

Enid Lewis (1920-2017). Auxiliary Territorial Service Carmarthen & Neath

West Wales Veterans' Archive, National Library of Wales

Date: January 2021. Retrospective account submitted by Jane Lewis.

Description

Enid Lewis was born in 1920 in Carmarthen. Enid's mother was a suffragette and, as a baby, she was informally adopted by Bryn and Vera Jones, who lived in Carmarthen, before later moving to Neath when Enid was in her teens. Enid enlisted in the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) in 1942, as an aircraft "plotter," initially in North Wales before being stationed in Chatham, Kent where she witnessed the start of D-Day on 6th June 1944. She took part in the VE Day celebrations held in London.

Demobbed in 1946, with the rank of Lance Corporal, Enid joined the British Control Commission in Dusseldorf, Germany, helping in the resettlement of war. Enid married Gerry Lewis in 1947, having first met him in 1940 when he had been stationed with the Royal Artillery in South Wales. Enid and her family moved back to Carmarthen in 1979 from Essex and lived there until she died in 2017.

This account was written by Enid's daughter, Jane Lewis, in January 2021.

Enid Lewis (née Lloyd)

Enid was born on 10th November 1920 in Carmarthen. As her mother wasn't married, she was informally adopted by Bryn and Vera Jones who lived in Woods Row in Carmarthen. Bryn worked on the railways and Vera in the stocking factory in the town. Her birth mother, Constance, was a tailoress and had been a suffragette who was once arrested for throwing a bag of flour at a Member of Parliament. She was from a wealthy family but having a child out of wedlock was taboo and she was forced to give Enid up at birth, although they managed to stay in touch with each other throughout Constance's life.

Enid went to Pentrepoeth School in Carmarthen until she was 13 years old when the family moved to Neath as her father had been offered a better paying job.

In Neath, she attended the Gnoll School for a year but left at 14 and went to work in a corner shop. After a few years, she went to work at a printing works in Neath where she trained to be a printer and stayed there until she was called up.

During this time, she lived at home with her parents. She had a large circle of friends and they seemed to have a very good social life – even after war had been declared. The arrival of soldiers in the town was very exciting for the girls and Enid seemed to be out on a date with a different chap every other night. They usually went to the cinema or a café and the evening ended with a chaste kiss as these were innocent times. She met my father Gerry in 1940 when his regiment, the 138 Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery, were stationed in

South Wales. Two years later, he was posted abroad and spent much of the war fighting in Italy and North Africa, so they had to keep in touch by letter.

Enid was called up on 6th November 1942. She would have liked to have joined the Wrens (Women's Royal Naval Service), as they had a nicer uniform, but they already had their full quota, and she didn't fancy the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, so it had to be the ATS. She was given a choice of working in the cookhouse or training to be a plotter, tracking German aeroplanes as they flew over the channel but, as she hated cooking, she chose the plotter's role. Her first posting was Wrexham where she stayed until January 1944, when she was posted to Chatham in Kent.

She was in Chatham on D-Day and remembers there being tens of thousands of British and American troops in the town one day, but all gone by the next as the Allied invasion had started. She also remembered the army creating artificial fog on the River Medway for two weeks prior to the invasion so that the troops could prepare for the big day without being seen by any German aircraft flying overhead.

In November 1944, she was posted to Walberswick in Suffolk and from there to Winchelsea in Sussex.

In January 1945, she was posted to Branston in Burton-on-Trent which she hated because of the constant smell of the pickle factory. On VE Day, she and some army friends hitched to London to join in the victory celebrations. After the Germans surrendered, she was moved from plotting to general office work.

In March 1946, she was promoted to Lance Corporal and was demobbed on 13th May 1946 in Guilford.

In August 1946, she joined the British Control Commission and was posted to Dusseldorf in Germany. I believe her role was helping to process the thousands of refugees the war had created. She returned to the UK in January 1947.

During her army career she had 11 proposals of marriage and nearly married a Scottish pig farmer but decided the farming life wasn't for her and accepted my father's proposal instead. They were married in March 1947 and settled in Loughton in Essex where his father lived. When my father retired in 1979, they moved back to Carmarthen.

Enid died on 13th June 2017, aged 96 years.