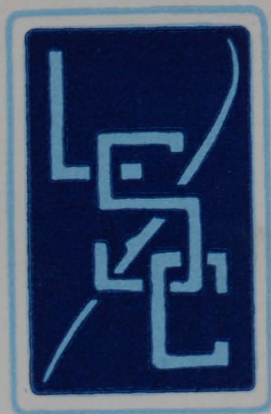


LADIES' SKI CLUB BULLETIN

MARCH, 1945

SWITZERLAND

The Swiss State Travel Bureau, and the Swiss Federal Railways, congratulate the Ladies' Ski Bulletin on its reappearance.

We have been deeply touched by the feeling with which you write of our mountains.

If you have missed our country, we can assure you that we have missed our friends, the British skiers.

The unchanging mountains still stand in a changing world, and the sun still sparkles from the powder snow in the winter.

A great welcome awaits you in Switzerland.

# THE LADIES' SKI CLUB BULLETIN

No. 15. Vol. II. Pt. 7. MARCH, 1945.

## EDITORIAL.

It was unanimously decided at a meeting of the L.S.C. Committee that the time had come to have an issue of the L.S.C. Bulletin so that the List of Members could be revised and changes of address given: every member more or less has changed her address and many have changed their names. It presented a problem as to what could possibly be written in lieu of our legitimate topic of snow, boards and bindings, so it was decided to take each of the Wartime Services in which members of the L.S.C. are spending their time and energies instead of in the noble sport of ski-ing, and give you an article from someone who could be persuaded to put pen to paper and tell of their adventures, grim or gay.

I approached the topic of "Wives and Mothers" with some trepidation as the competition to bring before the world the grim experiences in this category of Slave Labour should be terrific and may result in a minor civil war. I decided that Beryl Spence, Helen Tomkinson and Nancye Smith could write most feelingly on this subject (though there may be many others equally experienced and capable) if they could find time when not occupied with children or livestock, and I would suggest that at least a set of aluminium cook-pots should be given to the writer of the most blood-curdling article.

A special word should be said about our "*Grandmothers.*" The Club is now the proud possessor of three: Lady Mabel Lunn with a count of three grandchildren, Lady Blane ditto with the additional interest of including a set of twins, and Mrs. Alan Butler with one. I am told that her appearance on an aerodrome for some time invariably called for the cry, "Here comes Granny in her Spitfire."

Further claims to fame are Ethel Leverson with an M.B.E. She has been in the National Fire Service before outbreak of war and is now Senior Area Officer in Manchester.

The following items of news have reached us from time to time and will be of interest to all.

*Mrs. Anson*, remaining at home to look after her husband and family, has been Chief Billeting Officer for two villages since December, 1939, and is knee deep in evacuees. She drives for Queen's Messengers and W.V.S., works in a hospital a day a week, visits air raid casualties and Land Army girls, and is Secretary to the local Nursing Association.

*Mrs. Robert Bingham* was cooking for the Red Cross at the beginning of the war and then joined the F.A.N.Y. She recruited and commanded a special unit of F.A.N.Y.s attached to a War Office Department. She has recently married Colonel James Young and has gone to Ceylon.

*Miss Evelyn Bland* has been Land Army (Horticultural Branch) since July '39.

*Miss Helen Blane* (now Tomkinson) married January 27th, '40, and worked in Censorship till '41, when she had a son born in Belfast. Not content with this, she presented her husband (and the Ladies' Ski Club) with twin girls born in April, '43. She has had ski on twice—once on her honeymoon to impress her husband when there was snow in the south, and one day in Richmond Park.

*Lady Blane*, our Secretary, is a wholetime worker with the Y.M.C.A., and is one of its Vice-Presidents. She was a short time in France in '40, worked at Dover Pier during the evacuation of Dunkirk and ran the Mobile Canteens in the blitz in London. One day's ski-ing in Richmond Park has been the extent of her winter-sporting. She was badly overworked at one time and had a serious breakdown, but is now recovered and back in harness again.

*Mrs. Byam-Grounds* was a Sergeant in the W.A.A.F. early in the war, on special duties, and later after a period of housekeeping, has become a Works Inspector in a factory for the Admiralty—a whole-time job—as well as looking after her home.

*Viscountess Carlow* has two sons, George born in August, '38, and Lionel John, born in October, '40. She is running a troop Canteen as well as her house and family.

*Miss Cavendish-Clark* has varied between M.O.I., Foreign Office and Red Cross and is now back in M.O.I. She has had three scripts for the B.B.C. accepted and broadcast.

*Mrs. Adrian Chamier*, now a "Lady," a F.A.N.Y. before outbreak of war, went to the A.T.S. in '39 on the motor transport side. From Junior Commander i/c an M.T. Coy. in Ack-ack she went to the W.O. in Special Duties Branch in March, '43, and retired in August, '44, to look after her son invalided from the Fleet Air Arm.

*Miss L. E. Close-Brooks* has worked with local Canteens. She had some ski-ing which included a bit of machine-gunning from an enemy plane—fortunately with no harm done.

*Miss B. E. M. Carroll* has been working in a Y.M.C.A. Canteen.



*Miss Di Crewdson* ran an Ambulance Station for a short time and became a W.A.A.F. Corporal for an equally short time—the Schiltgrat being responsible for ending these promising careers. However, her back eventually returned to working order—she joined the Y.M.C.A. and is running a bunch of Mobiles.

*Miss Elizabeth Dobson* was with the Mechanized Transport Corps as an Instructor and then a Civil Defence Driver in the blitz until '41, when she went "back to the land." Tractor driving she finds particularly intriguing. She intends to use her ski this winter on her job and hopes to get in a good stembogen on the slopes of the Cotswolds where she works.

*Miss Bernie Duthie*, having started on market gardening, digging for Victory and Civil Defence, had gone to the Wrens where she is a driver.

*Miss Doreen Elliott* has had a similar career. She has been promoted to officer rank and is now on recruiting at Plymouth. Both Bernie and Doreen have had ski-ing on Box Hill during the war.

*Mrs. Marjorie Greenland* learnt Braille in the early days of the war and has been teaching at St. Dunstan's since May, '40. She has also started a Walking Club for her pupils called the "Salopian Alpian Club," takes them on long rambles and they get much fun and good exercise out of it. She organized a fete for Warships Week and made £2,380 in the day.

*Mrs. Donald Greenland*, after a preliminary canter of A.R.P. and ambulance driving is now a buyer of chemicals and metals for a processing factory in London doing Government work. She finds it most interesting.

*Miss A. M. Gregory* worked in Y.M.C.A. Canteens at Victoria Station in '39. She was sent to Dover for the evacuation from Dunkirk and now is still on mobile canteen work.

*Mrs. Hamlyn* is a senior psychiatric social worker at the Tavistock Clinic, where her work is with children and their parents suffering from nervous difficulties and behaviour problems, and with young offenders from the juvenile courts.

*Miss Pip Harrison* was in Egypt with her brother at the outbreak of war and worked as a cipherine in Ismailia, then in Naval Intelligence and in '41 in the Embassy in Cairo. She had some ski-ing in Lebanon in February, '40, but the snow was either beaten and icy or windcrust. Their costumes were a startling mixture of sailing and riding clothes, and boots and ski hired in Beirut were edgeless with bindings that didn't. In '42 after a trip to South Africa she joined the Wrens and is still with them.

*Miss Catherine de Gex* has been in the A.T.S. since September, '39. She did two and a half years as adjutant of various units, then became a staff captain for one and a half years, and is now back doing adjutancy in Wales.

*Mrs. P. M. Hepworth* belongs to a London detachment of the Red Cross and nurses or cooks as occasion demands in the Chelsea Sick Bay. She has heard from Mrs. von Almen who reported Kleine Scheidegg and Wengenalp full up last winter and the latter very popular now that the ski-lift goes up the Lauberhorn. Johnny Graf and the wife of a Swiss professor had been killed in an avalanche on the north face of Plum Pudding Hill.

*Miss Esme Hewetson* joined the M.T.C. in October, '39, and in July, '40, transferred to the American Ambulance, where she did a great deal of driving: 60,000 miles in two years. She has now gone to the W.A.A.F.

*Mrs. Hunting* has been on War Comforts Committee and Voluntary Hospital Work for the R.A.F.

*Mrs. Ingall* having two sons of three years and eighteen months, has been living in a cottage in Cheshire fully occupied with cooking, gardening and caring for the young.

*Miss Jeanette Kessler*, now Mrs. Ripley Oddie, joined the Red Cross and worked in a First Aid Post at Chelsea Hospital for Women in August, '39, and Guy's Hospital, Barnet, in April, '40. She was married in November of that year, and in '41 joined the W.V.S. and has been working at Headquarters ever since. Her husband, Wing Commander Oddie, was ill in hospital for some time, but is now at work again and we hope on the road to full recovery.

*Mrs. L. P. King* has been helping in various rest centres in the blitz periods and was also doing canteen work in air raid shelters and visiting for Islington Invalid Children's Aid Association. She has now gone to the W.A.A.F.

*Mrs. Kingsmill* has been working on a farm since outbreak of war.

*Miss Emerald Kirkpatrick* has been in the W.A.A.F. since '39 and has risen to considerable heights. I believe that she is now a Group Officer and has gone to India. I had a letter from her written on the eve of her departure, while she was sitting on the edge of England waiting for the weather to clear for her take-off.

*Mrs. Lavallin-Puxley* is an area representative of the W.V.S. with five towns and thirty-four villages to organize. Packing P.O.W. parcels two days a week fills in her spare moments.

*The Lady Mabel Lunn* has been acting as secretary and accountant at a military hospital in Market Drayton district since October, '40, and is now in Y.M.C.A. Information Work.

*Miss Elizabeth MacFie* has been in the A.T.S. since '38. She was called up for war service in '39 in the 1st London Motor Coys. and in '40 went to Glasgow in charge of a unit. In '41 she was posted to Lichfield as Chief Instructor and 2nd in Command of the N.C.O.s School. She is now a Chief Commander (Lieut.-Col) at a Group in Beds. She has managed to get some kind of ski-ing wherever she has been.



*Miss Olga Major* is with the W.V.S. and is in charge of the Information Bureau for the Rehousing Department of the Stepney Borough Council.

*Mrs. A. M. Martyn-Smith* in the early part of the war was a warden in her district. She then joined the M.T.C. attached to the Ministry of Supply and drives for them three days a week.

*Mrs. R. Morgan* is working full time with the Ministry of Food and driving an ambulance for A.R.P.

*Mrs. R. Norman* joined the Woking Mobile Y.M.C.A. Canteens at Christmas 1939 and worked at night in Pirbright Guards Camp for a year. She continued with mobile canteens in Horsham and was Canteen Officer of that area. She is now with the Admiralty in Operations Department.

*Miss M. A. O'Loughlin* writes from Australia to say she married Dr. John Devine of Melbourne in 1940. She has been ski-ing on Mount Kosciusko in New South Wales. The new chalet there has accommodation for 100 people and is eleven miles from the hotel. Snow conditions were good and a new ski lift going up 400 feet was a great asset to learners. She went to Mount Buller in Victoria for the Interstate Championships. It was the largest gathering of of women racers they had ever had. She says there are some very keen skiers in Australia and some very good ones, but the runs are all short compared to Switzerland or Austria.

*Miss C. O'Rorke* in the A.T.S. started life as a junior clerk and rose through the Quartermaster Department, driving a ration van, to Local Acting Unpaid Corporal in charge of P.A.D., and finally to officer status. Her winter of '40-'41 in Western Command prejudiced her against snow, although she has used her ski on several occasions to and from camp. Now at the rank of subaltern (lieutenant) she expects to be retired " on old age."

We regret very much to report the death of *Miss Pamela Peech*.

*Mrs. A. M. Penderel* was married in July '40 to Major Hubert Hadow. She was a V.A.D. at the Middlesex Casualty Post until she went to Chamonix as S.C.G.B. representative from January to March, 1940. She returned to her V.A.D.-ing until her marriage since when she has been following the drum and is immersed in domestic chores.

*Lady Raeburn* was for a long time head of the Information Bureau Y.M.C.A. at Waterloo Station. She is now working with the W.V.S. in Bethnal Green.

*Miss Patricia Raeburn* is in the W.V.S. and working for Poplar Borough Council in the Surveyor's Department. She is also part-time warden in Westminster. Her quick change act when sirens blow is worthy of a Mayfair mannequin.

*Mrs. R. B. S. Reford* writes from the depths of the country where her activities with bees and chickens are mixed up with Canadian Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. Canteens. She is also parish representative for two scattered parishes of the Women's Land Army.

*Dr. Vi Rendall* has been very seriously ill during the last six months. She has our deepest sympathy and hopes for a rapid recovery in the near future.

*Miss Isabel Roe*, starting in May, '40, as a V.A.D., is now in the Wrens.

*Miss Audrey Sale-Barker* is a ferry pilot in Air Transport Auxiliary.

*Miss Peggy Sherer*, having been a F.A.N.Y. at the outbreak of war, went into the Motor Coys. A.T.S. She was in France with an ambulance unit before Dunkirk. She and Amy Blane ran into each other in Rouen (I don't mean literally) but her unit was evacuated with the fall of France. She was posted to Edinburgh where she commanded a convoy company. She has recently been filling a technical post with R.E.M.E.

*Mrs. Kenneth Smith* (Nancye Barry) has had two daughters since the war started. She has written an account of her activities elsewhere in the BULLETIN.

*Mrs. Stroud* has a young family to look after and sandwiches in work for a child welfare centre and driving for the W.V.S.

*Miss Nigs Palmer-Tomkinson* is in the Land Army.

*Mrs. Alec Tulloch* (Bunty Walker) has two children, John born in July, '40, and Rosemary in September, '41. She does a great deal of work for the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association and ran a flower stall in Ayr Market, which brought in a handsome sum for this charity.

*Miss Marjorie Tulloch*, originally a F.A.N.Y., joined the A.T.S. and has been in Glasgow and Belfast and is now in England. She is a Junior Commander.

*Miss Vansittart-Neale* has been Commandant of her own house taken over by the B.R.C.S. and St. John's War Organization for a Convalescent Home for Mobile V.A.D.s and members of Red Cross and St. John's. It has 40 beds.

*Mrs. K. G. Holmes-Walker* washed dishes at a Y.M.C.A. canteen at Victoria Station in '39 and went to Dover for the Dunkirk evacuation. She then worked with mobile vans and is now running a static canteen for "Aussie" airmen. Her ski-ing activities were ten minutes (in a fog) on Hampstead Heath at Christmas in '42, and she was delighted to find she could still stem.

*Mrs. H. R. Spence* (*Beryl Walter*) has been pretty exclusively domestic in the wilds of Aberdeenshire. She produced a son, Christopher, in May, '40, and a daughter in July, '43, and has been



nursemaid, housemaid, cook and gardener at times. She was secretary to the Local Comforts Party dispatching parcels to the men overseas. Has skied a little each winter when family cares permitted, 1941 being a particularly good year for snow conditions.

*Miss Nancy Watson* after a checkered career in dishwashing and sausage frying for A.R.P. and Artists' Rifles, clerking for Naval Comforts and typing for a W.O. Registry finally settled in the W.A.A.F. and is now a Flight Officer.

*Mrs. Wright* runs the Poultry Department of a Training Colony, replacing a man who was called up. She has about 1,700 birds, eight boys to help her and her work is often from 7 a.m. till 10 p.m. She also does ambulance and canteen work for W.V.S. and is After-care Officer for the Training Colony.

These are all the news items I have managed to obtain and I hope that they are accurate. I give below a list of those members who have changed their names and those who have supplied the country with future skiers.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Miss F. C. Barrow - | - is now | Mrs. Field. Daughter two years old. |
| Mrs. Robert Bingham - | ,, | Mrs. James Young. |
| Miss Helen Blane - - | ,, | Mrs. W. R. Tomkinson. Son born July, '41, twin daughters, April, '43. |
| Miss Paterson Brown - | ,, | Mrs. Snowden. Daughter, December, '44. |
| Miss C. Bruce - - - | ,, | Mrs. Mitchell. Two daughters. |
| Mrs. C. I. Curteis - - | ,, | Mrs. A. M. Rudd-Clark. |
| Miss Diana Deane - - | ,, | Mrs. John Curle. Son. |
| Mrs. Gordon-Lennox - | ,, | Mrs. James Wright. |
| Miss Yvonne Hewetson - | ,, | Mrs. Leslie Lewis. Daughter, born October, '43. |
| Miss E. R. Jones - - | ,, | Mrs. D. Newall. Daughter born April, '43. |
| Miss J. Kessler - - | ,, | Mrs. Ripley Oddie. |
| Miss A. Kilroy - - | ,, | Mrs. A. B. Rendall. |
| Miss Lee-Booker - - | ,, | Mrs. McSwinney. |
| Mrs. V. Loyd - - - | ,, | Mrs. E. B. Motion. |
| Miss M. A. O'Loughlin - | ,, | Mrs. Devine. Daughter. |
| Miss Joan Paton - - | ,, | Mrs. Basil Murphy. Daughter born September, '41. |
| Mrs. A. M. Penderal - | ,, | Mrs. Hubert Hadow. |

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|---|---|---|
| Miss M. Steedman - - | is now | Mrs. Allen. |
| Miss E. M. Tulloch- - | ,, | Mrs. Garrett. |
| Miss B. Walter - - | ,, | Mrs. Spence. Son and Daughter. |
| Miss Joselyn White - - | ,, | Mrs. Philpott. Son. |
| Miss S. Wilson - - | ,, | Mrs. Pentreath. |
| Miss Wedderburn-Wilson | ,, | Mrs. Stirling. Two daughters. |
| Mrs. Forster - - - | | Daughter. |
| Mrs. Ingall - - - | | Two sons. |
| Mrs. Kenneth Smith - | | Two daughters. |
| Mrs. A. Tulloch - - | | Son in July, '40. Daughter in September, '41. |
| Viscountess Carlow - | | Son in August, '38. Son in October, '40. |
| Lady Myrtle Balfour - | | Son in February, '36. Daughter in January, '44. |

I have, at the eleventh hour, received news from *Enid Fernandes* whom I met dashing through Harrods the other day. She flew back from the Middle East in January, where she has been working in the Red Cross, as her father had died and her mother was seriously ill. She is going back again as soon as she has settled up her affairs. During her ten days' leave in the M.E., she hitch-hiked from Cairo over the Sinai Desert into Palestine and Syria, staying in Jerusalem, Damascus, Baalbek and Beirut and trod on snow by the Cedars of Lebanon as the summit of her leave. She then hitch-hiked back to Egypt "full of fresh air and that easing of the heart which comes from the loveliness of high hills."

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# L.S.C. 1923-1944.

By Greta Raeburn.

Our 21st birthday! and we should not have known it but for our Sinister Father, who, under pretext of seeing his wife home in the black-out, insinuated himself into the pre-luncheon Committee Meeting of the club and announced the news to his offspring.

The Club has been an unruly child, and the author of our being must sometimes have regretted that he had not allowed us to find anonymity in the arms of the Alpine Ski Club; but, indeed, then we should not have existed at all, and, although a plague to our parent, we have been an amusement to ourselves and a useful leaven at times in ski-ing politics.

Admittedly we like to remain the hidden threat, it is much easier and requires practically no overt action and leaves us free to enjoy our private ski-ing. Indeed it is safer so; as, on the one occasion on which we took direct action, did we not start international races for women? Our Sinister Father knows how much that has cost him in anxiety and exasperation, but we know that we have on occasion made him feel proud of us too.

To celebrate this remarkable anniversary we decided to make a special effort and, in spite of war conditions, to have a really good luncheon. Our determination would have been in vain but for the great kindness of Lady Fripp and Betty, who lent us their flat. Betty's arrangements were perfect: she produced a wonderful fork lunch, and her cook, Mrs. Brown, made the birthday cake. Various members of the Committee shared the ingredients and the result was a pre-war rich black cake of the wedding variety with real icing. The cocktails which preceded and accompanied the General Meeting were a miracle in themselves, both for strength and price: the latter in inverse ratio!

We had no speeches and no guests, just a few remarks from the President and some kind words from Arnold, and we hope that, although now of age, he will continue to cherish us however tiresome we may be again, in that hoped-for time when we can return to our beloved sport.

The original members are now grey haired, we have very few members under 30 years of age, but we have several nurseries full of promising future members under the age of four, and if they are able to follow in the ski tracks of their racing mothers the Club will again be a power to reckon with in the international events of 1959.

# WREN INTERLUDE.

By Birnie Duthie.

Two years and three months as a Wren rating seems a long time. It is difficult to remember first impressions and adventures, but odd flashes of memory about the little things I laughed at do come back.

My first recollection is of standing for hours in queues at the Training Depot. New people were still arriving and for lack of anything better to do we took a great interest in the new arrivals. I remember one very smart and haughty-looking young lady arriving with so much luggage that the taxi driver had to help to carry it in. Someone in our queue said : " Look at that one, probably a Duke's daughter ; she's in for a few nasty surprises." Another voice said : " Much more likely she's the taximan's daughter." I met her afterwards. The taximan was her uncle. The next laugh was our new clothes ; the bluettes (navy blue overalls) made us all look like charity school girls from the same school, but the nether garments were the best laugh. Thin ones unofficially called " blackouts," thick woolly very, very serviceable ones, issued to me as a Motor Transport Driver, we christened Birnie's passion killers.

While in our queue, I had particularly noticed and instinctively disliked another member of it. The dislike was obviously mutual, I was evidently a bad smell under her nose ! I decided she had a face like a pug dog, and come what may, I would never speak to her. Two days later we were put together to scrub a cement passage of interminable length.

We scrubbed for half an hour in silence, then I went for more water. When I came back, she had started at the beginning again. This was too much, I had to ask why ? The Chief Petty Officer had been along and had thought little of our scrubbing. When I had finished saying what I thought of the C.P.O., my companion's expression had changed to one of friendly admiration. We then decided that passage was going to last us as a job for the rest of the morning. We also decided that if we hollowed our backs while scrubbing, our rear ends looked indignant and impudent, but if we humped them, we looked humble and depressed. We thought this method best. Our efforts were successful beyond expectation, for eventually two more scrubbers were sent to help us. We had learnt something, even if not to be expert floor scrubbers.

From this time on we were the best of friends and even shared the usual W.R.N.S. double-tier bunk at our next Depot. When she coughed, I woke ; when I sneezed, she woke ; and when she failed to pass her driving test, I lay sorrowfully wakeful on a miniature Vesuvius all night. Next day we parted, still friendly, in spite of W.R.N.S. double-tier bunks.

After being drafted to my first job I developed boot trouble, not quite the same kind we have in Switzerland, but bad enough.

In a base where it rains so hard you not only walk through



puddles all day, but, to use a local expression, it " comes in over," I found the two issue pairs of shoes quite inadequate.

Having armed myself with the necessary permission, I set out to buy myself high boots, like the ones experienced Wren drivers wore. On emerging from the shop, four and a half weeks' pay the poorer, but with lovely high boots, I found myself clumping down the street to a barrage of whistles and catcalls and shouts of " Hi-Yah, Puss in Boots," from every sailor in sight.

Some Wrens wear a blue stripe on their arms. This is a Good Conduct Badge and it indicates three years of undetected crime. The possessors are mostly tactfully artful to an unusual extent. I have still hopes of attaining this badge. As a Wren driver I have had many opportunities of exercising this talent. It is dull to drive people to interesting functions and then be left outside ; something has to be done about it. Equally, there are times to drive up to the front door in the normal fashion, jump out and deliver smashing salutes in all directions, and other times when car lights are directed on the front door steps in case anyone should trip.

On one occasion I arrived with a station wagon (American for shooting brake) full of officers. I endeavoured to execute the lighted steps manoeuvre. . . . It was necessary to get into reverse, which I did, but unfortunately the automatic gear change stuck there, with the result that each time I tried to move forward again, we retired towards, on to, and down the front lawn. Having no handbrake increased my difficulties and when I eventually got the gear unstuck, we were halfway down a steep grass bank and the next move took us in up to the hubs. At this point we all got out. When it was light two men drivers were sent to retrieve the car. This episode took several days to live down.

Another interesting expedition was to the investiture at Holyrood Palace, with my Captain, who was to receive the C.B.E. Each recipient gets only two tickets and the Captain was taking his wife and daughter. However, he tried to get the Police to allow me into the outer courtyard, so that I could see the King drive up. They were adamant—it was impossible unless I had a ticket. Next time the Captain saw me, I was inside the Palace, in a seat in the front row about eight yards from the King.

At one point I must have looked a little too pleased with myself, because an official came up and said : " Are you a recipient ?" I replied : " Oh, no ! I'm only an ordinary guest, but I drove a recipient up here." He then ushered me into the inner room.

The thing that impressed me most about the ceremony was that so many brave men should be so nervous. Some bowed a little late, some too early, some stepped too close and some too far away from the King, and practically all of them gave a perceptible sigh of relief as they left the room.

While there it gave me great pleasure to see Digby Raeburn get his decoration. Obviously, receiving ski-ing prizes at Mürren has made him impervious to nerves on these occasions ; he did a perfect run.

# Alas The Snow

By Elizabeth Macfie, A.T.S.
(*now Chief Commander*)

Alas, The Snow! The wasted snow that has fallen on Tschuggen Glade since 1939. However, it will fall again and we shall fall with it; but this nostalgic cry is nothing to do with what I am supposed to write about. I am required by our persistent Editor to "Write an article on the A.T.S.," in fact she says I have "been selected" to write it—a choice of words which arouses all the old memories of apprehension mixed with unholy joy at being notified of selection for other things; things involving letters of the alphabet in gold or silver, or blue and red bands on a jersey sleeve.

To write about the A.T.S. while one is still in the thick of it is difficult as there seems nothing to write about. Most of us would find difficulty in writing an article about our normal life in peace time and to us life in the A.T.S. has become just that, utterly normal. Not humdrum, far from that, but just so normal that the old way of life seems extraordinary, like a memorable holiday. This acceptance of service life as a normal way of living by thousands of women of all ages and conditions is one of the most surprising things of the war. The newspapers incline to the publication of pictures and articles stressing the pecularity of women doing men's jobs, in other words the unnatural is news.

Heaven forbid that many of the jobs performed by the A.T.S. should be continued by women after the necessity has gone, either for the job itself or for its performance by the "gentle sex"; but the life itself is not as unnatural as the lay public would have us believe. It is in fact a better way of living than many women have previously followed. For those who find at first that the differences are irksome, their natural feminine adaptability and notorious imitativeness very soon cure any wish to kick against the pricks. Probably the most difficult thing for most auxiliaries to accept is the lack of privacy; to be transported from a small household into a moiling crowd of women with whom they must inevitably live, eat, and even wash for the duration, is not a state easily endured by women. To be required to make the whole of one's bedding into a neat square pile every morning seems unreasonable at first. To be addressed as "Private" Bloggs instead of "Miss" or "Mrs." Bloggs by all and sundry is slightly shocking to the mother's darling or the superior young woman who thinks she is a born leader. Worst of all to be told that she may not flaunt her blonde tresses to their fullest length for the benefit of her military admirers is just "the end, my dear!"

I was once heavily engaged in the making of an intricate and difficult programme for a Training Centre with staggered intakes and not much instructional accommodation, when I suddenly became conscious of a loud clatter and deep sighs coming from my army



stove, which incidentally was not fulfilling its purpose. The cause was a very newly joined recruit who, satisfied that she had at last attracted my attention, said: "I have never lit a fire before." "Well, you haven't lit that one yet," said her unfeeling C.O. "I mean, I don't do this sort of work, I have never needed to and I am not good at it." "What are you good at?" replies the dragon, a question which in spite of much heartsearchings produced no tangible asset at all. I was interested and dug out the fact that this girl had just completed five years at one of the most expensive schools in the country. Between us we came to the conclusion that the education of girls was "all wrong" and had resulted in the awkward fix in which she now found herself. The episode finished, she triumphed over the fire, and made an admirable exit with the words, "Thank you, ma'am, how lucky it is that I have you to practice on before I have my own home!" So perhaps there is something to be said for —— School after all.

In the main our Private Bloggs plays, and she plays well; not because she likes it and not because she fears what she will get if she doesn't. She plays firstly because she knows that but for her there would be one man less in the fighting line, and secondly because she realises she cannot have her cake and eat it; she is given all the rights and privileges of the soldier and accepts the liabilities.

Of course occasionally she does not play quite so well, and that is where the majesty of Military Law comes in, as administered by many members of the L.S.C., wearing crowns and stars on their shoulders instead of trefoils and "K.s" and Eagles and Goldene Gamses on their breasts. It is within the bounds of possibility that at some Mürren Prizegiving in 1947 a veteran lady of the L.S.C. may so far forget herself as to say she has "Much pleasure in awarding" the winner of the Hindmarsh Cup with "Seven days C.B." No doubt we may also find ourselves waiting on the mat outside Room 4 to ask Arni for compassionate leave to visit Wengen; with a "Frei-Warrant" thrown in, of course.

The mind jumps so willingly and so easily to thoughts of old memories becoming realities again, that the temptation to enlarge on them is almost irresistible. Unfortunately it must be resisted or (*vide* page 266 of the *British Ski Year Book*, 1944), "that little figure of our well known member . . . will express loud displeasure in a Canadian accent," she having detailed me to write about the A.T.S.

Hard as I try, only the most irrelevant events come uppermost in my mind in connection with the A.T.S., such as the dreadful occasion on which I was placed in command of a Guard of Honour composed of 75 A.T.S. and 25 W.A.A.F.s in the middle of Birmingham in pouring rain to greet a certain Royal personage. After a very long and dripping stand things began to happen. I brought the Guard smartly to attention and the band played the Royal Salute. Then came the anxious moment when the Royal personage comes forward to shake hands with the Guard commander. In those days, 1942, the instruction was that the glove should be removed

when shaking hands with Royalty. A new well-fitting leather glove soused with rain will not come off, as a high degree of suction is produced the moment the movement is attempted. This elementary scientific fact was unknown to me at the time, and for what seemed a lifetime I attempted to defy the laws of science. Film cameras turned; one hundred members of the Women's Armed Forces of the Crown, the Lord Mayor of Birmingham and all the Town Council, and the loyal citizens all waited anxiously. The band even started to play again, soft music. The Royal lady herself had by this time begun to get a little tired of holding her hand out, and even urged me not to bother, when suddenly the glove came off with a noise like a well delivered raspberry, and the inspection proceeded. Soon after this contretemps a War Office instruction was issued to all A.T.S. Commanding Officers to the effect that "In future, when shaking hands with Royalty, the glove will not, repeat not, be removed."

I once had a very naughty girl to deal with. She was remanded for me as she had been before the Company Commander so many times that it was thought she had better have her latest iniquity made into a real "do," and if found guilty have as an award that little bit more that the C.O. can give. She was a cook who, one day feeling her lot was hard and life was dull, decided that she would save herself much trouble if she presented her platoon with spam for their Sunday dinner instead of the large and gory joint provided. The Orderly Officer visited the meal and received no complaints and all might have been well. Unfortunately, on leaving the mess, the officer noticed an energetic spaniel digging up the well-tended garden plot much to the detriment of the platoon tomatoes. In spite of fierce noises made to it the dog refused to desist, eventually producing in triumph—the Sunday joint!

Such fearful crime does not often happen and in the main there is very little trouble, but it is sometimes irksome to be a C.O. and spend one's time either moving the contents of the "IN" basket into the "PENDING," or touring two counties sniffing round quarters looking for cobwebs. However it has its excitements and compensations as well as its bad moments. Having so often been frightened and cold and physically exhausted purely voluntarily for the joy of ski-ing it is interesting to find oneself suffering the same conditions in one's war job. It is often a help to look back and remember that having been through it all before for pleasure, and recovered, so will one continue to recover each time. My only real anxiety is over those things which are beyond the power of the spirit to control; a letter from Madame Märkle of the Bahnhof Hotel, Grindewald in which she told me my old room was waiting for me and that she frequently examined my vorlage bags for moths, has given me sad thoughts. I have no anxiety as to whether or not I shall be able to get into Room 20 but I have very grave doubts as to whether I shall be able to get into my vorlage bags again. I was not able to sit down in them, even in 1939.



# FERRY PILOT.

By Lois Butler.

Looking back on that icy morning early in the New Year of 1940 when I joined the A.T.A. and started flying as a Ferry Pilot it seems about 100 years ago. In fact it is just five years, and in all that time we have none of us skied in Hitler's Europe, no glorious Schuss, no "birds-nesting" on snowy days, no Eins, Zwei, Drei —Los! with that long way down to the finish, the only thought in mind; no Tschuggen Glade in powder snow, no dreadful slaloms set by Arni, no noughts and crosses played on the steaming windows of the Lauterbrunnen funicular, no hot grogs; in fact, no mountains and no ski-ing. I wonder if our Swiss friends know how we have longed to return and how glad we will be to meet them again and totter forth on our neglected ski with creaking muscles into the sunshine again.

I must return to this business of being a Ferry Pilot as that is what I have been asked to write about. The few original women pilots started in that bitter January of 1940 to ferry open Tiger Moths from the factory. Never have so few been so cold so often is the best way to describe that winter. We were told that if we were half a mile off course we would be shot at by ground defences! If we followed railways instead of "trusting the compass" we would land in a city with a balloon barrage, the map of England was full of places we must not go, under the most dire penalties. The weather and visibility were always bad!

Spring found us quite adept at flights from the South of England to the North of Scotland, missing balloon barrages with ease and confidence. We knew our routes and our little Tiger Moths. We were joined by about twenty more pilots including Wendy Sale-Barker and Amy Johnson. Soon great news was given by our C.O., Miss Pauline Gower. We were to go to the Central Flying School and be "converted." C.F.S was the "Holy of Holies" of the R.A.F. and no woman had ever darkened its doors or brightened its life before. "Converted" we were. It sounded like turning a house into a flat, or changing one's religious faith. We learned to fly aeroplanes with taps and knobs. They were as hot in the blazing June weather, as the Moths had been cold in the winter. Round the circuit we went in what seemed to be very fast machines. We learned "cockpit drill" and strange rhymes to remember our vital checks before taking off. Boost and flaps, trim and pitch ran through our waking thoughts and some of our dreams.

We went solo, were checked out and returned to our Ferry Pool "converted," we could fly these aeroplanes, single engine and twin, but we knew little or nothing about all the gauges and instruments in our cockpits. Later the A.T.A. gave us two weeks' technical course where we really learned the proper way to use all the devices in a modern cockpit, and the rudiments of what was going on behind

our boost gauges, hydraulic pressure gauges, fuel systems, and a hundred other things.

The A.T.A. have done a remarkable job, I believe. The essence of it is to take any plane anywhere in the British Isles or to the fighting front without damage to aircraft or engine. With just an odd exception to make the rule good, every single aircraft from the biggest bomber to the smallest trainer is delivered to the R.A.F. by the A.T.A.

We are probably one of the oddest band of people ever gathered together on a job. Men and women, old and young, from all over the world, and many nations. We must be able to fly and yet not be fit for operational flying. So we have several men who have lost an arm flying many types of planes. We have Polish, Chilian, Fijian, American and dozens of different types. One of our oldest Polish pilots is known as Captain "Double-Whiskey" throughout the A.T.A. and R.A.F.—his name sounds that way to us—so it is, even through the loudspeaker calling him on duty. As you climb up the ladder of experience in your ferrying duties you pass through all the thrills and difficulties of learning to fly a representative type of single, twin or 4-engine aircraft in the A.T.A. School of Flying. It is a training which would cost you astronomical figures in peace time, and would be unobtainable anyway. But when you fly your first Spitfire, Mosquito or Tempest, not to mention your first Walrus, you remember it for many a day.

Ferry Pilots go alone, except in aeroplanes which require a flight engineer, so there are many hours flying north, south, east or west over the country, doing your own navigation, when you get to know England, the face of England, in all its seasons. The thick smoke lying to the lee of industrial cities, the fruit blossoms in Kent in the spring, the first snow on the peaks of Wales and Cumberland in the winter and the first corn being cut when it turns golden in summer.

We have watched the aerodromes spread and multiply, and the strength of the R.A.F. grow month by month. To feed this growing might has been our work and our privilege.

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# SKI-ING IN 1945.

By Ethel Leverson.

For the last five and a half years, I have looked at my ski and wondered when, if ever, I should be on them again and as time went on I almost gave up hope.

When I came to Manchester over three years ago, I imagined that, as according to the map I should be quite near to the Peak District, I should be ski-ing regularly and therefore got my ski out and have had them ready in my office ever since, but there has been very little snow for the last few winters and the days when there has been, I've been too busy to get away, also transport became increasingly difficult as time went on.

Last Saturday I was rung up and asked to go ski-ing on Sunday as the snow was said to be good. I was very thrilled and spent Saturday evening getting ready, after nearly six years I hardly remembered what I needed and what to wear. I set my alarum clock for the ungodly hour of 6.30 a.m. and when it went off, I almost thought that a day's ski-ing wasn't worth it. However, I got up, dressed and had breakfast. Just as I was starting, I discovered I'd forgotten to put on my ski socks, so had to stuff them in my bun bag to put on later.

I waited at the 'bus stop feeling rather selfconscious, and the people in the queue looked at me very suspiciously, but I managed to get into the 'bus with my ski without hitting anyone over the head with them.

At the railway station, things were better as there were quite a lot of people with ski.

In the train there was quite a Swiss atmosphere, everyone was complaining that their boots were either too tight or too loose and I managed to get my socks on.

After a rather slow journey, we got out at a little Derbyshire village called Edale and it was hard to realise we were in England. The village is in the centre of a basin surrounded by hills, and the whole countryside was covered in snow. We went straight to the village pub, where people were leaving rucksacks and waxing ski. The skiers got some rather black looks from the hardy climbers who come out every Sunday to scale the local peaks, but on the whole everyone was full of the joy of life and war seemed a very distant thing.

After waxing ski, we set off for the local practice slopes, the village street (actually more of a lane than a street) had been cleared by a snow plough and it was nice to walk on hard crunchy snow, even carrying ski. We arrived at the lodge of the local big house and got permission to ski on the slopes, it was funny to have to do this when one is used to ski-ing anywhere without permission. Shortly after this we started to climb, I for one longed for a ski-lift.

Our climb was made more hazardous by having to get over one gate and two walls, we then came to the actual practice slope itself, a really excellent slope, steep and long enough to have held a really good slalom if there had been any poles or flags. Long before I got to the top, I realised what bad condition I was in and my ascent was very slow with frequent stops to get breath.

At the top at last and it was like heaven. Powder snow, blue sky, sun and a wonderful view! I put my ski on and wondered what would happen when I started down, it looked very steep and my legs felt like wet cotton wool, however, once I was off I didn't bother any more, the snow was absolutely perfect, "pulver schnee," and I found I could still turn where I wanted to. The bottom was reached only too soon, and the climb had to be faced again.

By this time there were several skiers on the slopes, but there was plenty of room and most of them were out of the rabbit class. By 1 o'clock I was worn out and quite ready to go back to the pub for sandwiches and beer. Some of the very hearty skiers stayed and ate their lunch by the slopes, but I felt like a rest.

I was on the boards again by 2 p.m. and went on till about 4 o'clock. The first slope had got fairly cut up by then, but there were plenty more where the snow was still virgin. It was freezing hard all the time so the sun didn't affect the snow, but was very pleasant and I got so hot that I shed one of my sweaters.

We left the slopes tired but happy and went back to the pub, ate a large tea and then to the station to get the train. It was very strange to see a little English wayside station packed with skiers and I think the people in the train thought us slightly mad.

When I got back to Manchester, the conductor on the 'bus said "I'll hold your ski," and asked me where I'd been and what the snow was like. He told me he was a keen skier and hoped to get some on his next day off.

Now I am hoping that the snow will last and that I'll be able to get out again next Sunday.

Perhaps if all goes well, it may not be so long now, until we all get back to the snows.

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# SKI-ING IN SCOTLAND.

By Bernie Duthie.

Last March Doreen and I went to Killin, we climbed with two companions to the shoulder of Coronach, where we found about 200 feet of spring snow. We were nearly dead with exhaustion but we found we could still ski.

On the climb up we came upon a "cast" sheep. That is a sheep which has rolled on to its back and is unable to regain its feet. This is a common misfortune among in-lamb ewes, or sheep with very heavy fleeces.

The foremost member of our party was considerably ahead of the other three, and I was amazed to see him walk straight past the sheep without making any attempt to turn it up. I could see the animal was still alive, as it waved its legs feebly as our companion passed, and I must have made some exclamation of surprise for his friend then proceeded to tell me the following tale.

To quote—"When they were on the hill two days before they had found another sheep in this condition. It was wounded in some way, as it had blood on it, or may be it was having a lamb and something went wrong. They had wished they had had a gun with them to put it out of its misery."

I later examined the corpse of this sheep. It lay well and truly on its back in a slight hollow, it showed no signs of lambing, the "wound" was the farmer's red paint brand. It was a big fat animal with a healthy-looking fleece, so I think it improbable that it had died from any disease.

When we reached our sheep, I could see it had been there some time, as its eyes were already glazed. I grabbed a good fistful of wool with both hands and heaved it over on to its feet. It had to be supported on one side for nearly ten minutes, but eventually was able to totter away and soon started eating.

I apologise for such a dull account of our ski expedition, but if the war situation eases we might have members of the L.S.C. ski-ing in Scotland this year. A "cast" sheep is a common occurrence in the Scottish hills in springtime, and I do not like to think there might be any member so unknowledgeable in farming matters as to leave one to die.

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# A LITTLE NOTHING ON THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE.

By Nancy Watson

*(Flight Officer, W.A.A.F.)*

Am I honoured or am I not, at being asked to write on the W.A.A.F. for the Bulletin? There seems nothing especially funny to write about, or more correctly I feel quite incompetent to write anything and am at a loss how to begin, continue or finish, so members, excuse please if, after reading this you are still none the wiser about the Women's Auxiliary Air Force!

Way back in '41 being fed up with the bombs that were falling on London and the paper work I was doing in a branch of the War Office and as I previously packed comforts for the Navy, I decided to join the Air Force. All the " Oh, my dear, you will never stick it " only made me the more determined to try.

The recruiting officer thought I should be a radio operator; the medical officer said my eyes were not up to standard but I might be a plotter; someone else labelled me a clerk/general duties; I did not know what any of them meant and climbed into a lorry with about twenty other females, assorted, and all were entrained for Gloucester. There we were marshalled into a bus and taken to the recruits depot and finally walked off, staggering under the weight of our suitcases and the very hot sun, to the sleeping huts. A corporal told us we were her charges during the training and of course she expected her squad to be the best!

Squads of twenty came in every day, and all over the Depot could be seen daily increasing in smartness. It was a big moment when the whole of one's squad was fully signed on and kitted and the motley of civilian dressed at last felt they were THE W.A.A.F. (It was a great pity if anyone was an odd shape because that spoilt the effect whilst the stores altered something to fit!)

Those early days were great fun; all were volunteers and keen and the majority enjoying the novelty of having no responsibility and doing what they were told. There was a heat wave and the Depot N.C.O.s treated us very gently, breaking-in the civilians slowly without killing them; as one said " I dislike women fainting on me intensely "!

After giving my life history in what seemed at least six different versions I was told I was an " Admin Type "—Greek to me but I have since discovered it means a " Universal Aunt." If you don't know the answer yourself you must know where to find it; and it isn't only the airwomen who come to the W.A.A.F. " G " (to give the trade its correct name) Officer on a Station.

My identity at the Depot was not hidden for long; we all had hut fatigues to do each morning and one day as I was happily cleaning



the " Ablutions " (Service name for the wash and brush up hut) I heard a friend's voice saying very sternly, " Do you see that girl? She's a general's daughter, and if a general's daughter can clean the ablutions a colonel's daughter can polish floors "!

The first station I was posted to was small. I reported to the W.A.A.F. Officer in charge after walking a mile from the railway station under a kit bag and with a suitcase, both of which seemed to weigh a couple of tons, 450129 A.C.W.2 Watson, N. C., and was greeted with " Good Lord, an Admin airwoman? What are we going to do with you? " Plonk Watson informed Mam that she could type and was promptly and enthusiastically received. Back to paper work but in the country.

It was several weeks before there were any Admin duties to do, these for an A.C.W.2 consist of lighting fires, making tea (that continues with any rank one may have!) carrying Government stamped toilette rolls and pulling plugs. The other airwomen were a very nice crowd and because I proved fairly good at lighting fires often found my scrubbing and polishing jobs being done for me.

Whatever one's rank and trade may be it is essential to have civilian contacts and interests outside camp and service life. This is recognised by the Services as a whole and progressive training is an important feature of the W.A.A.F. This so-called training fills the gap when work is slack, and in off duty time, and it is the W.A.A.F. " G " Officers' task to encourage airwomen to make full use of it. A hard task, because the very word training makes people think of just another kind of " duty," but progressive training covers a vast range, toy making, sewing, mending, homemaking, mothercraft, postal study courses, discussions, lectures, anything under the sun that airwomen may be interested in, including helping them to choose and prepare for a post-war career.

The " teachers " are often to be found amongst the personnel on the camp. I had once to give typing classes; luckily none of the class had progressed beyond five letter words, which I wrote on a blackboard. My spelling doesn't run to longer words.

As an officer I began life on an interesting station where work went on for 24 hours a day. The chief difficulties were fixing parades and inspections so that everyone attended, but none were taken from duty, or detailed when they should be sleeping—getting all those on the same watch sleeping in the same hut so that they should not be disturbed, and trying to make a midday lunch appetising at 04.00 hours. Such stations are not usual but the experiences of these first months certainly made me appreciate the difficulties of watch personnel, generally very much in the minority, on other stations; they generally have to put up with a flask of cocoa and sandwiches cut in the afternoon.

Games and P.T. are to be encouraged, in fact W.A.A.F. officers are told their airwomen are to take outdoor exercise and at one time we had very great difficulty to get any enthusiasm at all until we

challenged the male officers to netball, immediately games became popular. The men would be seen slinking behind the yew hedges for a little quiet shooting practice; the senior W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s challenged the R.A.F. and were beaten, and then some Americans arrived on the station and the W.A.A.F. officers' task was over. They had all the airwomen out playing base ball. On another station hockey and netball games were played regularly by some, but there were others who wouldn't or couldn't, and bicycling parties were allowed to go out in sports kit taking sandwiches. On Sunday afternoon one of the Flight Commanders took the cook house staff flying, and as the officer on duty to see there were no casualties when they landed, I was always hopeful someone would fall out at the last minute and there would be a place to spare, but alas was always unlucky!

One station I was in charge of was small and everyone was in billets. The owners had to be paid once a week and higher authorities delighted in posting bodies without due warning. The amount of tea I had to drink during a day doesn't bear thinking about, but I found it a great help in wheedling the Yorkshire woman to have someone billeted on her and in pacifying billetors who wanted to have someone removed!

This all seems very much past history but for the last year I have been a "stooge" in the W.A.A.F Directorate and out of touch with airwomen and at the moment I am not quite sure what my "staff" duties are all about.

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## OUR FRIENDS THE SWISS.

A formation of our Bombers on their way to Germany were about to cross over a corner of Switzerland. They received a signal from Ground Defences: "You are approaching Swiss Territory."

Bomber reply: "We know."

Ground Defence Signals: If you continue we shall have to open fire.

Bomber reply: "We know."

Ack-Ack guns go into action.

Bomber signal: "You are at least 10,000 feet below us.

Ack-Ack reply: "We know."



## Y.M.C.A.

By Amy Blane.

It was in the last war that women first came into the Association, under the leadership of Her Highness the Princess Helena Victoria. Our work is for the Forces. We have established hostels and canteens in most of the cities and towns throughout the country, and canteens and information bureaux in nearly all the big railway stations. Many camps and aerodromes have static canteens, while isolated units are served by the mobiles. As far as possible, we have the same facilities for the Forces serving overseas, in Northern Ireland, Iceland, Isle of Man, France, Belgium, Holland, Gibraltar, North and West Africa, Egypt, Italy and Greece.

I was in France during the first part of the war where our women were working in various towns and camps, as at home, but trying perhaps, to give even more of the "home touch." When the evacuation came we got all our women out of France. Then came Dunkirk! At that time I was helping on Dover Pier, the jumping-off place for so many of us in the old days, for our ski-ing holidays—a very different scene in those days. Men, battle-worn streaming off the boats—and what boats! poor battered things, their crews dropping with fatigue—the old Canterbury among them, another link with the old days! Those who could walked to the waiting trains. Of the wounded those who were not taken away in ambulances were laid on the platform until places could be found for them in the hospital train. We did what we could for them giving tea, food chocolate, cigarettes, and taking telegrams to send to their relatives, and we helped the doctors and nurses where possible. This went on hour after hour—one lost count of the time. During the occasional brief lull we snatched a few hours' rest, then back again to find the platform covered with fresh wounded. While we were working on the pier our mobiles were taking food and help to other places along the coast, where boats were also coming in.

For a time we ran buffet cars for the troops on the trains running to Scotland, and I can tell you that was tiring work—non-stop until we arrived in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

In the days of the blitz the mobiles helped the N.F.S., feeding the men at the big fires night and day. They went too, to the badly bombed districts, especially in the East End, feeding the rescued and the rescuers. When the railways were put out of action the mobiles went to the emergency stations to feed the troops there, and this work is still being carried on through the various V visitations. Incidentally, a knowledge of ski-ing has proved useful more than once in the North, when heavy snowfalls have prevented the mobile canteen reaching some outlying unit, and workers have put on ski and taken the supplies up that way.

Although in the space available I have only been able to touch on the main points of our job, I do hope that I have given you some idea of how "the old Y.M." works.

# WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE.

By Ethel Leverson.

I am not at all sure what you want me to write about and in any case, I'm a very poor hand at putting things on paper so all I can hope is that this effort may not be too boring.

I joined the London Auxiliary Fire Service shortly after getting back from Switzerland in the spring of 1939 and was attached to the London Fire Brigade Headquarters, at Lambeth. I used to go for training once a week, when I remembered, and I honestly never thought I should ever be needed to become a full time firewoman.

The women were divided into two categories, drivers and control room staff. I was a driver. On the 27th August, I was called up and took up my abode at Lambeth. Everything was very hectic and I drove people at all hours of the day and night making preparations for mobilisation and fire fighting in case the destruction of London by fire began. When war was declared and the first siren went, we all thought we should be blown to bits, but as you know nothing happened.

Early in September the woman officer in charge of the station was taken ill and I left off driving and took her place. We had a long winter of "standing by" and wondering if we should ever be of any use, this wasn't made any easier by the fact that the men were convinced that women would be little or no use in any emergency. Then came the fall of France and raids started in the South. The first of our women who came under bombing and machine gun fire were those who went with canteen vans and driving officers to Thames Haven and they had a pretty stiff time; however, they acquitted themselves well and the men began to think we might be of some use. Then the London blitz started and after that we came into our own. I personally was nearly always on duty in our local control which was very interesting if not always very pleasant. When other towns started to be raided, reinforcements were sent from London to help with the fire fighting and the women went with them with canteen vans and driving staff cars. They went to Coventry, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Southampton, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Bristol and other places often more than once. I was lucky enough to go to Southampton, where I had a very hot and busy forty-eight hours, I have never fed so many people in my life under such difficult conditions, there was practically no water, certainly none for washing, and when I got back to London I was almost unrecognisable.

In August, 1941, the existing 1,400 fire brigades in England and Wales were amalgamated into one National Fire Service and London's policy of having women in the service was adopted throughout the country. It was decided to use women on all possible jobs in order to leave the men free for fire fighting. This meant recruiting a large number of women for various jobs such as control staffs, clerical



work, shorthand typists, storekeepers, tailoresses, cooks, drivers, despatch riders, mechanics, etc.

For the purpose of organisation the country was split up as follows :—

The existing Civil Defence Regions were used and each of them were divided into Fire Areas under a Fire Force Commander and the women in charge of an Area Officer. The whole service being controlled from the Fire Service Department at the Home Office.

In October, 1941, I left London to come to No. 27 Area (Manchester) as Area Officer. I had a very interesting if somewhat difficult job, as before nationalisation, there had been very few women in the Fire Service in the North, there were the problems of recruitment, accommodation and training. The first two sorted themselves out gradually, although accommodation has always been a "bugbear" owing to the difficulty of getting suitable quarters in large towns and cities. Training was the most interesting and we had a very excellent Women's Training School where all the firewomen were trained for their various duties.

Early in 1942 a women's branch was opened at the National Fire Service College, Saltdean, nr. Brighton for training officers. Officers of all ranks went there, which they thoroughly enjoyed.

It has been very interesting to see the Service grow and the women have certainly justified their existence. Now that fire raids appear to be a thing of the past we cannot forecast our future and don't yet know if women will form part of the post-war Fire Service or not. I do feel that if we all go the men will lose us with regret.

Quite a lot of people imagine that when there are no raids we all sit waiting for fires with nothing to do, but in actual fact we are always kept pretty busy and certainly in this part of the country fires are not lacking.

The women in the North-West are keen on their work, and also on squad drill, fitness training and games, their drill is so good that it often puts the men (not only of the Fire Service) to shame.

We have been the "Cinderella" of the services and I for one shall not be ashamed in the piping days of peace of my wartime job.

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# WIVES AND MOTHERS IN WAR-TIME.

By Nancye Smith.

I started off this war with the idea that young mothers should abandon their children to the care of nurses and domestics and do war work. I was soon disillusioned by my nurse being turned into a W.A.A.F. overnight, and the departure in rapid succession of my maids who appeared to be somewhat allergic to wintering in leafy Bucks, for which I can't say I altogether blame them. My enthusiasm for war work reached its peak when the London blitz started, but was soon firmly squashed by an anxious husband who scuttled me off to the safety of Buckinghamshire far from blitz, barrage and bombs.

Somewhat grudgingly I resigned myself to the role of a good mother and left my husband a grass widower in London.

By dint of much advertising I managed to secure another Nanny—a real treasure who is with me still. The maids, in the meantime, were sniffing the good Bucks air rather sceptically and after a few weeks one couldn't take it any longer and departed. My cook followed suit a few months later, just after our second daughter was born. I then settled down in earnest to the task of learning the mysteries of cooking, sweeping, scrubbing and, the biggest mystery of all, the boiler!

A boiler is not the inanimate object for heating water that most people imagine—but rather, a delicate organism, with moods and mannerisms, far more temperamental than any artist. With gentle treatment its way can be mastered by exercising enough patience to try a saint.

The approach to cooking provided a major headache and many were the failures, overcooked, undercooked and burnt to a cinder. The kitchen table was invariably strewn with ingredients, with Mrs. Beeton propped up on a canister in the middle of the debris. Since then I have become more methodical and slightly, but not very much, tidier. To start with I spent my time running backwards and forwards to the nursery to ask Nanny what to do next. In a moment of overzealous economy I decided to bake the potatoes in the ash pan of the boiler instead of turning on the oven. They looked all right, once I brushed off a few cinders and clinkers, so I served them up with great pride, but when I cut them open—they were empty!—the potatoes had all evaporated.

After months of mental agony and hair tearing, I at last achieved my ambition, namely to be able to cook the lunch and do *The Times* crossword at the same time, the proudest moment of my life. I considered myself an accomplished cook, especially as I hadn't succeeded in poisoning either my husband or my children during the experiment.

The next thing I embarked on was animals, on which to feed the family.



Some kind friend gave me a pair of rabbits and within three months there were twenty-seven—most prolific animals. This was rather more than I'd bargained for—but nevertheless they were sweet when young and the children loved them. My spare time was spent in culling green stuff for their inexhaustible appetites, until my hands were stained and my nails chipped and broken, and if anyone mentioned rabbits I visibly blanched. In vain in the last two years have I tried to cut down the rabbits, but it seems impossible, they just won't stop breeding.

Their love of freedom is somewhat trying, too—as no amount of wire netting seems to keep them in, and if they can creep out and escape they will. Anything more elusive to catch than a young rabbit I haven't yet met. Their favourite hiding place is always the rose bed, which entails scarifying the arms and legs before the offender is brought back to its hutch.

One day the donor of my original rabbits suggested I might like to go with her to a rabbit show. As I hadn't gone in for any particular breed I picked out my nicest looking doe and entered her in the utility class, apologising to her the while, as not even a rabbit is awfully keen to be labelled "utility." The exhibits went on ahead by train, and we followed later. To my astonishment my old girl had won first prize amongst some twenty other utility girls. There she was serenely washing her paws looking as proud as Punch with the first prize ticket pinned on her pen. After this my blood was up and I showed all over the place and fairly raked in the prizes, festooning the mantelpiece with cards until my husband threatened trouble unless I gave it up.

I had no idea until I started all this what a vast concern the rabbit fancy is—ski-ing talk on the merits of waxes and bindings just cannot hold a candle to the rabbit jargon—which must be heard to be believed.

The man who lived next door, who was obviously a good salesman, persuaded me over the garden fence one Sunday afternoon to buy some of his surplus hens, who, he assured me, were "on point of lay"—a very elastic term in the poultry world that immediately puts up the price. By dint of encouragement one did lay an egg shortly afterwards—so I considered them a good buy. Since then the hen run has been greatly augmented and they are some of the few things I have not regretted buying. They're messy things and the cock crows much too early—but they do lay eggs.

Last summer ambition set in again and I decided to produce our own Christmas dinner by hatching out some turkey eggs under a broody hen. Several well wishers assured me they were most difficult to rear and mustn't get their feet wet. My enthusiasm was a bit damped as I remembered the autumnal rains they would have to survive, but despite all these difficulties they thrived—bar one poor unfortunate, on whose head I accidentally dropped the coop while it was still in its infancy. I found myself very popular around

Christmas and sold nearly all of them, at unreasonably little profit, I thought, due to price restriction. Four of them had been booked by people in London so up I went by train with the four turkeys (defunct) dovetailed in a suitcase. As I had a lunch date at the Berkeley the precious suitcase was left with the porter. I've often wondered what he would have thought had he known its contents.

The easiest form of cooking for children being milk puddings, and the milk ration being somewhat inadequate for splashing it around, I decided to buy a goat. This was a great error from the start and was the last straw that broke the overworked housewife's back. The said goat arrived at the station and my three-year-old daughter and I went down to fetch her. Her previous owner assured me she was most quiet with children and answered to the name of Jenny. I couldn't face walking her along the narrow High Street so we decided to come up the fields—of course, I'd clean forgotten the kissing gates—and no amount of coaxing would persuade Jenny to emulate a snake to get through them. There was nothing for it but to lift each one off its hinges in turn while Penelope led her through. It was the hottest day of the year and we all three arrived home exhausted.

The milking was fraught with anxiety, I had previously practised once, without much success, on my gardener's old goat. However, Jenny was very patient, and after a bit we got along quite nicely together. She produced two fine kids which were the delight of the children, but not of the gardener, who gave notice regularly once a fortnight, until I sold them. They ate everything—pruned the black currant bushes, which have never been the same since, barked the apple trees, ate my sweet corn and played leapfrog over the rabbit hutches till the latter could stand the strain no longer and collapsed—and out popped all the rabbits.

I felt sad at finally selling Jenny—we had all got so fond of her and she had become a complete family pet.

I haven't embarked on bees, yet—if I wasn't so cowardly about being stung I'd buy some to-morrow. I'm still toying with the idea of exchanging the rabbits for them next summer—but we'll see, perhaps the war will be over.

I've had a great many laughs over this mother-cum-cook-cum-landgirl role I have been trying to play for the last few years, and a great many sighs too. If only it wasn't so unending and one didn't get so tired it would be great fun. But still it's a great thing to have one's family around one, and I know I should be a dismal failure making split pins or the like in a factory.

I will confess, though, that I've always had a sneaking longing to be a Wren officer—I should be a riot in that hat.



# FROM MOUNTAINS TO MIDWIFERY.

By Biddie Armitage.

For the first six months of the war I worked as a V.A.D. in the South-West. My recollections of it are now curiously vague and only a few irrelevant details stand out: scrubbing lockers on a flat roof in about two inches of beautiful powder snow; the new and ever horrible sight of my own legs modestly clad in black wool; boiling a duck's egg on the gas ring in my billet and trying to eat it with a silver fruit knife. One awful day I absently added a spoonful of enema soap instead of greengage jam to every plateful of the men's rice pudding! After that I knew that I should go far—the farther the better, so I sped to the industrial North and in a voluntary hospital in a very poor district I started to train to be a nurse in earnest.

The next three years are really not very easy to describe: hard work, long hours and little time to oneself but in compensation an amazing sequence of new experiences, new things to learn and contacts with every kind of person. One alternated between wild fits of rebellion against the limitations and restrictions of our life and the feeling that really it was all so extraordinarily interesting that one could never learn enough about it. Most of the funnier things that happened are either very rude or rather technical and therefore apt to revolt or bore those not in the trade.

It is a curious thing about night duty that a night is either hectically busy or far too quiet, there never seems to be a happy medium, the former are really quite fun but the slack ones are an endurance test. The blacked-out wards are so airless and when sitting alone at the desk under the pilot light with long rows of snoring patients on either side time and the night seem endless and menacing and one longs for five o'clock to be able to turn the lights on and start clashing bedpans and running taps. Down in the casualty department time never drags, between works and colliery accidents, drunks and brawls, burns and babies there is seldom a dull moment. I never cease to be amazed at the things people think of doing in the night, apparently anything from throwing the meat chopper at your husband to swallowing your false teeth. Then as dawn breaks and one is just thinking how pleasant it would be to have a " nice sit down " behind the steriliser for a few minutes the bell clangs and in troops an early morning bus smash. " Twenty-two passengers were taken to hospital, only three were detained the rest being sent home after receiving treatment." Oh, my blankety blank feet!

New Year's Eve annually very nearly makes me sign the pledge. Having filled every couch and bench with celebrators we prop the residue round the walls in rows and then " all hands to the stomach pumps." Strangely enough they resent this and the party usually develops into a free for all.

I was casualty night nurse during our blitz period and saw

more courage and selflessness than I believed could exist, all coming from a group of people who live in houses not fit for habitation and who, before the war, through unemployment were compelled to live at a standard well below the simplest civilised requirements.

After three years I passed my final examination and became a State registered nurse and with nonsensical bows under my chin and a bronze replica of the "Scutari lamp" pinned on my starched bosom I found myself a fully fledged staff nurse.

Last January I moved to another hospital and started to learn how to be a midwife. It is an extremely concentrated training and after a few months of it the world appears to be entirely filled with mothers and babies!! One is kept pretty busy one way and another. Working in nurseries with twenty-five brand new "squallers" for eleven hours a day (the little angels!). Feeding tiny "prems" who look incredibly old and wise with drops of this and that every hour through the night. Rushing off to lectures and demonstrations and galloping back to the squallers or work in the labour wards. I shall never forget my first delivery as long as I live, it was twins, the girl beating her brother with twenty minutes to spare! When it was over I must admit that I was far nearer collapse than their mamma.

Later on I was allowed out on "the district" and I plodded along the pavements with a black bag and an anxious expression. My chief fear was that everyone would penetrate my disguise and find out that it wasn't a real nurse or midwife but only "me."

If one has a good stomach for endless cups of thick, sweet tea and doesn't mind being bitten alive by bugs and other livestock, district work is really the most enormous fun. Everyone is so kind, total strangers carry your bag and walk miles to direct you and normally hard hearted bus conductoresses pluck you out from the back of the queue and then ask if you've been to Back Canal Street, "Poor soul there expectin' 'er eleventh." The calls invariably seem to come at night and one sets off with the messenger, usually the husband who is either middle aged and imperturbable or young and incoherent; on arrival one learns to expect almost any situation. Only too rarely is everything prepared, clean and ready, more often the first job is to get rid of seven of the eight neighbours who have dropped in to lend a hand and chase out the swarm of ex-babies. Then a drawer or basket may have to be converted into a cot and a dozen odd jobs done. Then one sits and waits and if you are me start thinking gloomily of all the possible complications—and yearn for a cigarette. When the baby eventually arrives and is bathed and tucked up snugly the whole house seems filled with a sense of achievement and everyone is tired and happy, all the neighbours flock back to enquire, mostly armed with a "nip" to drink to the baby—at last one can get away and make a dash for the all night bus or start hiking back through the quiet streets hoping for a few hours' sleep before breakfast. So it goes on and if anyone dares to tell me that the birth rate is going down I'll tell them to go to—the nearest maternity hospital and see for themselves!



## W.V.S.

By Patricia Manifold Raeburn.

"Oh, Miss Raeburn, can we have 500 more blankets by to-morrow; Miss Raeburn, the Billeting Officer wants us to find billets for 50 Repair Men by to-night; Miss Raeburn we've just had another 'incident' and the Clothing Depot has been hit; Please arrange for the Ruritanian Ambassador's wife to see her country's gifts being distributed; There is a 12-ton furniture van sitting outside the Centre, we have no more room so what shall we do with it; Please arrange for a small boy wearing a brown suit to be met by the engine at Waterloo and seen safely to Paddington in ten minutes." That is life in the W.V.S. One has to do anything and everything, and always at a moment's notice.

In five and a half years it has taken me to Scotland to billet evacuees from Clydeside, into the City of London on the night of the Great Fire, to Poplar and the Docks during the Blitz, and finally to an office in Lambeth during the Flying Bomb attacks of last summer.

I joined W.V.S. because I was sick and tired of going on my knees to somebody who had a friend who knew somebody else who might be needing help. How odd it seems, looking back, that one was grateful for a job which took up four hours a week. Now one would be even more grateful, but for quite another reason! W.V.S. offered me the chance of "doing" something for the war and I snatched it. Years that have followed have been frightening, boring and exhausting, but I would not have missed a minute of them.

The B.B.C ringing me up at Poplar and asking if I could produce a singing Chinaman for a programme on China. The footman at the Mansion House filling my urn of tea the morning after the City Fire. The East End mother who washed her children's hair in Persil after I had told her they were not clean enough to be evacuated. Then the jobs that have made up for all the boredom and the grumbling. Being able to tell anxious parents that their children are not dead but safe and sound in the local Rest Centre, evacuating little children to safety in the country, helping shocked people to start life again when they have lost everything. Lying flat on my face on a London Common as a Doodle careered overhead, and one of my Post Leaders calmly naming the people she could call upon if it crashed in her area. And always the unspectacular courage and fidelity of "our housewives."

Sometimes when all three telephones are ringing in my office, when a valuable member is threatening to resign, when Lady Reading wants to know within five minutes how many cases of chocolate the "Women's Guild of Medicine Hat" have given us, I am reminded of the atmosphere in Room 4 at a K Committee Meeting, and I bless the training I had there. Any ability I have for ignoring interruptions springs from the days of the Junior K meetings, and any ability I have for persevering in the teeth of opposition springs from refusing to elect one of Arni's pet candidates without a test. Switzerland taught me more than ski-ing, and W.V.S. has taught me many a lesson which will prove useful when we meet, with blackballs in our hands, in Room 4, The Palace, Mürren, once again.

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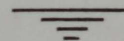

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