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READING ROOM

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 1992

The Buckmaster sisters: Gems of Kingston



PATSY FLEMING

Snow boots and winter coats began to pile up in the hallway of the Buckmaster home last Saturday, as friends and neighbors, bringing bouquet after bouquet of flowers, came to spend a few minutes with the lively Buckmaster sisters. Miss Hilda and Miss Elizabeth were having a reception to celebrate Miss Hilda's 95th birthday.

"After 20 years in Kingston," said Miss Elizabeth, "we have a wonderful lot to celebrate. It is wonderful to be in Kingston and wonderful to be in our own home."

In 1972 the Buckmaster sisters chose Kingston to be their home town and set about experiencing all that Kingston had to offer.

I sat beside Miss Elizabeth, who is nearly without sight, and immediately we started to discuss the teaching of English. For many years she had taught English literature and drama in colleges in the northeast United States while her sister travelled in Russia and Poland. Miss Hilda finally came to Toronto where she was the dean of women at St. Hilda's, Trinity College at the University of Toronto.

The walls of their tiny sitting room are crammed with books from floor to ceiling, all clearly in their own sections — biography, history, children, Kipling, dictionaries, ships, sea fiction, prayers, Canada, and a 1910, 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica in worn but beautiful soft leather bindings and fine silky paper.

Among the 50 guests was Mayor Helen Cooper, a longtime friend, and Peter Milliken, MP for Kingston and the Islands.

Mayor Cooper honored both sisters in a few well-chosen words: "Here we have very clear, very astute, completely independent minds. Hilda and Elizabeth are two of the greatest gems of Kingston."

In the early '70s Miss Hilda was



Hilda (left) and Elizabeth Buckmaster celebrate Elizabeth's 95th birthday

IAN MacALPINE/The Whig-Standard

an active member of the Association of Women Electors. She was no stranger to politics. Between the two world wars she had twice been an unsuccessful candidate for the British Parliament. In 1987, age 90, Miss Hilda said in an interview, "It is a pity that the feminists are tumbling over words that are not necessary. They could pay attention to facts and focus on issues, not on how to use words."

Naval and marine affairs are another lifelong interest. In 1976 the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes in Kingston received its official authorization. Miss Hilda was a founding member of this custodian of the history of Kingston's centuries of waterfront activity.

In 1916 Miss Hilda left her Oxford studies to join the newly established Women's Royal Naval Service (the Wrens). She was classed as a Motor Coach Operator #1. She chauffeured senior naval officers, hand-cranked her car and polished it to a gleaming finish. During The Second World War she rejoined and held a rank equivalent to a naval commander.

In Kingston the Buckmasters have had garden parties in their small back garden for gatherings of the Canadian Wrens.

The Buckmaster sisters have a special place in Kingston. There is a small triangular piece of land that marks the joining of Clarence and Brock streets between the post

office and the Queen's Inn on Brock Street. Now, the apex of this pie-shaped piece of land has two benches, a flower stand and a very handsome shell-shaped old iron horse trough. The plaque says:

"The Gore Fountain provided in 1886 by the Kingston Humane Society, restored in 1986 by the City of Kingston through the generous donation by H. & E. B."

Here on a very hot August day Miss Hilda was walking and found herself terribly thirsty. The idea for the drinking fountain took root and the old horse trough was adapted so the summer time crowds could have a drink of cool, clear water in the tiny Buckmaster Parkette.

Mayor Cooper, in her closing comments, aptly summed up some of the sisters' special qualities:

"In the years since I have returned to Kingston I have always appreciated the fact that I had a chance to meet the Buckmasters. They offer immensely stimulating and interesting conversation because they have always been willing to break new ground and challenge conventional beliefs.

"They both have the most amazing sense of humor and joie de vivre. Anybody who has ever had the opportunity to meet them never forgets them. I sincerely thank them for all they have brought to Kingston and for the little they have asked in return."

Dear Family/Friends,

This will be the last letter from the Buckmasters, 357 Victoria Street, Kingston, Ontario. Elizabeth passed away on May 09, 1994 at 9:04 pm surrounded by love and tears. Elizabeth was looking forward to the visits of May Harrison (May) Padmini O'Brien (June) David Millar (July). For the last year her main goal was the finishing of the "book". An biography of Elizabeth and Hilda by Helen and Keith Singer.

We, " the team and Elizabeth", celebrated Easter shared with Marion Hamilton, a treasured friend. A good-bye dinner for Helen and Keith who were off to Singapore Easter Monday. Just before Marion's departure, Sally Curtis arrived for a short stay followed by a weekend visit from Harley and Anne Campbell.

On April 26, Elizabeth and I shared a memorial mass offered in Hilda's name at the chapel of St. George's Cathedral. Elizabeth was peaceful and thoughtful at this service. Reverend Sel Carodus joined Elizabeth at '357' for lunch and Ruth Tracey for evening meal.

As you can see by this she touched many of the people who were friends and family this last week.

Elizabeth became ill on Saturday, April 30, was rushed to Hotel Dieu Hospital, she only wanted to return home. An ambulance returned her to '357' where she died on May 9.

Enclosed you will find copies of the obituary, eulogy and the service which was beautifully simple.

Elizabeth's pall-bearers, chosen from a long list of special friends were:

*Dr. David Hemings
Christopher Crowder
Norman Chadwick
Mel Sanborn
Doug Gerront
Evan Black*

This letter is my final responsibility as the co-ordinator of 357 Victoria.

Sincerley,

Carolyn Sanborn

*Carolyn Sanborn
'The Buckmaster Team'*

*" Wishing you were somehow here again,
Wishing you were somehow near,
Sleep well Elizabeth!"*

BUCKMASTER, L. Elizabeth
(Retired Teacher). Elizabeth
Buckmaster, born in Middlesex,
England, July 24, 1903, in her 91st
year, at her home(357 Victoria Street,
Kingston) after a short illness; the
third daughter of the late C.A.
Buckmaster and Lucy Ormerod(nee
March). She was predeceased by her
brother Ralph, her sister Ursula, and
her beloved sister Hilda with whom
she shared a home in Kingston for 20
years. No visitation. Funeral Service
at St. Georges's Cathedral, King
Street, on Thursday, May 12, 1994, at
1 P.M. Cremation to follow. Interment
Catarauqui Cemetery. As expressions of
sympathy it would be Elizabeth's
wish that you join her in prayer for
peace. Funeral arrangements
entrusted to Robert J. Read & Sons
Funeral Directors, 309 Johnson Street.
"Our lives are defined by those we
lose - Our lives will be defined by
Elizabeth Buckmaster."

FUNERAL SERVICE
for
LUCY ELIZABETH BUCKMASTER

May 12, 1994
1:00 P.M.

The Sentences
Funeral Liturgy begins on Page 576

The Greeting

The Collect

Eulogy - Marion H. Hamilton

First Reading: Romans 6:3-9

Gradual Hymn - #262 Alleluia, Sing to Jesus

Holy Gospel: St. John 10:11-16

Homily: The Rev. Sel Caradus

The Creed

Page 579

The Prayers

Offertory Hymn - #256 Let All Mortal
Flesh Keep Silence

Page 581

The Great Thanksgiving

Holy communion - all who are baptized are
welcome to receive the sacrament

Prayers after Communion

The Commendation

Page 587

The Committal

The Blessing

Hymn - #82 - Hail The Day That Sees
Him Rise

Celebrating:

The Rev. Alexander Wakeling, Vicar

The Rev. Ken Robinson

The Rev. Sel Caradus

The Rev. Cyril Betts

Organist:

Dr. Mark Sirett

EULOGY FOR ELIZABETH

BY

MARION H. HAMILTON

I have known Elizabeth Buckmaster for 42 years. We met at Wellesley college where we both taught.

When I was offered the headship of a college preparatory school in Pittsburgh, I managed to persuade Elizabeth to come with me to be the Dean of the school and chairman of the English department. That she agreed to come delighted me because I greatly needed her wisdom, her balanced judgement, and her delicious humor. And so for eight happy years the school and I benefitted from all she, in her infinite variety gave so generously.

Although she had started out as an actress (and, may I add, had played Queen Margaret to Lawrence Olivier's King John in London) briefly had her own theatrical company in England, wrote plays for radio presentation in Milwaukee, headed the drama department at Rockford college in Illinois, taught fencing and messed about in boats in her spare time, essentially she was a teacher of English literature and a magnificent one at that. This was suitably recognized at the Northfield-Mt. Herman school where she was chairman of a department of 27 people. Shortly before she retired she received their prestigious Wiegand award given annually to one person designated as a great teacher. I have wondered if they knew that privately she believed that no one was truly educated unless they were well acquainted with Winnie the Pooh, Alice in Wonderland, and the Wind in the Willows! With a degree in Romance Languages from the University of London, a diploma from the Central school of Drama, and a M.A. from Middlebury college she was a gifted educator.

But there were other facets to Elizabeth's life. Although she lived and worked in the United States for 50 years, she never became a citizen, although she loved the country and desperately minded not being able to vote. She always had a strong convictions about candidates - mercifully she always favored liberal Democrats! - but she could not bring herself to disavow her allegiance to Queen Elizabeth II because England was always home.

In 1991, however, when she proudly became a Canadian citizen, after several years of living her in Kingston with her sister, Hilda, she rejoiced in now legally belonging to a country she had come to love which, most importantly, was part of the British Commonwealth. I have not forgotten her pride and joy when I took her to vote for the first time.

But as her loyalty to England never wavered, neither did her devotion to her extended family. That they were people of rare distinction was important to her, not because of false

pride, but because they were people who had contributed so greatly and so variously to England. Her Uncle Stan, Lord Chancellor under Asquith, her father, a scientist who was made head of education, her Uncle George, a doctor of considerable renown, her youngest uncle, Martin, an artist and an antiquarian of importance who at 92, when we tried to see him in London, was late getting home because he was enjoying himself at Wimbledon! She never lost contact with her cousins and their children, and of course her parents, her siblings, and especially her sister Hilda were never far from her mind because family was something Elizabeth never ceased to revere.

And in the last two years of her life she had a new family. She called "The Team" and she basked in their tender loving care even as she revelled in the knowledge that her home and her life were in perfect order, largely thanks to the strength and intelligent dedication of Carolyn Sanborn, leader of The Team, whom Elizabeth could trust implicitly.

I cannot bear to speak of the last two weeks of her life and of her suffering, but I can only say that knowing about the splendid medical care she was getting from Doctors Janet and David Hemings and knowing all that Carolyn and Judy and Kim and the rest of "The Team" were doing for Elizabeth helped me more than I can say because all that they did was done with love.

Elizabeth Buckmaster, a very private person and a very vulnerable one who could not deal with anger or confrontation, was a woman of stamina and courage, strengthened always by her profound and unwavering faith in god.

Her mind, keen and incisive, was a challenge to the brightest; her humor, dry and often sparkling, was a delight; but her kindness and selflessness were the hallmarks of her entire life, recognized so by her host of friends.

In her head she carried whole volumes of poetry, and when the cruelty of blindness overtook her, the poetry remained. The last time I was with her, just a month ago over the past Easter which we celebrated right here in this cathedral, shortly before I left for my home in Connecticut, suddenly, without warning, she leaned toward me and in that lovely voice began:

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" that familiar and much loved poem by William Butler Yeats. And as she softly finished the whole poem and said the last lines.

"I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore
While I stand in the roadway, or on the pavements grey.
I hear it in the deep heart's core"

In the silence that followed, with tears in my eyes, I thought, " Thank God for that rich mind which continues to nourish her when she cannot see to read."

The Pulitzer prize winner, a journalist for the New York times named Anna

Quindlen wrote in a column last week a line that became almost a mantra for me. It is "we are defined by those we have lost."

Elisabeth Buckmaster gave definition to more people than she ever realized, but those who have lost her and grieve in that loss, now know who they really are and what they have really lost.

Ave atque vale

Elizabeth Buckmaster
357 Victoria Street
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3Z4

May 1993

Dear Norman and Joan

Funeral services were held for Hilda M.A. Buckmaster at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Kingston on April 28, 1993. Hilda passed away on April 26th at her home at 357 Victoria after a relatively short illness. She was in her 97th year. Cremation at the Cataragui Cemetery followed the service which commenced with The Navy Hymn, included readings from the Old Testament, a soloist singing The Lord's Prayer, communion and flags representing The League of Nations, Britain, Canada and the Navy. It was a lovely service. In lieu of flowers, Hilda expressed the desire that any who wished to give a contribution in her memory could donate to outreach projects such as the Primate's World Relief Fund or a project of their choice. Hilda is survived by her beloved sister Elizabeth with whom she shared a home in Kingston, and is predeceased by her brother Ralph and her sister Ursula.

Hilda was born January 23, 1897 at 16 Heathfield Road, Acton W3, Middlesex, England, the 3rd child and 2nd daughter of Charles Alexander Buckmaster and Lucy Ormerod (nee March). At the age of 17, Hilda joined the war effort as a volunteer with the Red Cross until the Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS) was organized in 1916. The WRNS were not drafted, the WRNS went because they volunteered. She was enlisted as a Motor Mechanic Rating during WWI until they were demobilized in 1919. Hilda entered the London School of Economics in 1919 and upon graduation was one of the Commissioners chosen by the Lloyd George Government to study municipal affairs in post WWI Germany. For 18 months Hilda was a Quaker Relief Worker in Eastern Poland until the outbreak of the Revolution. She travelled widely in Europe, partly while studying for her doctorate, and sailed as a deckhand and carpenter's assistant on the SS Panape, one of the last grain sailing ships that traded between Australia and Finland. She was a candidate for Parliament as a Liberal on 3 separate occasions, being twice selected for the Malden Division of Essex and for one subdivision of Manchester. At the outbreak of WWII, Hilda was called up by the Admiralty of the WRNS as 3rd Officer and rose to Chief Officer, posted in London, Greenwich, Liverpool and Mill Meece. In 1946 on demobilization, she began her post as Warden of Crosby Hall, the British Federation of University Women's Residence for graduates of the International Federation of University Women. In order to ready Crosby Hall, Hilda drew on ex-WRNS for the staff to run the Hall. Hilda's pioneering spirit was also evident in her campaigning, with her cousin Margaret, to improve the social and political situation existing in Ireland. On leaving Crosby Hall, Hilda decided to be nearer her younger sister, Elizabeth, and emigrated to Canada in 1954, becoming a Canadian citizen in 1955. She worked for a short time in Ottawa, Hamilton and Mississauga, before moving to Toronto. Her years of service in the Navy led not only to her membership in the Toronto branch of the WRNS, but to her great desire and success in attending the 50th Anniversary of the Canadian WRNS which was held in Halifax in August 1992. Here she was commemorated for her courage, dedication and commitment to the Service. In Toronto, Hilda was Assistant to the Principal of St. Hilda's College (University of Toronto), and House Director at the United Church Training School. Hilda and Elizabeth retired to Kingston in 1972 and both became deeply interested in local affairs. Hilda pioneered and supported as a life member many social, political and historical aspects of this community. As part of a family tradition, Hilda

was dedicated to the preservation of cities and open spaces and this led to her support and donations to restore the Gore Fountain at Brock and Bagot Streets.

On May 26, 1993 Hilda will be one of 25 Kingstonians receiving on behalf of the Canadian Government, and ordered by Her Majesty the Queen, a medal for significant contributions to her fellow citizens, her community and her country.

Hilda is an inspiration to all who know her and the world is a better place for having the privilege to know Hilda. Her wit, her charm and graciousness, her caring and passion is loved deeply and remembered clearly. Hilda will walk beside us every day as a faithful friend and guider of spirit with her warming smile and heart of gold. She is a treasure and will be greatly missed.

I am sorry there have been times when you came to our home only to find that I was tied up. I feel very comforted by your visits and I know that Hilda enjoyed them to, very much. There are so many letters I need to write to Hilda's friends in many distant lands that a formal letter such as this became imperative.

Very Warmly Yours,

E. G. Galt

St. Augustine said "Become what you are".....

and Hilda Buckmaster set about to do just that.

Hilda has great respect and love for the word...

for life....

for people.....

for truth and for God.

With a wave and a smile and a mischievous tone in her clear, majestic voice, Hilda captured us all with her wisdom and humour. Her enthusiasm and frontieing spirit brought more than one seemingly impossible task into being. And she proudly carried on this family tradition of pioneering. Her grandfather, J.C. Buckmaster, was involved in the Great Exhibitions, which were set up and held in the later part of Queen Victoria's reign. Her father, C.A. Buckmaster, was also involved in one of the Exhibitions, specifically on Agriculture. Once finished, these Exhibitions were left with products from many countries. Bottles, kegs and barrels of wine from Germany, France and Italy, and no one was quite sure what to do with it all. A Cooperative Wine Society was founded and the Buckmaster membership has been passed down from grandfather, to father to Hilda. And still today Hilda and Elizabeth receive brochures from this Wine Society. The

family as a group has been dedicated to making the world a better place for almost two hundred years.

Hilda was born on the 23rd day of January in 1897 and she died on the 26th day of April in 1993. Hilda is a woman of the NINETIES, whichever century you wish to look at. Hilda received her B.Sc. of Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She further did graduate studies at the London School of Economics, Paris, Berlin; School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London, Poland and Eastern European countries. She was "good" in French and German, and had a "working" knowledge of Latin, Greek, Russian, Italian. BEFORE World War II even got started Hilda's accomplishments are many.....

..She was Commissioned for the Peace and Reconstruction Committee by the Lloyd George government to study public ownership of land in Germany,

..She was involved in coaching candidates for League of Nations Secretariat exams,

..For 18 months she was a Quaker Relief worker in Eastern Poland,

..She spent some time as a deck hand on the grain sailing ship the SS Panape,

house MANAGER ELLIS LLOYD ~~OF~~ JONES HALL
..She was ~~Warden~~ of the ~~Student Residence~~ at Manchester
University. *Particularly for students mayning in Speech Problem*

AFTER World War II she was appointed Warden of Crosby Hall, the British Federation of University Women's Residence for graduates of the International Federation of University Women until 1954 when she emigrated to Canada.

Every phase of Hilda's life was like a ground work for the next phase. She never for a moment stopped using her God given talents. All her life was a step up, and up again. And along the way she never stopped helping others.

But her passion was for the Navy. She joined the Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS) when they were formed in 1916 during World War I, and re-enlisted at the outbreak of World War II. Hilda rose to Chief Officer and one can only image that her right to command imposed on her the duty and spirit of living life in order to guide others with humility. Her journals from World War II carry some delightful stories and I would like to share Hilda's own words with you:

“One day (having been bombed out of my lodgings), the Quarters Officer offered to put me up for two nights (where the Wrens stayed when off duty) . . . I was so late coming off duty that all transport was finished . . . After some difficulty, I secured a taxi and ordered him to drive to Ackerly House . . . on nearing the building the driver stopped and said “I’ll drop you here, you can then sneak through those bushes, and get in at the back window. One of your mates will have left one unlatched for you!” This was indeed an interesting “tip” - especially when passed on to their Senior Officer!! However, I’ve kept this to myself.....until now!”

“Wrens going or returning from leave went by way of Stafford. A truck would be sent there to pick them up. Since this was the only connection, **NO EXCUSES** could be allowed for failure to catch the right train. So it was with a good deal of nervousness that I once found myself carried past the station and hurtled on to Crewe. I got back to face the jeers of the Wardroom. My juniors had not had such fun since the occasion when, doffing my hat, on approaching the bar to order a drink, out of my hat flew a moth.....

About a month later I was again returning from London, and again my train did not stop, but went hurtling by I could not

again face the jeers so hastily looking in my pocket, I saw I had my "nest egg" of a £5 notethen looking at the Emergency Signal sign saying "Penalty for improper use £5" I pulled the Communications cord! The train ground to a halt ... on a curve. Looking out on the INSIDE curve, I saw the guard and the engine driver shouting to each other ... so I turned around, quietly nipped down to the track on the OUTSIDE curve and, head in air, walked firmly along the tracks, back to the station ... a blast from the engine and the train drew away ... leaving me still with my £5 note in my pocket!!"

Hilda proudly and courageously attended the 50th Reunion of the Canadian WRNS held in Halifax last year and was rightfully commemorated for her years of dedication to the Wrens ... an association which spanned 77 years.

In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action and Hilda lived and breathed in a world of action.

I would like at this time to acknowledge the staff

of Elizabeth & Hilda:

Sharon Vuch

Carolyn Sanborn

Tina Hartwick

Judy Gray

Kim Sheridan

Evelyn Clarke

Melba Lamont

their loving care and devotion and in particular their love for Hilda

This 24 hour care 7 days a week 12 weeks on end. In this I cannot thank them enough

a special note of recognition to Helen Singer who prepared

and wrote the eulogy that I just delivered.

To Elizabeth my loving sister, in her wit, her love and ^{her counsel & wisdom} taking

loving care of me

Hilda is an inspiration to all who know her and the world is a better place for having the privilege to know Hilda. Her wit, her charm and graciousness, her caring and passion is loved deeply and remembered clearly. Hilda will walk beside us every day as a faithful friend and guider of spirit with her warming smile and heart of gold.

MAY GOD AND OUR LOVE BE WITH YOU ALWAYS.

EXCERPTS FROM

A

WARTIME JOURNAL

MISS HILDA M. A. BUCKMASTER

*CHIEF OFFICER RETIRED
WRENS, ENGLAND*

1939

Eleanor Leigh had bought a new Morris car and wanted to go on a Continental holiday. She suggested Spain, I said that we would be able to go to Spain after the war, but that there would be no Baltic States in five years' time. "But we don't want to get caught in eastern Europe!" cried Eleanor, to which I replied that Hitler would not march until after the harvest was in.

So, at the end of July we embarked in a Polish ship for Zoppot Five weeks later we reembarked at Tallin in a Baltic Shipping Company's ship bound for the Thames. We were only 36 hours out when the Captain informed us that he had received a message ordering him to have the ship completely blacked out, and to sail on a zig-zag course radio silence was kept, so it was not until we reached the Thames that we learnt that Poland had been invaded, and war declared.

In accordance with previous decisions, I telephoned Mrs. Laughton Matthews that I would be available for service as soon as I had "packed-up" the Student Residence at Manchester University (where I had been Warden). Laughton had told me that she wanted me to set up a Wrens Depot, and would I look around for a suitable property. I enlisted a friend with a car, and looked at about a dozen "possibles", then reported to the Director W.R.N.S. Laughton was shaken, "You work too fast! We'd better commission you and put you under orders!" So by the beginning of October I was "Second Officer, for duty with WRNS Clothing Officer, H.M.S. President".

At this time requisitions from WRNS Units came direct to WRNS HQ where we handled what we could, and passed others on to our Naval opposite numbers with our comments and recommendations. Harwich requested the issue of chamber-pots, since the Wrens were billeted in an ex-warehouse with the ablution block some distance away. My memo with "approved" came back from Naval Stores marked "chamber pots allowed for R.M. Officers only". On another occasion the WRNS Quarters Officer at Immingham indented for curtain material. Enquires disclosed that the Wrens were accommodated in an ex-lunatic asylum, where the heads were one long range of pans without any stalls (suitable for supervision by one Attendant!) Again, no A.F.O. to cover this could be found, so we took up a collection for the very necessary supply of curtains.

Now uniforms were beginning to be delivered, but we were inundated with complaints that only Small and Very Small sizes were supplied. We bombarded Naval Stores, but were told the complete range had been sent. Finally, I offered to go down to Bath and beard Captain (S) in his lair. (Naval Stores had all been evacuated from Deptford to Bath). Armed with my travel warrant, a fat packet

of sandwiches, and a sheaf of complaints, I arrived in Bath. My blarney and bluff I got an interview with the great man. The Captain produced the A.F.O. containing the size roll, but I spotted that this was dated 1918! "Oh yes, I remember that, but now, twenty years later, young women are taller, longer in the arm, and broader in the back . . . see, here is the size roll used by the wholesale ladies' garment manufacturers". Reluctantly he agreed that a complete revision of the A.F.O. was necessary, that he would see to this, and write to our Director. Thanking him, I replied that I had my lunch with me, and could just sit there in his office, until the letter and copy of the revised instructions were ready, when I would personally take them direct to Director W.R.N.S. Faced with having me staging a "sit-in" (was this the prototype of all those of the present decade?), Captain (S) "struck his flag", and three hours later his Writer appeared with all the needed papers!

In November I got my chance to attend the O.T.C. at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Most of the Cadets were "direct entry", only about 4 of us already had their commissions (and uniforms). Although now a Cadet, I continued to give my weekly lectures on "Naval Catering for General Mess and Wardroom" and "Kitting-up and other AFOs". Our drill instructor was a Royal Marine Sergeant, and we were soon put through our paces. Fortunately, at that time, Gas Masks had not been issued . . . we just had our civilian ones . . . so the problems of giving and receiving orders when wearing a mask were not ours . . . we found quite enough to confuse us when "sizing" or "forming on the right" . . . and then, when all was confusion to realize that the C.O. was just behind one.

Early in December the Director summoned me to go with her too an Admiralty Board Meeting to settle the matter of a locale for a WRNS "Training and Drafting Depot". Three of the places I had submitted were presented for a choice. The decision placed them in an order: (i) Westfield College, Hampstead, (ii) Kings College for Women, Camden Hill, and (iii) University College, Men's Residence, Perivale. I was then told to prepare to move into Westfield College at once. However, when the Requisition Order arrived, someone had boobed, and it was King's College that had been taken over . . . and just the empty half, the best part of it being already in occupation by the W.V.Y.C. (Yeomanry)

3/0 Thomas - a colleague from by OTC course - and 4 Wrens, a Writer (Parrington-Jackson), an Officers Steward (P.O. Wren Keene), a Cook (P.O. Wren Cameron) and VAD Hooke were the Advance Party. One of the Domestic Science Labs become our Galley, and a classroom became the Wardroom. A consignment of 100 beds and bedding arrived from Naval Stores and we all turned to hump these up the stairs (a four storey building). On Boxing Day the

first recruits began to arrive, a group of 20 W/T trainees. Amongst them a World War I W/T Operator who I rated as "Acting Leading Wren Miller" and turned over to her the allocation of beds for her group, and the drawing up of a Watch List. A week later, Miller had a heart attack and was found dead on her bed. This was a sad beginning to my "Command", but my troubles were not over a little later a Wren reported to me with a chit from Harwich, this said she had been locally recruited, but had proved unsuitable. Since no machinery for local Release existed, she was thus drafted to H.M.S. President for action. "What went wrong," I asked, "Maybe it was just that adjustment from civil to service life was too abrupt." Wren X replied that the Naval Base at Harwich was a sink of corruption, she had urged the C.O. to let her evangelise the men and women, she had done her best with the chaps in the galley, but had been turned out. Now that she was in London, she was to preach in St. Paul's Cathedral. She would wear her uniform, and she would recall London to its sins. Obviously this was a case for the Medical and Psychological services. Pending their arrival, I suggested to Wren X that she should stay in my office, and write out her sermon on my typewriter, that if she would stay quietly with us until Sunday I would lend her my University gown to wear in the pulpit so we kept her occupied for two days.

1940

One day we heard that the Director was to pay us an Official Visit, accompanied by the Commandant, Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent. We now had about 90 recruits in Training. The only ones in uniform were my tiny "Ship's Company". I therefore arranged with L/W Parrington Jackson that she should be in charge of the classroom where Writers were, then double through the tunnel to another classroom where Pay and Supply recruits were working, then back to the switchboard where communication recruits were working watches. In the same way P.O. Keene was to double as P.O. Officers Steward and as P.O. in charge of Mess Attendants.

3/O Thomas, and my Wrens (in Uniform) were all tiddly and lined up to receive the Commandant. A scout was posted to signal us when her car turned out of Kensington High Street just then a big van rolled up from Naval Stores and began to unload barrels and cartons. Urged to hurry up, the last carton was dumped out of the van, which drove away leaving behind it a broken carton of toilet rolls, jumping and rolling in all directions. We all fell to and by the time the royal car arrived, most of the toilet rolls had been corraled, and only the slightly disheveled, and rather red faces, could betray that something had "gone agley"!

A very shy Princess Marina stepped out - wearing white gloves! and shyly acknowledged our salute. The Director arrived almost at the same time, and I led them through the building . . . when, after the third time, L/W Parrington Jackson having called her class to attention, the Duchess of Kent turned to me and said "Haven't I seen her before?" . . . so I had to confess my strategem . . . Formality was broken down, and later in the Wardroom we ended up with an hilarious tea party which HRH confessed that she too had "boobed" . . . For, as she was approaching Kings College for Women she looked at her hands and was aghast to realize that she was wearing BROWN gloves! "Never an official visit in anything but WHITE gloves." So the car was stopped at Barker's, the Princess jumped out and bought a pair of white gloves . . . only to realize with horror that after all it IS brown gloves in the Navy!

In May the order came to remove to the R.N.C., the Training and Drafting Depot was to be accommodated in the Queen Anne Block. Here we were faced with quite another set of problems . . . the members of the Gun Room! not to mention the roving eye of the commander! One night we were all aroused by the Commander, followed by a train of junior N.O.s, racing through the dormitories calling "Wake up, Mabel, come to my arms!" A very cold request, by me, that they should leave quietly, was finally listened to . . . but it was clear that the presence of three uncontrolled entrances could not go on.

The main floor contained offices and dining and recreation rooms. Very lofty ceilings made the upper floor very high and reached by long, winding narrow stone stairs. Every other day we had fire and air-raid drill. When the whistle blew everyone had to seize their gas mask and overcoat and march smartly to the cellars . . . Once a Pro-Wren was caught trying to push her way UP the narrow steps as the other Wrens were coming down. At the foot stood C/W Dwyer, our "Crusher" who cried out "What are you doing!" "Going to fetch by gas mask" the delinquent replied . . . "Well, you can't, you've not got it so you are dead!" At which the poor girl fainted dead away!

"Number One" at the College was Commander D'Oyley, under whose eye we were - actually as well as metaphorically - since his cabin was just off the courtyard where we assembled for divisions. Sometimes, when he was the guest of the Gun Room, the whole Class would get very "gay", and on one occasion, around midnight, we were "boarded" by the Gun Room, led by the Commander, running through the dormitories and calling out "Wake up, Mabel, come out to play!" There were four entrances to Queen Anne's Block . . . so that the "token" Regulating Office, and "Crusher" on duty, could keep no real check on the comings and goings of newly joined recruits . . . Finally I got permission to

have wooded barriers erected, with gates easily openable from the inside should hasty evacuation of the building be necessary. Maybe the Commander was getting his own back, for when the work was done they were 6 foot high gates, fastened by hugh padlocks, weighting about 2 lbs . . . When Director learnt of this she took a dim view!

My Quarters Officer, 2/O Ruck had asked permission to bring her dog, but it was very strictly contrary to College orders for dogs to be allowed. One day, I came to the Anteroom, rather harassed and tired after trying to meet the drafting requirements, when no-one was really ready for draft I sank into a chair, C/W Keene hurried up with a pink gin the door opened, and an adorable pekinese dog entered, paused, looked around, sniffed in a superior manner at the junior officers, and then made straight for me, bowed, and sat down at my feet! . . . In came Ruck, and said "Oh, Ma'am, how kind of you, I see Toy has already made his peace with you!" So, of course, Toy then became part of the Ship's Company!

I was on leave the day the Battle of Britain started. I was wearing plain clothes for a hike in the country. I got into the return train at Redhill, a fine evening, at the close of a lovely day's outing. Then it began. The train was diverted, or stopped, many times. We could see the flashes of A.A. guns, hear the crash of bombs, smell the smoke. At last we reached Clapham Junction when the train could get no further. All passengers were herded under the arches of the viaduct, the police not permitting anyone to leave then I spotted 1/O Miller. With the authority of her rank (Lieut.Comdr) she took me in tow and persuaded the Police to let us out to return to duty. There was a great deal of noise, but we made our way, by the flashes of artillery, along the road to the junction where we hoped to pick up transport to get me back to Greenwich. A screaming shell Miller & I dived for the cover afforded by the ornamental lintel of the doors of a Public house Some coping stone crashed at our feet I turned to Miller and said, "Why don't you put on your tin hat?" "Oh, I don't want to do that, I've just had a perm!"

Well, that was the end of my leave now life was timetabled to fit into the pattern of raids. The hour of the Wrens dinner was advanced, but the Wardroom seemed destined to have to carry our congealing dinners down to the air raid shelters. Later, we had hammocks and mattresses down there, as the toil up and down two or three times at night was very wearing. These cellars were in the old foundations of the old Palace of Placenta (where Elizabeth I had been born). In the part that extended under the courtyard, the roof was only about one

foot thick, but since I kept this information to myself, we were able to enjoy a sense of security. Many of our recruits were quite new to London, and quite unaccustomed to air raids. So we would tell stories and have sing-songs. One day, when a particularly noisy raid was in progress, one of the old naval P.O.s who was on Fire Watch duties, ran down the steps and called to me, "Ma'am could you get your Wrens to pipe down, we cannot 'ere the hair raid". My "Number One" at this time was 1/O Arnold, a very stout woman, who could not sleep on a flat mattress. So she would spend the night in a derelict arm chair, emitting very loud snores. One night, a young N.S. (still rather wet behind the ears) passing through on his rounds, asked me, "What is that strange noise?" "Oh, just snores", I replied. Pause. . . ."Oh, do Wrens snore!" he said in a voice of complete disillusionment.

It was about this time that the Battle of the River Plate had taken place, and their Lordships decided to give a No. One Naval Welcome to the heroes of H.M.S. Ajax. The Horseguards Parade was to be lined by W.R.N.S. personnel. Myself amongst them. So on that morning I wore my No. 1 suit, my hat brushed within an inch of its life, and set off by tram to the rendezvous. Soon the tram was boarded by a very dirty and very drunk man carrying a newspaper parcel. . . . he sang and shouted the praises of the Ajax then he spotted me in Naval Uniform, and swaying unsteadily, stood over me crying "The Navy, I salute you" and other such compliments, finally, he unwrapped his parcel, which contained a greasy mess of fish and chips, and thrusting it onto my lap, declared "Nothing is too good for you take my fish and chips!"

In November I was moved to H.M.S. Pembroke to take charge of the Wrens Quarters at Gillingham, and to make arrangements for the requisitioning of other places. One was the Juvenile Borstal Prison, another was Charles Dicken's house at Gad's Hill. Chatham, the HQ of the Nore Command was one of the oldest Naval Establishments, and was very "Pukka Navy". Every Rating in the Barracks had to move "at the double". One of my first jobs was to try and persuade the Captain to order Wrens to "quick March" instead of "doubling" . . . since our fat cooks and elderly P.O.s were objects of derision when seen trying to "double". I won that round, but lost the next.

The Unit Officer had complained to D/WRNS that the Wren Stewards in the Wardroom were made to wear black dresses with caps and aprons, as if they were "Nippies", instead of their Wren Uniforms. Taking an occasion, I waited on the Captain, and told him how proud the girls were to be serving under his command, but that they could not feel truly part of H.M.S. Pembroke when they were not in their Wren uniforms. They would be a still smarter lot of stewards if

he would order this. "No", he replied, "We have bought them these black outfits, and that is what they are to wear." Doubtless I had forgotten that a Captain may dress his ship's company in any uniform he wishes, provided he pays for it himself. And indeed, I checked, and that is still the law . . . only nowadays no Captain wants the expense of providing, at his own expense, uniforms for his crew.

Gillingham was on the direct fly-path from Germany to London. So we often had the benefit of the Luftwaffe dumping their leftovers on us. And, of course, there were also the attacks on the Naval base. The officers took it in turn to be on telephone watch. One slept on a camp bed in the office with a flash light and a notebook at hand. As the signals came through "air raid warning yellow" one replied "air raid warning yellow" and recorded the time in the notebook. Next would be "Red", on which the officers and P.O.s were aroused . . . then if "air raid warning purple" followed, all came down to the splinter-protected ground floor, "at the double". One morning after a particularly noisy night, I went out to see what had happened around us (we had not suffered at all). . . I saw a man outside his small suburban house, nailing a notice on his gate "Admission 6d to see the "Biggest Aspidistra in the World" (a popular Gracie Fields song) . . . and indeed it was! For a neighbouring elm tree had been uprooted and had crashed down through his roof . . . with the leaves sticking out through the tiles, like a plant in a pot!

1941

I did not stay long there, partly because the complement did not provide for a Chief Officer, and now Western Approaches was moving from Devonport to Liverpool as a better port from which to fight the Battle of the Atlantic. The C-in-C was Admiral Noble, and the F.O.I.C. Vice Admiral Ritchie. My first office was in the Liver Building where some confusion arose owing to the presence there of Eng. Ad. Buckmaster. One day my Writer said, "Admiral Buckmaster to speak with you, Ma'am." "Do you call yourself Buckmaster?" an angry voice shouted, "Well, don't!" Apologetically I replied that that was my name, and that there should be no confusion . . . "Make sure you tell your women to address you carefully . . . I don't want any more letters about pregnant Wrens . . . I'm an Engineer, NOT a gynecologist!" Shortly after that I was relocated in a tumbled down office in Old Hall Street.

Liverpool in war time was no place for the queasy. On my first night, as I struggled to refind my hotel, in the murky blackout, I fell over a man ? dead ? drunk ? . . . It took me some time to locate a policeman and when I got him, I

could not find my way back to the man! On another occasion, I could have been in the same state, for as I was feeling my way along Old Hall Street, walking for safety in the middle of the road, I tripped and fell flat on my face . . . just then the dim lights of a car approached . . . What would the driver think? W.R.N.S. Officer dead ? drunk ? On looking back, I find that of all the hardships of war, the worst was the blackout. Mostly transport was provided to take Wrens to and from Quarters, but I, as the Senior Officer on F.O.I.C.s Staff, was in lodgings and was expected to find my own way. At first I had room and board with a landlady on Gambier Terrace . . . a splendid position looking over the Mersey . . . but bit by bit my landlady cut down. First no packed lunch, then no suppers, and finally no breakfasts either . . . not to be wondered at, for raids often interrupted gas and electricity supplies, and nights in the basement did not improve people's tempers.

One morning, after a particularly heavy raid, I set off at first light to find out how my Wrens who were on Duty Watch had fared. At the D.A.M.S. H.Q. (HMS Wellesley) the Wrens had had a miraculous escape . . . they were in the basement - where the great boilers also were (the building had been a hospital). An aerial bomb had floated down, and the fuse had caught on the ornamental railings, leaving the bomb gently swaying instead of exploding and blowing the whole place to bits, killing everybody by floods of boiling water. I then hurried on to the basin where H.M.S. Eaglet was moored. At the dock gates a guard said, "She's gone" . . . and I hurried on, not a sign of "Eaglet" . . . not even debris floating in the basin . . . At last I saw a sailor . . . "What has happened to Eaglet", I called, "Oh, she's all right, when it began to get hot last night we warped her out of the basin into the dry dock and let out the water so that she was not so visible!" Was I glad to see that little Unit safe and sound!

1942

Battle of the Atlantic. The submarine war could be described as between Max Horton and Admiral Doenitz. In March two thirds of a huge convoy was sunk in the Atlantic.

The Battle of the Atlantic was master-minded from the Operations room in C-in-C's headquarters at Derby House - an unfinished block of offices about 3 minutes from the Liver Building which houses F.O.I.C. A distinguished Submariner - Captain Horton - ran a battle school for submarine commanders. A WRNS Officer was there to guide the Captains in the tactical exercises carried out in miniature scale . . . sometimes a Sub.Commander would ask if he could have 3/O W.R.N.S. to go to sea with him, since she was so much better at his job than

he was! All these activities, and of course all communications were two floors down in well raid-protected areas duty personnel coming off watch would doss down for their "watch below" 4 hours, ready to return to duty at the next change of watch. Many of our Wrens found this mole-like life very trying; some could not take it at all. Cooks, Stewards and Messengers had to work in the same conditions. To try and reduce the amount of sickness, a V.A.D. was on duty, giving quartz lamp treatment twice weekly to all personnel who worked underground. When the short watches were over, a "tilly" would drive the group back to their quarters. Now, at least, they could sleep between their own sheets! Wrens on off duty passes would try to catch the tilly back to their quarters (in the Sexton Park area) failing that, it meant a tram and a long dark walk or the expense of a rare taxi. One day (having been bombed out of my lodgings), the Quarters Officer offered to put me up for two nights I was so late coming off duty that all transport was finished After some difficulty, I secured a taxi and ordered him to drive to Ackerley House on nearing the building the driver stopped and said, "I'll drop you here, you can then sneak through those bushes, and get in at the back window. One of your mates will have left one unlatched for you!" An interesting "tip" - when passed to the Senior Officer! However, I've kept this to myself, until now!

F.O.I.C.'s area extended from Aberystwyth to Carlisle, so that was also my area. A distance, by the winding coastal roads, of about 500 miles, about 20 units and a total of 1000 WRNS personnel. In Liverpool itself was the office of Superintendent Curry on the Staff of C-in-C. The Wrens at HQ were under I/O Beldon (who had been my A/P in World War I). since this might have been difficult for me to give orders to Beldon, it was arrange that she should deal direct with Supt. Curry, and that my only function would be the handling of drafting. It was due to this anomalous situation that I found myself summoned to a "Court of Enquiry".

Base Captain Heaton learnt that a Wren had given birth to a baby in Ackerley House Quarters. The Wren in question was one of Beldon's, but she appealed to me for help. I enlisted the assistance of the Salvation Army who took the woman and her baby into one of their Homes while the case for "Compassionate Discharge" was referred to D/WRNS. I/O Beldon, the P.O. Wren Steward (under whom the woman had worked), the VAD who had been giving the Derby House Wrens weekly sun-lamp treatment (to offset the fact that they worked entirely underground) and myself were all summoned to a Court of Enquiry. As the enquiry proceeded I found that it was I who was being censured. I should have been aware of what was going on, and I should have reported to the Base Captain that one of the Liverpool Wrens was pregnant. The fact that I have

never at any time seen this Wren, and that I had no jurisdiction, was overruled. I could not defend myself without making a charge against Beldon. And even the VAD, who had seen the woman, stripped, every week up to two days before the baby was delivered in the toilet-pan, had no inkling that the Wren was pregnant. A week later, as I gloomily contemplated the end of my WRNS career, Superintendent Curry telephoned me to say that she had succeeded in getting the Reprimand quashed and excised from my papers.

Next time Captain Heaton and I met was on the occasion of a public meeting sponsored by the City of Liverpool to honour the visit of a Russian sharp-shooter, one of whom was a woman, who had won the highest honours for their valiant and accurate sniping. They had been on a good will tour of the USA and were now on their way home, awaiting the chance of a ship to Archangel. Captain Heaton and I represented the Navy . . . as I knew a little Russian, I acted as a liaison . . . when we all stood up to sing the "Internationale", Captain Heaton - a Welshman - sang with great gusto . . . later I whispered to him, "I did not know that you were such a fervent Communist . . . you certainly sang the Internationale with great conviction." "Good God," he replied, his florid face almost white, "Was that the Internationale!" So I got back at him in the end!

Since the small "listening posts" up the coast consisted of a "dug-out" Naval officer and about 4 Wrens, I had to pay them visits about every three months to sort out any rubs. Some would find it too lonely . . . others could not stand up to watch-keeping . . . some had family problems and wanted a draft back to Devon. Many had joined the WRNS when Western Approaches meant Devonport, and now found themselves marooned on the Cumberland or Welsh coasts. For this purpose I would requisition a car, and drive myself. In good weather this was quite delightful, but in rain or fog, quite a chore. One of the N.O.I.C.'s was Captain Campbell, who proudly told me that he had the unique distinction of having been promoted Captain three times! First as a reward for his famous Q-Boat adventures, secondly when recalled for service, training the Indian Navy, and finally in World War II, to take charge of this tiny establishment. On another occasion I was asked to go to Pwllheli. The WRNS Unit officer there was having "Captain trouble". The Navy had taken over one of Butlin's Holiday Camps, and about 1000 men were there doing their basic training. There was a Ship's Company of about 100 Wrens. There were complaints of pilfering and the Captain had given orders that no one was to go past the Regulating Office carrying a parcel without opening the parcel for inspection. Now, many Wrens were in the habit of posting home their "smalls" to be washed by "mom" and they did not cotton to disclosing their underwear to what they described as "those dirty-minded old Stokers".

The Captain did not at all take to my interfering, and it required several visits, nibbling at the questions, before I secured his consent to all Wrens' parcels being inspected by a Wren P.O. Another problem was the complaint by the Wrens in Supply being required to hand out contraceptive capsules. Finally, we got that task handed over to the Sick Birth Attendants at the Base Hospital. It was while I was visiting on one of these occasions that I/O Mocatta told me that one of her Welsh Wrens in the gally was a remarkable Crystal Ball reader. Since I scoffed, The Wren in question was summoned and asked to display her gift. She handed me a crystal ball about 5 inches in diameter, and wrapped in a piece of dark green twill. The Wren handed me the ball, and told me to warm it with my hands and gaze into it. Rather rudely I complained that I was not so much warming the ball as chilling my hands! She then took it from me and started to warm it herself. She then handed it back, and again told me to gaze into it. "What do you see?" "Just the magnified lines of the weave of a fabric." "Keep on looking." "Well, one could imagine that those lines were a fence or railings." "Keep on looking."

Now, an extraordinary thing happened. Just in the same way as a photograph is developed in a bath of hypo, so a picture gradually emerged. What I had described as a fence or railings I now saw was a bookcase in three stacks . . . the backs of the books became so distinct that I could read their titles. The stacks were ornamented with a bust of Virgil on one and Goethe on the other. In front of the bookcase, a circular mahogany table was pushed right up, close to the shelves. Now, I did not know of just such a bookcase, and the Wren was from a remote Welsh farm, and would never have seen such a library. One of the other Officers then tried her hand, but the Wren said she was tired, so we let her go. The next morning I reported to the Captain's office to say good-bye and to ask for transport to get me to the railway station to return to Liverpool. But when I entered the office, Scratch told me to wait. I looked anxiously at my watch, I did not want to miss the one and only train. Then I was called in, and the Captain said, "There is a signal here from F.O.I.C. You are to go to Towyn and look for this house which the Admiralty contemplates requisitioning for a Wrens Quarters in connection with a R.M. base for Assault Course landing training. This is Top Secret. I have told a Wren driver and car to be at your disposal." So I set off. We drove for several hours and at last located the house in the Idris Valley . . . a beautiful site . . . but nobody to ask, and the house was all boarded up . . . so paced out its measurements; noted the number of windows, and the number of chimneys, tried to peer through the chinks of the shutters . . . finally spotted a pair that were not quite closed. My driver and I collected some logs, and broken down boxes, and I climbed up this tottering "ladder" . . . pressed my face to the window . . . and what did I see? The very library depicted in the crystal ball!

At one of the bases, the WRNS O/1 C was 2/O Robson - "Robbie from Canada" to all at Holyhead. Many happy hearts were made there, as, in addition to our Navel personnel, there was a Dutch contingent today there is a flourishing Association of Wrens in Holland to which many one-time British Wrens, now Dutch wives, belong. (Robbie is now Mrs. Napier and lives on the Isle of Man)

One day I was summoned by Supt. Curry. "You are to muster the WRNS Officers, give them a run through of drill, and be ready to have them on parade when signaled we expect a VIP." This was done, and one day the signal came Sailors and Wrens lined the streets from the landing stage to Derby House The WRNS Officers were drawn up . . . I rehearsed my words "WRNS Officers, 'shun." "Sir, WRNS Officers on Parade, presented." His Majesty, the King slowly walked up the street, accompanied by Queen Elizabeth; when the King drew near, I took two steps forward, came to attention, saluted, and said, "Sir, WRNS Officers on Parade." When I opened my eyes, I saw I was speaking to the Queen who was obviously much amused at being addressed as Sir!

The next VIP that came to Liverpool was Mrs. Roosevelt. Since FDR could not make visits of inspection, she was doing it for him. She addressed a big public meeting in Liverpool, and then came to talk to the Wrens in Ackerley House, where we accommodated her over night. Late in the evening we assembled in the Wardroom for a "nightcap" after which the junior officers went to wash up the cups. But Mrs. Roosevelt would not allow this to be done for her, but joined in with a towel in easy comradeship.

WRNS Officers and Senior Ratings were being posted to Rosyth on short Anti-Gas and Fire fighting courses. To set a good example, I put my name down on the First list. It was cold, wet weather, and since much of the practical work was out of doors, it was not exactly a picnic. I was the most senior officer that had attended the course, and apparently the most eccentric. For when, on the last day, we were told to cross a certain rough field, taking individual action if we came across gas, I was the only one who did NOT put on my gas mask, and when asked "did you not smell the gas?" I replied, "No, it smelt just the same as where my office is in Old Hall Street, Liverpool!!"

1943

Early in 1943 a new Training Establishment was to be opened to train Wrens for the servicing of aircraft. There were to be four categories: Ordnance, Airframe, Engines and Electrical. D/WRNS decided I should be the

WRNS Officer in charge, under Captain Percival DSO. This was a most interesting assignment, and Captain Percival was a most distinguished and understanding C.O. HMS Fledgling was situated at Millmeece (a few miles outside Stafford) where fogs were almost continuous and so protected by cloud cover from air raids. We had some of the best quality and intellectually superior recruits it was hard not to denude the classes by picking out potential "officer quality" Wrens. It was good, once again to meet Wrens who had been with me at Greenwich, C/W Keene and P.O. Wren Painter, for example. One day a signal came saying that 2/O Law, Signal Officer, was reporting to me for Quarters Duty. This sounded quite wrong, surely someone had boobed a Signals Officer, trained in Confidential Books, to run the Catering side of this Establishment! When Law reported to me I asked her why she had been sent to undertake Supply duties? She replied, "Yes Ma'am, I was trained in Home Economics, and then, you see, I attended your lectures on Naval Catering at Greenwich" so I was hoist with my own petard either she knew her job, or my lectures had been no use!

We soon settled down to a very close-knit community. Our Chaplain was an effective worker, and soon both the social and religious life of the station was active. Once I was asked to be Godmother (sponsor) to a Wren presented for baptism; and the Bishop held a Confirmation in our Chapel. From time to time I had to go to London on matters that had to be referred to D/WRNS, one of which was in connection with complaints about the food. We had tried to get sufficient vegetables by making an (illegal) "deal" with a local farmer, which we could do by buying an entire field of cabbages. Stuffed cabbage, boiled cabbage, grated cabbage, pickled cabbage, etc, etc, began to pall long before we had eaten our way through the field! A local representative of the YWCA listened to complaints, and before long we had a visit from Admiral/Air's Catering Officer as Senior Officer, I had to carry the can, but I cannot remember that any improvement resulted, since rationing ruled the menu. The next official visit was by Admiral/ Air himself. Captain Percival was in a bit of a flap. He told me to stand near the gate and to signal him as soon as the official car came around the corner this I did but the Captain had omitted to tell me that the North Gate, kept permanently locked, was being opened for this special occasion so there was I, Casabianca at the South Gate, unaware of what was happening until I heard the Admiral being piped aboard!

Wrens going or returning from leave went by way of Stafford, where they changed onto the local line, and were met at Millmeece Halt. A 3-ton truck would be sent there when a draft was going or coming. Since this was the only connection, no excuses could be allowed for failure to catch the right train. So it

was with a good deal of nervousness that I once found myself carried past the station and hurtled on to Crewe. A telephone call to the Transport Officer and I got back to face the jeers of the Wardroom. My juniors had not had such fun since the occasion when, doffing my hat, on approaching the bar to order a drink, out of my hat flew a moth.

About a month later I was again returning from London, and again my train did not stop, but went hurtling by I could not again face the ribaldry so hastily looking in my pocket, I saw I had my "nest egg" a £5 note. . . . so looking at the Emergency Signal "Penalty for improper use £5" I pulled the Communication cord! The train ground to a halt on a curve. Looking out on the inside curve, I saw the guard and the engine driver shouting to each other so I turned around, quietly nipped down to the track on the outside curve and, head in air, walked firmly along the tracks, back to the station a blast from the engine and the train drew away leaving me still with my £5 note in my pocket!

About this time, the P.O. Instructors got restive about not having the privileges of duty free tobacco which they would have been able to draw in a genuine naval establishment. I suppose the Captain did not want any more Enquiries and Inspections, so he endorsed this request. Now the Camp had to be made into a customs-controlled area. A high barred wire fence was erected all around it. A guard of 12 airmen was posted to H.M.S. Fledgling to provide a continual patrol on duty at the gate. Now we needed more Mess Attendants, for these 12 airmen had to have their own Mess then the P.O. Instructors said they, too, should have their own Mess and not have to share with the Wren Chiefs and P.O.s tradition is a fine medium to help create a well-integrated and "happy ship" but such anachronisms at the height of the war were certainly not helping the war effort.

1944

While the Army was awaiting D-Day, all sorts of ploys were tried to stop any rot. One of these was the establishment of the Army Education Corps. They organized lectures, discussion groups, technical and language courses, which were highly successful. (Some commentators see in these the growth of a Leftist movement which ultimately resulted in the return of a Labour Government and the dismissal of Churchill.) Mr. Price, a Labour M.P. for Portsmouth, asked questions in the House, "Why is the Navy not getting the same opportunities?" Their Lordships, grinding their teeth, replied that the Navy was busy fighting the war, they had no men sitting on their hands! However, in due course, an

Education Dept was established at the Admiralty. Lecturers were transferred from sea-service to give pep talks, or putting across the need to keep one's mouth shut. Films were made. And now the papers of WRNS Officers were combed for those with University and/or lecturing experience. Thus it was that I was again shifted back to WRNS HQ (now in Queen Anne's Mansions) and given the title of "Travelling Lecturer".

I visited establishments from Portsmouth to Peterhead and Lerwick to Londonderry. I had a chance to look for the Loch Ness Monster, and to feel the cruel winds moaning across the heather where clan had destroyed clan in bloody internecine battles. On arriving (by Navy plane) at Invergordon (scene of 1918 mutiny) I was greeted by four young N.O.s whose welcoming smiles turned to dismay when they learnt that the plane did NOT bring the long awaited consignment of whiskey, but a long-in-the-tooth WRNS Officer. At Loch Alsh I was asked to intercede with the Captain on behalf of the Wren Cooks, who were made, once a week, to cook and serve dinner wearing their gas masks! At the Gairloch I was to make clear to the Wrens that they were not to expect early demobilization . . . there was still the war with Japan, and even when that was over it might take a long time before one was released . . . "In the last War it was eleven months before I was back to civvy street" "Was that after the Boer War, Ma'am?" "Silly, it was after the Crimean War, wasn't it, Ma'am?" At Londonderry airport I saw for the first time young hefty American soldiers eating donuts and drinking MILK. At Peterhead, I was told my lecture would be to the whole establishment, some 500 men and 60 women, and would take place on Sunday morning. After Divisions, "Dismiss" was sounded, and the men rushed off at top speed for the chapel, the 300 who could not cram inside, then repaired too the drill hall to listen to my talk. At dinner, I found myself sitting next to the Chaplain. I congratulated him on the enthusiasm of his congregation, "It is not often that you find a waiting line-up to get into a church." "Oh", he replied, "It's not enthusiasm for Service nor for my sermon, but the Captain has laid down the monthly Pass to go into Aberdeen can only be obtained by those who have attended the Chapel twice during the previous month!" A visit to Stornoway was by water . . . I was lucky in the weather, and even managed a dinner of haggis. The visit to Lerwick was by air, and nearly ended "in the ditch". It was on the return flight to Aberdeen that head winds were so strong that when we were already in sight of Wick, the pilot decided to turn back, since he was making no headway, and we were nearly out of fuel. We then "coasted" back to Sunburgh Head airstrip and settled down like a tired insect. The plane could carry 8, but we were only 6. Two of these hired an old car, and returned in the dusk to Lerwick. The remaining 4, consisted of one civilian (anxious to get to Aberdeen for his father's funeral), and two solders going on leave. Night

fell, and at last a pilot from the Shetland Air Base was rounded up. We were refuelled, and again airborne. The pilot said that he had never landed at Aberdeen after dark, but supposed there would be guide flares and so there were. The pilot brought us safely in, and after some impatient telephone calls, a car arrived to take me to the station and the long wait for the day train (having well and truly missed the night sleeper for London.)

1945

Now attention was turned to Job Counselling. I took every opportunity to visit Universities, Technical Colleges and Trade Schools to check on openings for study and employment. My lectures now became concerned with the embryo United Nations. When the Security Council held its first meeting in London (at Church House), I secured one of the seats for "Naval Advisors"! It was there that coming out from one of the Sessions I ran into Mrs. Roosevelt again, who returned my salute by saying "Let me see, you are one of those kind WRNS Officers who entertained me in Liverpool."

The General Election I was given leave of absence for two weeks to contest the constituency of Chelmsford (Essex). The biggest problem was to get some civilian clothes, as the wearing of the King's Uniform was not permitted when making party political speeches. Since I had no coupons, I thought the alternative might be to campaign in Pajamas! But then my family came to the rescue, and together raised enough coupons to buy one ready-made suit. When the election was over (and I was well and truly beaten), I returned to duty, but not for long. I had been suffering increasingly with an infection of the finger nails that caused them to rot and fall off. I now had only one finger with a complete nail.

1946

As the War was over there really seemed little point in trying to carry on. My job, as Warden of Crosby Hall, would soon be awaiting me as the use of those premises as a School for Writers and an Overseas Drafting Depot had come to an end. So in April, I was invalided out, with the notation that my condition was "not attributable". I went to Crosby Hall, hastened the departure of the Naval Working Party who were much enjoying a lazy "holiday in London" and "my War" was over.

Crosby Hall's windows were mostly boarded up. The gable end was filled in by sheets of corrugated iron. Chelsea Old Church (where Holbein had carved

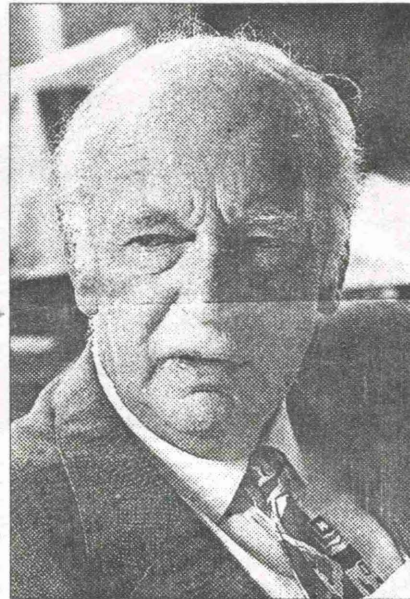
capitals for the Thomas More Chapel, and that Saint had worshipped) was a heap of rubble only the More Chapel still stood next door, where a terrace of houses had stood in Danvers Street, the basements filled with rubbish, were being turned into sweet smelling gardens by the devoted care of neighbours. As we turned our hands to the tasks of peace, we remembered those shipmates whom war had taken my personal Writer, Audrey Lane, of the Depot days and the first air raids; VAD Chappe Hall, whose ship was torpedoed in the Med.; 3/O Clucas, my loyal and devoted helper in Liverpool, who was burnt to death and so on in a long litany of faithful service. May they Rest in Peace.

Hilda Buckmaster
C/O WRNS
September 1968

Daily Telegraph
20-4-92

Cousin of HILDA & ELIZABETH B.

Col Maurice Buckmaster



Buckmaster: SOE in France

mand HQ with photographic evidence. Harris had hitherto been sceptical of SOE's ability to blow up targets which, he maintained, were better left to his air crew.

Buckmaster found it intensely frustrating that he himself was not allowed to go into enemy territory. Nonetheless, this did not prevent him on one occasion — so the story went — from flying to France in a Lysander in order to make essential voice to voice contact with George Starr, one of his agents in the Gers.

As they approached the rendezvous Buckmaster's pilot remarked crisply: "Look at those bloody awful lights."

At which Starr's inimitable Staffordshire voice cut in over the plane's radio: "Your lights would be bloody awful too, if you had the Gestapo less than a mile away." Starr merged into occupied France so successfully that he became mayor of his local village.

Perhaps the most characteristic story of Buckmaster was his reaction to Gen de Gaulle's postwar attempt to expel Starr on the grounds that he did not hold a French passport. Starr replied that he only answered to his Colonel and asked Buckmaster for orders. Buckmaster cabled: "*Tu y es, tu y reste,*" which he himself translated gruffly as "Don't budge an inch."

This rather impressed de Gaulle who relented at once and gave Starr the Légion d'Honneur instead.

Although SOE was wound up after the war Buckmaster worked resolutely to ensure that the French section's connections with the Resistance lived on through an old comrades' association, the *Amicale Libre de Resistance* — more popularly known as the "Amicale Buck".

In 1945 Buckmaster returned to Ford, first in his old job as head of Europe and subsequently as director of public relations.

Then, in 1960, he went freelance. He was best known in the field of public relations as an appropriately effervescent PRO for the wines of Champagne. Certainly this account was his first love and consumed most of his time, enabling him to retain his close links with his beloved France and with men like Krug.

A trip to Champagne with Buckmaster was a privileged opportunity to see a rare example of the *Entente Cordiale* in action — as well as being an intoxicating and stylish *cavescrawl*, in which the various houses vied with each other in doing honour to the legendary Col Buckmaster and his friends.

Buckmaster divided his later years between a small flat in Chelsea and a country hotel in Sussex. Although he became increasingly frail, his spirit was always indomitable and his speech forthright.

France honoured Buckmaster as a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1945 and raised him in 1978 to the rank of Officer. He was also awarded the Croix de Guerre avec palmes and the Médaille de la Résistance, as well as the American Legion of Merit. Britain appointed him an OBE in 1943, which many felt to be less than generous.

He wrote two volumes of autobiography, *Specially Employed* (1961) and *They Fought Alone* (1964).

Buckmaster, who described his recreation as "family life," married first, in 1927, May Dorothy Steed; they had a son and two daughters. He married secondly, in 1941, Anna Cecilia Reinstein, who died in 1988.

master's section. For his part Buckmaster did his best to turn such rivalries to good purpose and looked upon the competitive element in such relations as encouraging each group to seek to outdo the other. He described such liaison as existed with de Gaulle as owing everything to the tact and charm of SOE officers — "the only weapon against jealousy and intransigence."

Amid such arrows, it comforted Buckmaster that, when it was all over, Eisenhower credited his French section with contributing significantly to shortening the war by six months. "It was," Ike said, "the equivalent of 15 divisions."

Perhaps the most telling tribute of all came from Hitler, whom Buckmaster quoted as saying: "When I get to London I am not sure who I shall hang first — Churchill or that man Buckmaster."

Early in life Buckmaster had been steeled by the vicissitudes of fate: home life was precarious as his father's business fluctuated between prosperity and decline.

Maurice James Buckmaster was born on Jan 11 1902. He went to Eton, but it was touch and go in his last year whether the fees could be found. When his father was made bankrupt the school recognised his prowess by giving young Maurice a scholarship.

He had already demonstrated a remarkable facility for speaking French and was particularly influenced by a master named Robert Larssonier whom he used, in later years, to describe as "a wonderful man".

The verdict was characteristic, for Buckmaster tended to divide the world into three categories: "Wonderful men," "Splendid girls" and "Not my cup of tea".

After school he was sent to France where he perfected his command of the language working as a journalist on *Le Matin*. There followed six years with the merchant bank, J Henry Schroder & Co.

Then, in 1929, he joined Ford, first as assistant to the chairman and thereafter as their manager in France and then the whole of Europe. Buckmaster's European contacts and linguistic abilities inevitably led, on the outbreak of the Second World War, to a job in the Intelligence Corps. He claimed, aged 37, to be the oldest second lieutenant in the Army.

His task was to arrange suitable French billets for 50 Division, a job which led to a lifelong friendship with Paul Krug, head of the celebrated champagne house.

At Dunkirk in 1940 Buckmaster was ordered by the future Field Marshal Templer to stay behind with the rear-guard on the grounds that when the Germans arrived Buckmaster would have only to divest himself of his uniform to pass himself off as a native Frenchman for the duration.

In the event, he managed a spectacular escape, and was reunited with his division and his batman, who had inadvertently made off with his puttees.

"Thank God, Sir," Buckmaster used to recall the man saying. "You're safe, Sir. Your puttees, Sir!"

In the autumn of 1940 Buckmaster's fluency in French secured attachment to "Operation Menace", an ill-fated Anglo-French enterprise designed to wrest Dakar, capital of French West Africa, from the Vichy government and hand the port over to the Free French under de Gaulle. Buckmaster recalled this fiasco as "sitting in the Bay of Rifisque and being bombarded and dive-bombed for 24 hours, and

torpedoed." In 1941 50 Division was posted to North Africa, where Buckmaster reasoned that his French would be of little use, so he presented himself at the War Office, hoping to find more relevant employment. There he bumped into Templer again. "Ah, Buckmaster," he said, "You speak French. Got a job for you. Start this afternoon. No 64 Baker Street."

Once in the hot seat — after succeeding H A R Marriott, a director of Courtauld's French company — Buckmaster, ably assisted by Vera Atkins, worked up to 18 hours a day. He would occasionally give himself a break by bicycling home to Chelsea for an early dinner before returning at 8 pm to Baker Street, where he would remain until 4 am.

Buckmaster was acutely aware of the loneliness of his agents and of their doubts about those such as himself understanding or even caring about their problems. So he made a point of presenting them, as they were leaving for France, with personal gifts — for instance, gold cufflinks or cigarette cases for the men, powder compacts for the women — carefully manufactured to disguise their origin. "You can always hock it," he used to say, "if you run out of money."

By the end of the war Buckmaster had been responsible for the training and dispatch of some 500 people. He was devastated by the loss of men and women whom he regarded as close personal friends and felt keenly the responsibility of sending them, however unwittingly, to their deaths.

He was always fiercely loyal to his operatives, who included men like Richard Heslop, codenamed "Xavier," who sent a fusillade of boulders on to a Panzer division on the Route Hannibal, delaying its arrival in Normandy until a crucial 17 days after D-Day.

Then there were the two schoolmasters, Francis Cammaerts and Harry Rée. By the summer of 1944 Cammaerts had been so successful in the South of France that Buckmaster could claim that he had 10,000 men under his orders — at least half of whom had been armed by his efforts.

Rée immobilised the tank turret production factory at the Peugeot works at Sochaux. It was his demolition exploit which gave Buckmaster the satisfaction of calling on "Bomber" Harris at Bomber Com-

COLONEL MAURICE BUCKMASTER, who has died aged 90, led the French section of the Special Operations Executive for most of the Second World War.

After the Dunkirk evacuation in the early summer of 1940 Churchill's directive to SOE "to set Europe ablaze" was hardly more than an act of faith. Even a year later, as Buckmaster contemplated empty "in" and "out" trays at SOE's Baker Street headquarters, sabotage and subversion across the Channel seemed almost an impossibility.

"The fact is," Buckmaster was told when he first reported to Baker Street as information officer, "everything's highly embryonic here." So he busied himself with self-imposed duties; initially it seemed sensible for him to remember what he could about French factories which he had visited while working as the manager of the Ford Motor Co in France before the war.

Then, late one night when Buckmaster was responsible for security of the building, he challenged a dimly lit figure in a doorway. "My name's Hambro," the shadow said. "I happen to be the No 2 in this SOE set-up."

And so Sir Charles Hambro, the banker, settled down to question Buckmaster. The upshot was that, in July 1941, Hambro was instrumental in Buckmaster receiving temporary control of the Belgian section.

That September Buckmaster was promoted to head the French section, almost certainly the hottest seat in SOE. For the next three years he masterminded the training and dispatch of agents to France.

Buckmaster faced a formidable task in their selection. Not the least of the crosses he had to bear was the abiding suspicion of Gen de Gaulle, who insisted that SOE would not be allowed to recruit French nationals but only French speakers with British passports, Quebecois — whose accent was usually unmistakable — and Mauritians. So, for the most part, he picked and trained half-French men and women or others with a good knowledge of the language and the country.

Buckmaster's agents were to provide a roll of honour second to none in the story of British wartime undercover operations. Their stories inspired a host of books, films and television series.

Some agents, such as Violette Szabo, were tortured and shot. Others, like Odette Churchill, suffered at the hands of the Gestapo, but survived.

The high losses of the men and women whom Buckmaster sent to France have since raised questions about his methods. In retrospect, and with hindsight, Buckmaster has been unfairly criticised for running an "amateurish" organisation and incurring unnecessary loss of life.

But this was emphatically not how it seemed in the years when Europe was occupied by a ruthless Nazi regime — and when sabotaging railways and communications, attacking road convoys, supporting and arming the Resistance were considered paramount.

As M R D Foot, the least partisan of SOE's historians, has observed in connection with Buckmaster: "Was it not Turenne who said, the general who has made no mistakes has commanded in remarkably few battles?"

Charges of amateurism were particularly misplaced coming from the Secret Intelligence Service, which was not averse to obstructing Buck-