

EVACUEE RETURNS FROM AMERICA TO JOIN A.T.S.

Sheila Winifred Gell, an 18-year-old girl who was evacuated to New York in 1940, has returned to England to join the A.T.S. She made the whole of the arrangements for the journey herself, getting her permit from the British Consul, booking her passage, and finally crossing the Atlantic alone in a Dutch merchant ship.

Her mother, senior A.T.S. officer thought her daughter was still in America until one day she was called to the mess telephone at the A.T.S. Training Centre of which she is Officer Commanding, and heard Sheila speaking from an English port.

"I decided that I must do something for the war effort as soon as I left school," Private Gell said in an interview. "As a British subject I could not take a job in America without taking out first papers of naturalisation, which I did not want to do. I wrote and asked my parents if I could come home, and they said I could if I liked but they had no idea that I was actually coming until I arrived.

"People in America were tremendously interested in us. They laughed at our English accents, but they were amazingly kind and generous and they did everything possible to make us feel at home.

"I went to a high school in New York and found the new methods of education extremely interesting. We learnt logic for instance, which is seldom taught in schools over here. I finally qualified for my high school diploma which is the equivalent of school certificate and is bestowed with much ceremony.

"When I 'graduated' from the High School, I wore a white dress and was surrounded by flowers sent by friends, but the excitement was quite over-shadowed by the fact that on that very day I received official permission to return to England to join up.

"At first I did not know which Service to join, as my father is an R.A.F. officer, but finally I decided on the A.T.S. and enlisted at a London Recruiting Office."

All the recruits who enlisted at the same time as Private Gell were sent to the Training Centre of which her mother is Commanding Officer. By special request Private Gell was sent to another training centre. She volunteered for A.A. operational duties and is just beginning a course on radiolocation.

Sheila is the eldest of four children. Her younger brother and two sisters, whom she took to America when she was 16, are still staying with friends in New York.