Ties, shoes Stockings Underwear Shoulder bag Greatcoat Gas mask Gun site: Battledress top and trousers Long johns Leather boots Gaiters Jerkin BAOR: Beret	Photo: 		
Mary K Wilson - 1944			

Description of daily tasks:

- Gun site:
 - Fire practice.
 - Parades.
 - Responsible with another NCO for girls in barrack hut getting up, barracking their beds correctly etc. Rooms were inspected.
 - Early morning PT.
 - When manning the Radar, power unit large transmitter and receiver, the team of 6 would LINE UP and CHECK DIALS with the Gun Park. A book was issued giving the Drill for this and also for the daily maintenance. A 'call out' siren went regularly to bring everyone alert. Sometimes gave an update on War news to girls. When Duty NCO checked Day and Evening passes and personnel for the M.O. We marched everywhere! The camp was kept smart with whitewash.
- At short notice I packed small kit – was taken to the Searchlight on a hill behind Newport/Cardiff area – given instructions for operating and cleaning prisms. I had to direct the powerful light up and down the master beam over Bristol!
- The Radar girls were moved to sites around Newport and Cardiff and this often meant leaving friends! We were helping to defend the Bristol Channel (food ships) and a very large aluminium works.
- Nov 1942 made L/Cpl, June 1943 Cpl, September 1944 Sgt.
- Air co-op took place regularly and Brigadiers Inspections!
- Volunteered for Overseas.

Pay book:



Memorable moments:

- Conscripted 31 July 1942. Met Moira on train Leeds to Duke of Wellington Barracks, Halifax. Basic training – male Sgt – Major drilled us for hours. Kit issued! Back to school – tests and examinations – mathematics, speed, dexterity. Medical examinations and vaccination and inoculations followed by weekend leave.
- Posted to large Training Camp at Oswestry, Shropshire where we had a very intensive course to train as Radar Operators. This was TOP SECRET and just being developed. At first we were called OFC Operators Fire Control and on site we became G.L. girls – gun laying! At the end I was a Lance/Corporal to be responsible for a team of 6. No 1, 2, 3, 4 in the Receiver and 5 and 6 responsible for the Power Unit and Transmitter. I remember standing in the Radar Field dressed in denim

holding grease gun with a letter from elder brother in copper plate handwriting "Please choose something in keeping with your gentle upbringing"!!

- We joined 612 (M) HAA Battery R.A. and were proud to wear the bomb on our uniform along with red flashes. We went to Firing Camp at Bude, Cornwall often driving in convoy over Dartmoor. We marched with kit bags in full kit the last part and felt the Atlantic wind! Our base then became H7 above Rogerstone, but there were many sites in the area of Newport and Cardiff where we moved around. I visited Regimental HQ to see the Plotting Room for the whole area and how the radar was involved. We went to Porthcawl for a refresher course and appreciated the bathrooms in the Seabank Hotel. Ty Croes Anglesey was another beautiful place where we practiced following a sleeve towed behind a plane. My last course was at Aberporth where I used a new circular screen for radar.
- On site I enjoyed a wonderful concert by Polishnoff one of the worlds finest pianists. His silver hair and thin face and, the music of Chopin brought tears to my eyes. Another moving Sunday evening concert was by a choir from one of the Pit villages up the Valley – the men were so thin and white!
- At Halifax Training Centre I had learned to enjoy my marching so was particularly thrilled to be part of the Parade around beautiful buildings of Cardiff. 612 (M) HAA had claimed, along with another Battery, to have shot down a JU88 coming up the Bristol Channel where food ships arrived. In April 44 after a small parade up the valley I noticed hundreds of trucks under the trees and noted in my Diary I thought the Invasion was close. With another girl we went to Buckingham Palace Gate to collect a Private called Blossom – who had gone 'Absent without Leave'. She soon ran away from us and I felt very uncomfortable in the chase. However, we arrived back safely at Newport with transport to meet us. Meanwhile I was promoted to Sgt – a little more pay.
- D Day was fairly quiet on site and some Americans were invited to a Dance in the NAAFI. I was on duty – a 'Bullseye' from 11.30 to 12.30 pm. With another girl I was detailed to visit soldiers from the Battle of Falaise Gap at the Royal Gwent Hospital. However, there was little conversation as most were sedated and bandaged with head wounds. Soon after I twice gave blood – the second one was a very hot day and didn't feel so good waiting for the bus. My two friends Moira and Peggy were like ships that passed in the night!
- After the war progress was better, these Gun Sites hopefully would not be needed and girls were posted to a variety of places over the country. A sad time. Peggy and I had volunteered for 'Overseas'. The inoculations made me ill. When I recovered I was posted to ATS Clerks School in Spaniards Close, Hampstead. What a contrast. Didn't worry too much about the course but enjoyed meals in Harry Roy's house (Dance Band Leader married to Princess Pearl of Sarawak) and sleeping in Anton Wallbrooks house. Theatres and Eating Out – lots of Dances. P.T. each morning around Kenwood House. This was January 1944 one of the coldest on record. I remember running in heavy greatcoat over Hampstead Heath in deep snow hearing V1 or 2 buzzing along, then stopping, then explosion and some poor people had it!
- After some leave I was posted to the Office of the Military Hospital at Catterick – North Yorkshire – the nearest to home. However I had a series of interviews with Camp Commandant Senior Commander ATS and Junior Commander ATS suggesting I stayed and took the Officer's Training course. I persisted that I preferred an overseas posting. 22 March I was on embarkation leave and reported on 4 April 1945 to War Office Holding Unit in Bristol (this was Muller's orphanage – a bleak building). A quick visit to Taunton for lunch with friend Peggy and husband on honeymoon and at 4 pm reported back to Mullers. My married sister lived in Bristol so I offloaded any surplus possessions. We had kit parade, more inoculations, medicals, dental inspection, not a spare moment. This posting was for a Corporal not a Sgt but this was not a problem for me.

- We paraded 10 am on 11 April and went by train to Paddington Station. Transport took us via Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace to Southend-on-sea. 12 April Train to Tilbury – money exchanged to Belgium currency and waited three hours to embark! 2 pm we sailed out into the Thames estuary and anchored for the night. We lay on deck in full kit and kit bags, enjoyed a picnic meal. Sailed 5.30 am on 13th arriving Ostend 12 noon. Much bombed port, remember twin towers of the church. Stayed overnight – ate at YWCA (children scrambling for chocolate and sweets). Most of the ATS were posted to Brussels but 16 of us were taken by truck on rather rough dusty roads to Eindhoven. We had sandwiches at the YMCA Antwerp. Villagers waved and smiled as we passed by. We were met by Brigadier Carthew-Youston and a small group of soldiers who had been detailed to clean this newly built house. Mattresses were on the floors in the rooms but jugs of flowers! I worked in the Supplies and Transport Office of the Royal Army Service Corps – the work would vary much also the hours. The Officer for ATS in 21 L of C (lines of communication) was married to an Officer in the same area. We made a good start by being invited to the Wedding she was posted away and not replaced. The Sgt was also away most of the time so Cpl Jean Brown and I were responsible for the ATS Unit and billet. I worked part time in the ATS Office issuing rations, leave passes, new kit from the Ordnance Dept. I thrived on the variety – 21 L of C HQ was in St Joris College, an old building covered in ivy with creaking floor boards. When I was Duty Clerk at night the mice often disturbed us. Everyone very friendly and helpful. I noted in my Diary – Russians in Berlin – rumours of peace and capitulation. However, a café close by was put out of bounds as some shooting had taken place but many years later reading about that time I realised many collaborators had been rounded up.
- 4 May saw the unconditional surrender of Germany and we celebrated. With another ATS I was Duty Clerk at HQ taking messages until midnight. 8th was VE day – worked until 3 pm. Listened to Winston Churchill on the Radio and then 6 of us went to Brussels and joined in the celebrations. On 10th I went with others to Antwerp (the Cathedral Zoo gardens and shops closed). There was a procession! Meanwhile I was attending to general welfare of the ATS – many were drivers who covered large areas. 2 girls went back to UK always much to do.
- Sunday 13th May we attended a Thanksgiving Service on Phillips Football Ground. I only visited two Dutch families and clearly remember pouring the strong schnapps into a potted plant hoping no-one else at the Party saw my action. 27th May Church Parade was held in the Main Square in Eindhoven which was much damaged – I was right-hand marker for the ATS and had practiced the previous night with a Guardsman – he had to take smaller steps and mine had to be longer! Amongst work for two different Departments my 3rd stripe was restored and I was a Sgt again. ATS Head Office was in Avenue Louise in Brussels also a good YMCA. The German SS also had headquarters there during the occupation. The Palais d'Egmont became The Montgomery Club, which was very comfortable and interesting. Many years later on TV I saw John Major meeting Prime Ministers there. I attended a course in Brussels – the senior lecturer being Lord Mancroft. We slept in Franklin Roosevelt Avenue, beautiful large houses. We saw 'The Magic Flute' at the Opera House.
- I was present at a very large party given for Anna Neagle and Rex Harrison who gave a performance of 'French Without Tears'. Two friends and I were given 3 days leave in Paris. The weather was hot and sunny and we travelled overnight by train. A guide took us sightseeing along with mostly Canadian troops. I treasure the photographs taken. Arc de Triumphe, journey down the Seine, Tuileries Gardens. I loved Paris and have visited often since. At some point I was shown round the site of the Battle of Waterloo and most days use the letter opener I brought as a souvenir. 8th August 1945 the Supplies and Transport section was moved to Breda – a

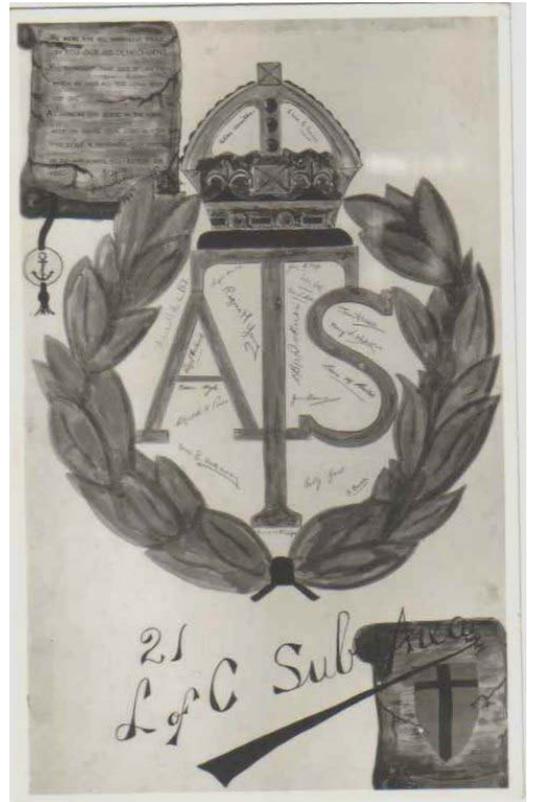
charming town and our new home was a pleasant Hotel Central owned by the elderly Van der Bergs. They lived in a small private area of the hotel. This was very comfortable and the large warm kitchen was a great place for keeping in touch with everyone and exchanging news and experiences over tea coffee and sometimes gin. It was in a quiet street near St Catherine's Church. I believe the RASC Offices were at the old Castle nearby. As so often some ATS were posted to Germany, some were due for demobilisation etc. We had a new intake of Drivers who were always good company. At Eindhoven and Breda there was always a truck going in the evenings to one of the small dances held in the various Messes. Cpl Jean Brown a driver who left Ostend with me and shared many duties in the Eindhoven house was posted to Osnabrook in Germany. Both Canadians and Poles had been billeted in the Central prior to our arrival.

- 31 August the Dutch people were celebrating Queen Wilhelmina's birthday – orange was their national colour and became a favourite of mine. 15th and 16th August – celebrations for Japanese Surrender. – I appear to have been working in the S and T Office.
- Twice during this overseas posting I had leave. One was a slow train journey to Calais via Brussels from Tilburg – on choppy sea crossing Calais/Dover, then a Troop train to Victoria Station. Left Kings Cross Station for Wakefield changing at Doncaster. This took 24 hours which was a good journey apart from the rain. In January 1946 Jean Adams and I went on leave – reported to Transport Office at the Hague – there were no flights because of a storm over the sea. We were taken to an Hotel (Christina) at Katwyck for the night. Next morning we walked among the sand dune – it was much calmer. We flew out about 3.30 pm to Biggin Hill in a Dakota plane. These were used for the drop at Arnhem. We tried to book a return flight at Q (Movement) War Office – not possible. I visited Bristol on the last day of leave and caught the 3.55 am train to London 7.30 arrival. Jean's train from Scotland was 2 hours late so we missed the only flight. When she arrived we went sight seeing – London was new to her! In uniform it was easy to get Theatre tickets and we saw Ivor Novello in 'Perchance to Dream' and always loved the songs. We slept at Warwickshire House, Gower St (I believe it had been the Hostel for girls employed by the store Bourne and Hollingsworths). Next morning we reported to Transport Command – were taken to Croydon and left 10.20 am. Good flight by Dakota in bright sunshine. We had lunch in the Royal Hotel, the Hague with a South African business man who had chatted on the way over. He was opening up his business again with Amsterdam. (We assumed it was diamonds.) I rang Breda and transport took us back to Hotel Central. 1945 – 46 was wet, snow, ice and very cold.
- From now on there were many changes of personnel – demobilisation was changing everything. The mixture of work for the ATS girls and the male Supplies and Transport Office was a good mix which I enjoyed enormously. Places visited apart from Paris, Brussels and Antwerp were Burg Leopold, Malines, Ghant, Helmond, Tilburg. S'Hertogen bosch, Utrecht, Igminden (Navel base) Haarlem, Rotterdam, The Hague, Uden (RAF) Flushing badly bombed now Vlissingen, Middleberg and elderly lades in National dress – Moerdyk Bridge badly destroyed. Nijmegen and also the Hook of Holland where I went twice with supplies for 2 ATS who were in charge of a new instant house to be shown to troops who were demobbed from the Hook.
- I have always enjoyed dancing and look back with pleasure when I danced with Brigadier Carthew-Youston at an impromptu party the ATS girls gave on Christmas Day afternoon – 50 turned up to the house in Poiterslaan, Eindhoven. Also in Eindhoven I believe I did the eightsome reel with Brigadier Montgomery.
- Too many farewells and goodbyes at the end of April (Spring had arrived) when I travelled to Imphal Barracks, York to be demobilised. However, I managed to save my uniform and small notebooks.

Photos:



1942 Summer New Recruits,
Oswestry, Shropshire – Radar (OFC)
Moira Parkin and Mary K Wilson



Card dated 1945/6
From Brig Carthew-Youston
Breda and Eindhoven



Breda 1945



Breda 1946
Hotel Centrael



July 1944



A Coy, Radar, 612 (M) HAA Rgt
July 1944 - Newport



23 July 1945 – Arc de Triomphe Paris

