

THERE WILL BE NO CHRISTMAS FOR THESE A.T.S.

Among the toughest girls in the A.T.S. are the maintenance squads who 'keep the wheels turning' at the enormous Vehicle Reserve Depots scattered throughout the United Kingdom. They will be greasing, oiling, mending, washing, checking and painting vehicles on Christmas Day as on any other day, for thousands of vehicles from Jeeps to three-ton lorries and from ambulances to gun-towing vehicles have to be kept 'at the ready' to be driven hundreds of miles by A.T.S. convoy drivers at a few hours' notice, to ports where they are shipped to the fighting men overseas.

Take one depot as an example - Only once during rainy weather was their work not completed by the scheduled time, and that was when they had to wade in mud up to their knees. Progress was slow, but they cheerfully volunteered to work 'overtime' to complete the job.

Despite their rigorous life in the open air in all types of bad weather, there has not been one case of 'flu in this particular squad.

In charge of the maintenance squad at this Depot in the West Midlands is Sergeant Evelyn Stevens, of Barnet, who, during her career as an A.T.S. convoy driver, was once 'snowed up' of the road for a night, before getting her convoy to its destination. She joined the Service on the same day that her husband enlisted in the Army. With her is Corporal Stella Hughes, of Ryde, Isle of Wight - a one time riding instructor, and Lance-Corporal Winifred Thatcher, of Harrow, who drove an ambulance in the East India Dock during the fire of London in the blitz.

Most of the auxiliaries in Sergeant Stevens' squad worked in shops and factories before joining the A.T.S. A few months ago Private Alma Thomas, of Redditch, was making knitting needles, now her job is oiling and greasing vehicles, while Private Freda Clarke left the shoe shop in Wallasey where she was an assistant to clean and check vehicles. From textile designing to convoy driver and car maintenance is a big contrast in jobs, but Private Hilda Watson, of Salford, Manchester, whose husband is a Captain in the Royal Corps of Signals, thoroughly enjoys her outdoor life.

Despite their arduous existence at this Depot, the A.T.S. love their life. They have comfortable warm quarters in a nearby town, and plenty of entertainment is provided for them in their time off. Their rosy cheeks, bright eyes and clean health record, make them the envy of many workers whose jobs are done in warmer surroundings.

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