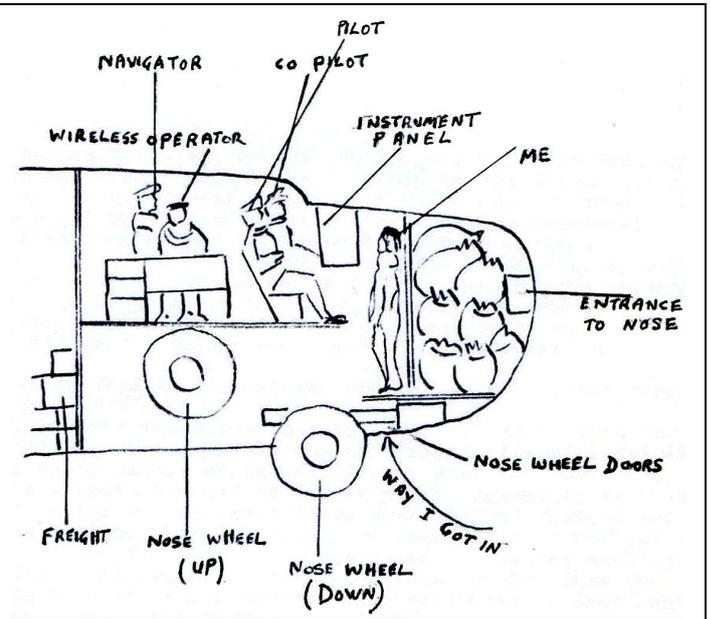


“STOWAWAY”

BY

BETTY DREWRY

(Served in ATA from 02/06/1942 to 17/01/1945)



FOREWORD BY CHRISTOPHER DREWRY (Betty's half-brother)

In November 1943 a 24 year old English girl hit the headlines of the national and international press. In the years immediately preceding the Second World War she had received a comfortable and privileged upbringing and had started a career as a ballet dancer but from the outbreak of war she had been desperately trying to learn to fly so that she could contribute to the war effort by becoming a female pilot ferrying military aircraft for the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Every conceivable form of prevarication, bureaucracy and discrimination had been applied to frustrate her attempts to secure a flying course in Britain but she was determined not to be beaten. She had become an aviation mechanic servicing Liberator bombers while she waited in vain for the promised flying training which never materialised. Finally her frustration boiled over and, hearing that the prospects for being trained to fly were better on the other side of the Atlantic, she stowed away one night in the nose-wheel of a bomber leaving Scotland and climbed out into a hangar at Montreal, Canada 19 hours later. The first anyone knew about it at home was when the press descended onto her parents' doorstep.

Having managed to avoid deportation by the skin of her teeth, she succeeded in working her way across Canada and, after appealing to no less a person than President Roosevelt's wife, into America where she eventually acquired a civil pilot's licence. By that time it was 1944 and neither the Americans, the British, the Free French or even the Chinese were so desperate for pilots that they were prepared to take on women to do the job. But the Russians might be interested, she heard. All attempts to go to Russia legally were blocked. So she stowed away again, this time on a Russian ship heading from Vancouver to Vladivostok, remaining concealed for 5 days under a lifeboat on the deck.

I knew this story because the girl in question, Elizabeth (Betty) Drewry, was my half-sister. She was born in March 1919 as the first of two children from my father's first marriage and from an early age I had read and re-read the various paper cuttings and correspondence which my father had kept but I understood little about what had motivated her to undertake such an extraordinary adventure. Both she and my father died in 1954 at which point I was only 7 years old. So there was no opportunity to delve deeper into the story at first hand. The story re-emerged briefly in 1976 as a chapter in a book on aviation exploits (Survival in the Sky by Ralph Barker) but this revealed nothing more than could have been gleaned from the original paper cuttings. And there the story would have remained if I had not been cleaning out old papers from a cupboard at home in 1997 - 54 years after the event - when I discovered a manuscript of 14 chapters, some of it in faded type held together by rusty paper clips, some of it in barely legible pencilled handwriting which I immediately recognised as Betty's. Here, from the dim distant past of half a century ago, was her own unpublished account, her autobiography.

From her own narrative the motivation for her exploits stands out loud and clear. It was first and foremost a simple but deep passion for flying - something which is less explicable at this distance in time when flying is now a common experience to most people, if only as passengers rather than pilots. But in the days when flying held the same attractions as driving must have done for those lucky enough to use the first motor cars, the appeal is easily understandable.

Her second and perhaps equally strong motive was to prove that, in times of national crisis, women were just as capable as men of doing those jobs for which they had the same technical and physical competence. The ardour of what would now be called feminism shines through her pages as well as the rage at being condemned to menial tasks at lower rates of pay and conditions than her male counterparts. This would have been an unfashionable view at the time but one which grew in the consciousness of women, many of whom were called upon to assume roles traditionally assigned to the male in the exigencies of wartime and it was a view which led to the wider emancipation of women after the war in terms of employment, status and equality of rights. She was thus pioneering a role which few would now find surprising. By today's standards there are many passages of justifiable outrage but there is none of the aggressive feminism which could make her judgement unattractive. Indeed she had a touching and wry, self-deprecating sense of humour which somehow leavens what was no doubt deep-felt criticism.

She was clearly driven too by a determination to deliver the most she believed she could achieve for the benefit of her countrymen and women and their allies in a world war which directly and personally threatened the freedom of them all in a way of which subsequent generations can have no comprehension. She did not need to bother with any of this. She could have had a comfortable war entertaining the troops in her professional capacity as a ballet dancer but she opted to do something radically different.

Such circumstances explain only too well her frustration with the pettiness of a bureaucracy which failed to exploit these simple virtues, which put barriers in the way of national and self fulfilment and which hampered international co-operation between allies even to the point of preventing their citizens from crossing mutual borders.

She was undoubtedly an adventurer and much of her account resembles that of an early 20th century traveller exploring previously unopened parts of the globe, explaining them to a sedentary but curious audience at home. To a modern audience, whose porthole on the world has been extensively opened by the power of television and regular travel, this may seem humdrum and perhaps patronising. But the innocent perspective of a traveller in the 1940s is a revelation in its own right, calling into question our modern blasé and stereotyped outlook on the global village. Her account is pitched unashamedly at the American and Canadian literary market, pandering to the modernity of the trans-Atlantic attitude at the expense of the Old World and expressing comparisons wherever possible in dollars. There is obvious sincerity in

her love affair with the New World but it displays a budding commercial awareness at the same time!

There was, I suspect, one further motive on which her narrative is completely silent. She had a younger brother, Frank, whom she mentions only in passing as the harbinger of the facts of life in her days as a schoolgirl in a sheltered education at Margate. During the war Frank joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and became a navigator flying numerous hairy missions in a Beaufighter fighter-bomber over the Atlantic and occupied France in 1940-1941 before being posted with his squadron to North Africa in 1942. On the 1st September 1942 and at the still tender age of 21 his aircraft was declared missing in action whilst strafing behind enemy lines on the third day of the battle of Alam Halfa in the North African desert. She would no doubt have poured over the letter of condolence from the squadron commander to our father, the terse notification from the Air Ministry, the simple but sincere and routine message of gratitude for the supreme sacrifice from the King and the correspondence with the father of his fellow crew member who had some evidence that the Beaufighter had come down less than catastrophically, thereby allowing for the possibility that they had survived and been taken prisoner. She would have waited with our father for further news in vain and, a year later in 1943, her resolve may have been even further stiffened by this personal tragedy which had deprived her of her brother. The absence of any mention of this incident in her narrative speaks louder than anything she might have said about it.

What is unique about her manuscript is that it remains a faithful commentary on her times, a vignette taken straight out of the time-warp of the 1940s without any of the distortion of hindsight. I had no hesitation in avoiding the temptation of putting it into modern idiom, 'correcting' her idiosyncratic 1940s terminology, concealing the patent naiveté of a girl in her early 20s or modifying the strength of her youthful convictions. What you see hereafter is her version of events, warts and all. Had she sought to publish it at the time, it would have met with much resistance; would have been seen as irresponsible and even scandalous. After the passage of time we can view it in a different light - at once honest and moving; inspiring pathos, admiration and disbelief. The strength of her narrative lies in the extent to which her pleas from the 1940s remain unfulfilled and in the thought that, for quite different and insidious reasons, her exploits could not be repeated in the modern age. It has put flesh on the shallow persona portrayed in the press cuttings. It has enabled me to understand her. And what a character she was!

Chapter 1

On November 19th 1943 I slipped through the nose-wheel doors of a B 24 just before take-off and, unknown to the crew, stole a ride across the Atlantic. Nineteen hours later I arrived in the New World tired and dirty, without a change of clothes, a toothbrush or a lipstick. This was the beginning of what turned out to be quite an adventure.

Though to a certain extent all this happened on the spur of the moment, perhaps I had better explain all the circumstances that led up to the journey. So let's go back to the very beginning of the War when very gradually life began to diverge from the normal.

September 3rd 1939 found the Meirion Welsh Ballet busy rehearsing at their headquarters at Bala, Merioneth on the shores of Bala Lake. This is the largest natural lake in Wales, though really quite small, being 4.75 miles long and one mile across at its widest, but much more has happened to it than most lakes. Once upon a time there was no lake there at all. In the bottom of the valley stood a castle wherein lived a wicked prince who oppressed the country people and threw wild parties. At one of these orgies the music was provided by a bard with a harp and during the evening a bird came to the old man and told him that, as he was in none too healthy a spot, he had better scam. So the bard scrambled up the hillside as quickly as he could, falling exhausted at the top. When he looked round, there was a lake with his harp floating on it. There is a Welsh saying that "Bala was and Bala is, but Llanfor (the next village) will be by the lake." This means that if the present inhabitants don't behave themselves, the same thing will happen to them. However, aided by the Ballet Society, the Methodist College, the oat-cake bakery, five pubs and the fortnightly country market, we all led a happy life and the waters showed no signs of rising.

Legends such as this set to Welsh music - sometimes traditional, sometimes original - were used as themes for ballets with plenty of native atmosphere and humour. Steps from the old folk-dances are almost impossible to trace because dancing was suppressed as 'sinful' during the religious revival of a hundred years ago. Some of the chapel elders still think it is sinful. In fact a completely classical number in long white dresses was recently banned at a vestry concert, though the whole party later played Postman's Knock! Welsh humour is lots of fun and not at all the sort of thing they broadcast on St David's Day.

Most members of the Ballet were semi-professionals. The boys had ordinary jobs during the day. If we ever made a profit, which was doubtful, we divided it amongst those of the girls who would otherwise have been gainfully employed. Welsh people are naturally artistic and they are better at music and expression than a similar English group.

I joined the Company in August 1938. The Munich Crisis financially ruined the show we were then staging at the sea-side town of Barmouth. I suppose I ought to tell you how the whole

country waited breathlessly for Mr Chamberlain to return but, to be honest, at the age of 19, these things didn't seem to matter very much. International affairs were just something which happened in the papers and it seemed unbelievable that they should ever affect one's own little world of career, clothes and boy-friends. Doubtless older members of the cast were concealing their worries but my chief memory of the Munich weekend is a purely humorous one. Taking the part of a Spanish courtier in one scene and of a musician in the other, my first costume was to be shared with another dancer. Coming off the stage, someone forcibly pulled me out of my costume and left me to run down strange long corridors and past strange people - a horrible apparition with a sinister black beard and whiskers, topping a pink lace bra and girdle.

Please don't think this is a typical background for an allegedly educated young Englishwoman. Nothing could be less so. A conventional English upbringing is so different from that of an American girl. Perhaps I had better explain it. Daddy was one of the agents for a big landowner. He rented and sold land and farms, and ran around listening to tenants' grievances. The job had been in the family for several generations. We lived in the country in Derbyshire and were comfortably well off without being especially rich.

English children know their parents far less intimately than American kids and, when we were small, my brother and I always had a nanny and a nursemaid. Practically all English people who can afford it send their children to boarding school from the age of 8 onwards, partly to keep them out of the way during an unattractive stage of development, but principally because there is no equivalent of the democratic American High School. Though free education in the big cities and in Scotland is better than in rural England, it was only compulsory up to 14 before the Education Bill which came into force at the end of the War. Country children really only learnt reading, writing, arithmetic and a little history and geography. Our parents would never have dreamt of sending us to the local 'board' (free) school for fear we should get nits in the hair and pick up the local accent. It is very silly of middle-class English people to pay taxes for the upkeep of free schools, and sometimes even to be on the Board of Directors, yet not make the system good enough for their own children.

The basis of all snobbishness in England is accent and education. For boys the line is most rigid. At different times in history well-meaning people have endowed educational establishments for the sons of deserving but poor parents, often connected with some especial profession or trade such as the Army or the East India Company. In the course of time these schools have come to be patronised by comparatively wealthy people just for their social value. Though still called 'public' schools, they are really very exclusive, granting few scholarships. Someone once described the public school system as being an exclusive form of labour exchange - you expect a public school man to do a certain sort of job. In fact often enough when you fill in a questionnaire when applying for a job, instead of saying 'what standard of education did you reach?' (referring to any generally recognised system of grades) it will just say 'where were you educated?' The emphasis is on unwritten tradition. In a certain

form a boy may do up one button of his jacket; in another, two. These aren't passing crazes like bobby-socks and sweaters, but accepted practices passed on from generation to generation and which must not be questioned. When my brother failed the entrance exam for one of the brainier public schools, the family were fearfully concerned until they could find a school with a 'name' that was willing to accept a lower standard. Otherwise they would have considered him handicapped for life. Through their Officer Training Corps it used to be easier for public school men to get commissions in the Services but since the War all new officers have had to spend some time in the ranks; and boys from Secondary or Grammar Schools (scholarship or subsidised) have done so well that some people think this caste system has been broken.

If we girls suffered less from tradition, we suffered more from seclusion. Apart from Board Schools for poor people, co-education is practically unknown. Those who admit it would be a good thing for girls usually believe it would turn boys into cissies - a belief that has probably been shaken by the US Forces. Though for a time I did go to a small co-ed boarding school, this was very unusual and only happened because this little 'home from home' catered for delicate children. The boys only came for a term or two after some serious operation, to continue their studies while taking time out from the serious business of being turned into little gentlemen. They were usually more fun to play with than the girls but generally the boys had hobbies and were more interested in making things like ships and planes. They seemed to know more about the outside world.

My next school was a typical Girls Boarding School, like hundreds of others in England. For three months on end and three terms a year we were herded around in droves and never allowed any privacy. The whole idea of Boarding School seems to be to protect you from the temptations of the outside world, most of which we would never have thought of anyway if they had not been suggested to us. The one daily paper allowed to the upper forms was censored and anything considered unsuitable was cut out. If we were interested, we bribed the day girls to bring in an uncensored copy. We never went to movies except on the two or three occasions a term when our parents took us out, and then only if there was no illness in the town. Movie magazines were banned as 'vulgar' and were highly valued as contraband. We had pictures of film stars pasted surreptitiously on the inside of our desks.

We had to wear heavy stockings all summer, even for games, and never went out except in 'crocodile'. A crocodile is a long column of girls walking two and two behind each other, with a mistress at the back to see that they don't get into mischief. If the girl behind doesn't like you, she treads on your heels, and if you don't like the girl ahead you tread on hers. The crocodile was never allowed to go through the main street of town where it would have been possible to get a sideways glance at the shops, as this was considered 'distracting'.

During term-time we did not speak to a male other than the music master and he, though charming, was married and completely cross-eyed. Nevertheless many girls professed to have a

grand passion for him. This was less tedious than having to listen to their crushes on each other and the mistresses. When we played tennis on the courts of the local club we were not allowed to look for balls in the shrubbery, in case we spoke to the boys. At sixteen and a half I was the only girl in the dormitory who knew the 'facts of life', having been told by my small brother who had been learning dirty stories at his 'Prep' (i.e. pre-public) School. He thought he was a 'helluva man of the world'. The other girls constantly bothered me to enlighten them but I could do nothing as I had forgotten the point of the story and didn't know how to explain. In fact I was far too shy to try.

At half term we got a brief respite from routine and were allowed to go home for a long weekend. As home was 300 miles away, my ever-roving Mama (bless her) took me over to Paris by air. It was wonderful - my first proper flight! We saw all the usual sights and monuments; drank wine in the cafes on the side-walks; went on an organised (Cook's) tour of the night life and spent an evening at the Folies Bergeres which didn't seem especially exciting to a schoolgirl. The triumphal return to school was somewhat dampened by having to tell the whole story to the French class in French. Mademoiselle (a sophisticated soul) threw up her hands in horror, then borrowed my Folies Bergeres programme to have a good look at the picture of Casanova cavorting around an enormous double bed with 24 voluptuous nudes who couldn't dance for nuts.

If hygiene was a subject completely neglected in the school curriculum, so too were Current Events, neither being compulsory for School Certificate. Latin is still pretty generally taught, especially to boys. They couldn't teach me - I wasn't interested! Science was laughably inadequate for this scientific age. History and Geography was so divided into periods and regions for exam purposes that it was quite possible to get School Certificate (equivalent to High School Graduation) or Matric (university entrance) with enormous gaps in one's elementary knowledge. Our information on world events from an exclusively British angle stopped at the end of the Boer War, after which it was said to be 'too complicated'. The Last War and its causes were never discussed. Neither was it suggested that the same thing would happen again. Of citizenship and how the country was run we knew nothing. General Knowledge, designed to make cultured women of us, did fine for Greek architecture, Renaissance painting and a bit of low-down on Roman emperors but did not mention anything more up to date than Garibaldi's march on Rome. The chief feature of our weekly dancing classes was court curtsies.

Now this isn't the best in English education and it isn't the worst. There are public schools for girls modelled on those for boys but they are comparatively new, having been founded within the last 50 years or so. These are usually divided into 'houses' with prefects etc but they still do not enjoy anything like the amount of self-government practised through student committees in American schools. As for Parent Teacher Associations, these never seem to function above kindergarten level. Most parents take one look at a boarding school, dump their

kids and leave them. Public school girls do not have the same personal freedom as boys and they still have no contact with the opposite sex. We stay in the inky-fingered unattractive stage as there is nothing to attract. In fact being caught using make-up (even powder) is usually a serious offence and furthermore, if you get into hot water, it is too far to run home about it. Private education affects people in a far lower income group in Britain than in the States and, though a few of the more expensive schools may be run on better lines, there are plenty of the same or worse - the many St Mary's, St Monica's and St Hilda's, whose crocodiles may be seen winding forlornly along the seafronts at most seaside towns. Though there is normally some high-flown talk about 'character-building', which is presumably a benefit board school children don't get or need, private education is fundamentally a means of livelihood for the school principals. To avoid the risk of disturbing the parents, they carefully avoid all controversial subjects - in fact all the problems you are likely to come across in later life. American co-eds with their attractive clothes, their unchaperoned visits to the drugstores and their teenage dances don't realise how lucky they are to avoid such horrors as compulsory cricket, uniforms with black stockings hanging in wrinkles, shapeless tunics and panama hats, and how fortunate they are to be educated in the real world. It is generally held that America is a woman's country because once upon a time there was a shortage of women. Couldn't it be because American women grow up with their men and understand them quicker than we do?

I was lucky (and determined) to get out of this education racket when I was 16 and a half but with most girls it goes on to 18. Many 'finish' abroad and, carefully chaperoned, see some of the pictures and architecture they have been learning about; or else they go to a school of domestic economy, a subject which, owing to the cheapness of servants, is seldom learnt or practised at home. Probably the reason why relatively few British girls go to universities is that after 8 to 10 years of boarding school the whole subject of education seems to be so associated with undignified interference with one's personal life and liberty that they just want to have a good time. The two most famous universities (Oxford and Cambridge) are still a bit diffident about women students. Cambridge will not give a woman a degree, just a certificate stating that she has reached an equivalent standard. London is better. Though the standard may be very high, there is nowhere one can do practical subjects like Aviation. Whereas in Canada and America you can go to university and enjoy a cheerful social life, train for a career and finish up better informed all round than you would have been otherwise. In England the term 'blue stocking' is not quite dead which explains why a lot of otherwise very nice women never seem to be able to talk about anything but their children and the servant problem.

Such was the background with which hundreds of 'middle class' girls entered World War II and at the age of twenty found themselves drafted into the Services or went to war plants anywhere in the country. And they did very well, didn't they?

The best thing about a conventional education is that it gives one an enormous appetite for life in general and finding out what the world is all about. Unfortunately leaving school wasn't as

exciting as expected for me. I was going to be 'presented' in Jubilee Year but Ma and Pa had a row about who was going to pay for my dress (\$150 minimum) and as Mum and I were feeling like socialists, we called it off. There isn't much advantage in being presented unless you live in London and are in real society when it might possibly lead to some invitations you would not otherwise have received. It also comes in handy as a reference if you want a job in one of the swanky hotels in the South of France. Still it might have been fun to have had a posh dress and seen the inside of Buckingham Palace.

We lived in a horsey part of the world. Nobody thought about anything except hunting twice a week during the season, point-to-point (race) meetings in the spring, horse shows in the late summer, and between times they turned themselves and their horses out to grass. Hunting in England does not mean wearing a red hat and stalking around the mountains taking pot shots at deer and one's neighbours. It is the extremely serious business of galloping across the countryside on horses after hounds. It is Very Important to wear the correct clothes and use the correct phraseology. It is wrapped up in tradition and involves 'educating the young to the idea'. For this purpose we were taught to hold the reins almost before we were out of our cribs and enrolled in the Pony Club as soon as possible. We had an annual camp run on somewhat military lines at which we struggled through cavalry drill, attended numerous lectures on the 'points of a horse' and its ailments, groomed our ponies several times a day and fed them to the whistle in true cavalry tradition. Camp was fun and it was kind of our elders to organise it for us, though as a sign of how seriously the business of horsiness was taken, one small boy was even forbidden to play with toy motors in case he grew up to be mechanically minded. Probably the children who were riding because it was their hobby got far more out of it than those whose parents regarded it as a 'must'. Even so, there were youngsters from Sheffield and Manchester who had been known to do terrible things like forget their hard hats and call hounds 'dogs'.

The nicest things about hunting, to a mere mutt who didn't go hard, were things like the feeling of one-ness you get with your horse when you have been riding all day, and how good it is to feel full of fresh air, often with your boots and the brim of your hat full of water, soaked to the skin but still warm. Sometimes the country looked nice in a wintry fashion. North Derbyshire is austere upland country cut by rocky dales and the rounded hills are criss-crossed with numerous limestone walls which we jumped (maybe!). The walls are grey; the sky is grey and the distance is grey. Even in the summer there is no real colour and after a while it makes you too feel somehow grey inside. How pleasant it used to be to come home to be pulled out of one's boots and relax in a hot mustard bath, with radio playing and a meal balanced on a tray. Or better still, if the meet was near home, an after-hunting tea-party. These used to start about three in the after-noon and continue indefinitely as more riders gave up and came in tired and hungry to feed on boiled eggs and hot potato-cakes; the men having whisky in their tea - tea fetched from Mummy presiding behind the big silver tea-urn. Often we would entertain 20 or 30 people in an after-noon in this informal manner.

Personally I am a shockingly bad rider. One slight difference of opinion with the horse and off I come. Furthermore when the creature has all four feet on the ground at the same time and evil intentions, I am so scared that I wish I had fallen off already, just so I wouldn't be so scared any longer. Give me something where your parachute has time to open. To counteract this embarrassing tendency to part company with my mount I used to hunt side-saddle, wearing an apron skirt, a bowler hat, a veil and a side-saddle face.

Being scared was bad enough, but being bored was worse. Real horsiness seems to be a mixture between a religion, a disease and an escape from all intelligent thought - an escape from the realisation that in this same country where they galloped about so fervently were thousands of people who couldn't afford to ride; hungry, unemployed people; that this couldn't go on forever - that somewhere on the continent, in the world of foreigners, trouble was brewing that would affect all our lives. Will the horsey people be the same after the War? We were only Harriers (i.e. hunted hares, the men wearing dark green coats with red collars) and quite human; but followers of the neighbouring fox-hounds (pink coats as on Christmas cards, the women in both cases wearing black) were so horsey that they even looked like horses and one sometimes wondered if they took their spurs off in the bath. It used to worry me when at Hunt Balls towards 6 am partners still talked of equine friends. Was I less attractive than a horse? - It's incurable. Through the encouragement of Mummy I got interested in the theatre, though at first from an entirely audience point of view. I fell in with the Welsh Ballet and from then on never bothered with hunting again - which brings us back to Bala, which is about where this chapter started, and so far about the best place on Earth.

Chapter 2

The outbreak of war caught the Welsh Ballet at a bad time - busy rehearsing for our biggest venture to date - a whole week show at Cardiff including several changes of programme. Some of the original music was to be broadcast and we were to be officially received by the Mayor and Corporation as the 'Welsh contribution to the Terpsichorean Art'. For the big occasion we were doing a full-length symphonic ballet 'The Harp of Cargai', the story of which is reminiscent of the sort of thing which sometimes happens nowadays!

Some six or seven hundred years ago - maybe eight hundred - having nothing better to do, the local Lord of Cargai and his followers decided to make war on the English. This is an old Welsh custom and vice versa. To this day the best shops in the old town of Chester are situated in rows above street level which could be barricaded in the event of a raid, though nowadays differences are settled at Soccer and Rugger Internationals with a lot of beer and singing. Having been blessed by the local Abbess and nuns, the warriors do a terrific war dance and set out, but not before the Lord of Cargai has said good-bye to his lady by playing her a certain tune on the harp which only he can play. A year goes by with no news and the Cargai ladies are very bored (they would be!). To pass the time they are listening to the stories of the bawdy old nurse, when into the laughing party bursts a messenger who tells them that Wales is defeated and the Lord of Cargai is dead. Another year goes by and Lady Cargai is to be married again to a guy named Garw Llwyd of Rhiwaedog, but at the height of the celebrations a tattered beggar enters and tries to attract the attention of the company. Finally in desperation he takes down the harp from the nail on the wall and plays - yes, you've guessed it - Cargai's tune! After long imprisonment in the dungeons of Chester Castle he has escaped. Husband and wife are re-united. Rhiwaedog goes home a sadder man. But there is no record as to which man Lady Cargai would really have preferred. Now a farmhouse stands on the foundations of Cargai's castle, and Plas Rhwyddach has been used as a home for the little evacuees from Liverpool.

All theatres were closed for an indefinite period at the beginning of the War as no-one knew how severe the raids would be. The show had to be cancelled and, for financial reasons, we could not afford to keep the contract open. Probably each of us was wondering what the War would be like and how it would affect us personally. One thought of stories of the last war - of trench warfare and long casualty lists - and wondered which of the boys would go. It seemed as though a woman's lot was always a long and harrowing waiting. Probably none of us girls guessed that we too would be conscripted and be part of the Forces that were making history. We were especially nice to the boys, and to cheer ourselves up we all rehearsed 'Children's Overture', a ballet originally arranged to be danced by young children. It really did look very funny.

At first the War didn't seem at all a grim business. In fact the whole period of the Phoney War was very gay. Comparatively ordinary people suddenly became handsome and dashing in uniform. There was a feeling that real adventures might happen to anybody and, best of all, it seemed that in this particular war nobody was really going to get killed - or so it seemed to our inexperienced young minds.

Here I had better explain more about Bala and introduce Meese who runs the Company. Bala is in the middle of the country described in Borrow's 'Wild Wales'. At that point it is so narrow that if you stand on the top of the Quay at the end of Bala lake on a clear day you can see all the way from the Wrekin in Shropshire England right out to the sea at Cardigan Bay. Yet when you think of all the stories and songs connected with the different places, you realise what a lot has happened there. Sometimes when you look out over the roofs of a big city like London you get the feeling of a lot of happenings going on, but often they all seem so muddled and rather futile, and as though people were always striving for things that they didn't really want at all. When you consider all the Welsh songs started by ordinary people, you realise that they must have had complete feelings about something which is much better.

The Ballet originated with a troupe of dancers from the village Christmas pantomime and was nursed to comparative fame by Hyllane Johnston - hereinafter referred to as Meese - which name was given to her by her daughter Judy. The rest of the family consists of a younger daughter known as Brat and husband Bill, who handles the business side of things, works the curtain and says that he hates the stage anyway! They live in a house full of big game trophies which Bill and Meese have shot - animals' heads which are all decorated with hats at Christmas, and skeletons of gnus etc which sometimes have their eye sockets decorated with luminous paint. It is the sort of place where you may find a strange poet at the breakfast table any morning or half a dozen small chickens in the linen room. We staged ballets in villages so remote that the inhabitants would come to the box office and ask if the show was in Welsh or English. At one time Meese's household was probably the only one in the country where the butler would be unable to serve coffee because he was changing into tights for rehearsal.

For some time after the beginning of the War life continued very much as before. We went on working for our exams and staged the annual Bala panto. Then we took it to the Wrexham barracks of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers - one of the oldest regiments in the British Army and with more battle honours than any other, and whom we had unofficially adopted. This led to a memorable party in the Sergeants Mess at which we sang songs - Welsh and English - far into the night. Looking for the bus in the black-out, one of the girls stumbled over a sentry and was challenged "Halt! Who goes there?" To which she answered "Your Fairy Godmother, you shall go to the ball." The journey home was memorable too. At that time the black-out restrictions were very drastic indeed - side-lights only and they had to be fitted with hoods, the lights shining through narrow slits covered with several thicknesses of paper. The only way to travel was to get astride the dotted white line in the centre of the road and proceed until you

met some-one else doing the same thing. However in bad weather it was permissible to use a fog light. As, so far, there had been no raids, we interpreted this very liberally. We were driving along the cheerful beam of yellow light, just switching it off to pass through villages and small towns. In one of these an object suddenly loomed ahead. I flicked on the lights and the object was the local bobby! Well fortunately you can't read number-plates in the black-out and we certainly made record time until we were through the next town and able to turn off the highway. Next day even Brat who was the youngest 'Babe in the Wood' and officially restricted to lemonade, said that when she bent down the world seemed to go round. Perhaps that seems a flippant way to write about a war but it is just how it seemed at first. Later when we had no petrol at all and hardly any leisure, we looked back on those days as among the happiest of our lives. When the Royal Welsh went out to France we sent them costumes to do their own shows, usually putting a packet of cigarettes and a letter in each. This led to a correspondence which lasted up to Dunkirk, after which we never heard anything of most of them again.

One by one our boys were being called up. Iestyn, with Welsh Nationalist sympathies, had doubts as to whether joining the British Army would not be furthering English Imperialism but wisely decided that Fascism was as big a menace to Wales as to any other freedom loving country. Among the 3 million Welsh speaking people there are few out and out nationalists and those are mainly in the universities. Many people think there should be a Secretary of State for Wales, as there is for Scotland, and that legal business should be bi-lingual. But complete independence, such as Eire has, involving frontiers and customs would only be a nuisance to everyone. Certainly Hitler's agents tried to use frustrated Welsh Nationalism but with no success.

It is practically impossible to produce ballet that is worth anything artistically without men and things became more and more difficult in June 1940 when invasion seemed imminent. It was decided to disband temporarily but with some vague hope of starting again in the autumn. At that time there was still little demand for women in the Services where they were relegated to the dullest and most menial jobs - perpetual KP, store-keeping and a little driving. We four members of the Corps de Ballet decided to join the Women's Land Army which was then advertising for seasonal helpers. The work to which we were assigned was with the Forestry Commission at Coed-y-Brennan (which means the King's Forest) near Dolgellau. Most of the trees there had been planted during the First World War when we were no longer able to import timber from Scandinavia, and had just had time to grow big enough for pit-props and military telegraph poles. Among them was a wood planted to celebrate the Battle of Waterloo and which was still standing. It was always good to go through the forest for it smelt and sounded so lovely, and it was fun to pop the blisters on the trees. While the men did the heavier work of felling, we girls pulled up weeds in the nurseries (back-aching work!), cleaned the rides and cut the bracken around the young trees planted out on the hill-tops. We were paid 32/- a week (about \$6) which was more than the girls doing farm work received and had the

advantage of a regular 48 hour week. Land Girls are expected to pay for their own keep but this did not amount to much as we were billeted on a small farm which cost us 10/- (\$2) a week between us for 2 rooms, a fire and all the milk and buttermilk we could drink. The farmer and his wife were both young and though they lived only 4 miles from the town had only been to the movies 3 times in their lives. Some evenings we offered to look after the three children - Delwen, Ceirwen and Dewi - so that they could go out. This was awkward for me as, like many Welsh farm children, they did not learn to speak English until they went to school. The dog and the cows also had to be spoken to in the native tongue to get any results.

Often we would help with the milking in the evenings. Welsh mountain farming is still very primitive and totally unlike that in England. One old horse did all the work for the whole village of Llanfachreth, and pulled a sledge of logs which served as a cart. During haymaking everyone worked very hard (including the horse) and sometimes we were out in the fields until the moon was up. It was lovely up on the hill-tops cutting bracken. We could look right across the valley at Cadr Idris and down the estuary to the sea.

Sometimes aircraft would pass flying high but following a regular route up the river. Until then I had never thought of flying except for fun. Somehow wars were still things soldiers did in newspapers. I had wanted to fly as a hobby and had in fact arranged to go up for a trial trip just about the time that war was declared. But it would have demanded considerable saving, while for the average working girl it would have been impossible without outside backing. Looking at those planes through the long summer afternoons, I never thought that one day I should work on aircraft, live with them, think of them and sometimes even dream of them. And we never thought that within a few months German planes would come over the same route night after night, flying on a beam to bomb Liverpool.

Now you should meet the three other girls from the Ballet who joined the Land Army. First, here is Moya, usually leader of the troupe. She later went to London to join ENSA (entertainment for the troops) but became a clerk in the War Office instead. Next, here is Freda. She is one of those little dark women who have a devastating effect on big strong men. She later joined the ATS (WAG) and became a telephone operator with an Ack-Ack gun. We used to get exciting letters from her, written during duty with pauses while the gun went into action. Lastly, here is Iris, the beauty of the Ballet. She is genuinely blonde, husky-voiced and Garboesque. She stayed in the Land Army and became a rat-catcher's assistant! All three of them got married - all to soldiers. Our boys did very well too. Two of them fought from Alamein through North Africa and Italy. One was sent out to India. One was killed at sea and another, one of our best dancers, distinguished himself as a Paratroop officer. Certainly the men of the Welsh Ballet weren't cissies!

Meantime Meese had been having adventures. During the hectic weeks following the fall of France when the Home Guard was started (then called the Local Defence Volunteers) Meese

managed to join that august body. And so she should have too - she and Bill were among the few people in the village who could shoot straight. If you count the Chinese swords and Zulu spears, they had enough weapons to arm a company. America doesn't realise what it has missed by not having a Home Guard. As a Home Guard Captain, Daddy reckons that he used to do as much paper-work voluntarily during one week of this war than he did as a Regular Captain from 1914 to 1918. How odd it was to see ordinary everyday people taking part in manoeuvres around the house, to follow them on route marches and to pick up those with blistered heels! Probably the Home Guard in Wales was not as promptly organised as along the South Coast where the invasion was expected, though it was later revealed that the enemy did intend to land paratroopers in Wales and Cumberland to cut the country in half and encircle London.

On the night of August 15th 1940 it was reported that enemy parachutes had been seen landing on the moors just East of Bala. Meese was sent out with a patrol, all of whom were new recruits, and without even a second driver. The man in charge had no previous experience and half way up the steep side of Aber Hinnant Pass they stopped for a conference, meantime walking around smoking cigarettes and singing hymns in the usual Welsh fashion. Meese had an uncomfortable feeling that they were a sitting target for anyone on the hill above. Eventually they arrived at Lake Vyrnwy where they found a very wooden looking sentry guarding the dam and couldn't resist asking him if by any chance he had been dropped by parachute. They returned soon after dawn and I'll never forget waking up to see Meese standing by my bed with tin hat and rifle and looking considerably tougher than any woman I've ever seen before or since. And the parachutes? Oh yes, they were German all right - but dummies dropped to cause confusion.

Later the Home Guard got 'organised' and it was decided that women were weak, hysterical creatures who could not be admitted. A lot of old men who had been safely in bed on the night of August 15th tried to put Meese out but she hung on and put in hundreds of hours of service as a driver, ferrying supplies, fetching instructors and carrying patrols. Evenings fetching instructors were the best as we normally finished up in the 'OG' (Owen Glendower), the 'Bryntineon', the 'Ship', the 'Eagles' or some other salubrious establishment.

Among other things Meese was a despatch rider and had a motor bike. Here things got complicated because of an escapade of ours with the sons of the house while they were on leave. She was not accepted at the home of the Commanding Officer's wife but in her official capacity she had great fun roaring up to the front door of the ancestral mansion.

Then we caught a fifth columnist but only a very small one. He was an oily little twerp who had smuggled himself into the country with a bunch of refugees. He tried to tell Meese that she should help the German soldiers when they came as they were 'kind men really'. He also tried to find out where Bill was stationed. Well he tried that line on the wrong woman. Meese

contacted the Police and Military Intelligence, though in so doing she got onto a choleric retired admiral by mistake. The admiral used all his best quarter-deck language over the phone. Meese blue-pencilled him back and hung up. Half an hour later he called back and asked her out to dinner. The fifth columnist got locked up.

Another time it was believed that someone on the moors was signalling to enemy aircraft. Disguised as hikers, we went to investigate. It is extremely doubtful if anyone would bother about visual signals now that radio aids are so good and we found nothing. But it was lovely up there amongst the heather, with the lake glistening down below and the hills looking as though they were cut out of blue cardboard.

Perhaps Meese's greatest achievement was driving the armoured car. It was an old Lanchester to which the valiant Company Commander had attached sheets of armour plating. Even before that, the brakes weren't up to much and now with all the extra weight they scarcely had any effect at all. It looked a bit odd, an armoured car with a civilian licence and number plates. If the invasion had ever taken place, Meese would undoubtedly have won the VC - she had to change everything! On a 48 hour manoeuvre she ran into an ambush and was overturned in a ditch by Regulars with smoke bombs. The soldiers were very tactful about guarding their fair prisoner and thoughtfully looked the other way when she wanted to 'powder her nose' - at which point she got away through a hedge and warned the following Home Guard troops. The Regular OC was very sore about it.

At no time were women officially permitted to take an active part in the Home Guard. Women in every other country in Europe fought with the partisans. British women were presumably meant to stay in the cellars until the invasion was over and then come out and cook breakfast for whichever side had won. Once Meese and I got in as drivers to a demonstration of anti-tank devices - electrically fired mines of petrol or other inflammable liquid. Though these were very effective, it was believed that the Home Guard in the district would not have enough men to be able to use them. Yet any farmer's wife could have fired them if suitably instructed. In some parts of the country women organised unofficial rifle clubs. Undoubtedly if there had really been fighting, we would have taken some part as in other countries and keeping us unorganised would only have added to the confusion. Meese would have made a wonderful guerrilla and personally I would rather have relied on her, or any other competent woman or on myself than on many of the well-meaning veterans of Ladysmith. Towards the end of the War a few girls were enrolled in the Home Guard as clerks and store-keepers. Meese was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and put in charge of her company's transport. All this was very irregular but she handled the job admirably and was recommended for an award, but being a woman that was impossible under the circumstances.

That autumn we had a naval patrol guarding the lake in case of an enemy landing by sea-plane or flying boat. This naturally was regarded as a very tame assignment but the sailors were a

happy contribution to Bala's social life. They stood 24 hour watches and one could always tell which watch was off duty by noticing which petty officer was asleep on Meese's drawing room sofa.

By now the enemy were coming to Liverpool almost every night. Sitting around the fire, we could hear them droning overhead and feel the vibrations from the bombs which were often dropped near an unblacked-out signal on the little mountain railway line. Vibration carries further in the country than in the town. Really they fell several miles away - but if those had been atom bombs, there would be no Bala left. Motoring back from Chester one night, we could see the flames from Birkenhead going right up to the sky.

It was about this time that I read a newspaper story about the girls ferrying planes with the ATA and decided that was the job I wanted to do.

Chapter 3

For a woman to get into flying in war-time isn't easy. That's what this book is all about. When I first applied in October 1940 I thought it would be quite simple. If a minimum number of flying hours were required, I would get them. But obviously one couldn't learn in England with enemy planes overhead at any time of day. Besides all civilian flying had been stopped at the beginning of the war. The newspaper story about the Air Transport Auxiliary (the internal ferry organisation) said that American girls were coming over to help us out. All right, I would go to America to get my licence. An American friend offered to help me financially but the clerk at the shipping office said certainly he would book me a passage to New York - after the War. To learn in Eire was also impossible as flying there closed down for lack of petrol.

Meantime Christmas had arrived and the few remnants of the Ballet had a contract to provide a troupe of dancers for the professional panto in Chester. This year it was Aladdin and was memorable as my first, only and probably last attempt at being a show girl. The six lovelies scheduled to parade the jewel costumes in the Treasure Cave scene didn't show up and the tallest girls in the Ballet were used instead. 'What a life!' Representing Pearls, I had sea-shells on the bust, ostrich feathers on the backside, a dreadful cold in the head through working in a practically unheated theatre, and on top of it all a towering head-dress which came off if I so much as raised an eye-brow, let alone sneezed. Perhaps that is why show girls always have that odd teetering walk. As a glamorous profession you can keep it. As if all this wasn't bad enough, the costumes had been stored somewhere which had been blitzed, the water from the fire-hoses making the oyster shells so brittle that, as I tottered across the stage, an odd shell or two would fall to the ground with a sickening thud, leaving me totally unable to look down and see just how much of my costume had gone. One simply had to judge by audience reaction. Another topical touch was provided by the Dame (funny man taking the part of Aladdin's mother) who in his perennial undressing scene took off the traditional number of striped and tartan petticoats and frilled knickers to reveal a picture of Hitler on the seat of his final pair of panties. One night the show was nearly broken up by a box full of tough and cheerful young soldiers - "Hush, they are the newest thing, copied from the enemy in France; and well, very nearly secret - they are paratroopers."

After the show finished I got back to the serious business of trying to fly. The American friend thought he could get me a passage on the American (then neutral) ship which crossed from Lisbon every week. Since flights to Lisbon came under RAF supervision, I applied to Sir John Grieg at the Air Ministry. The idea was eventually knocked on the head by me being refused an exit permit on the grounds that 'all British women were needed for vital war work', though at this time girls were still being recruited for such silly and menial jobs as barmaids and mess orderlies. Sir John was very kind indeed and wrote to ATA but at that time they were not allowed to give any ab initio training. Even so, there were many girls anxious to fly and also many men who were too old or unfit to meet the exacting requirements of the RAF. They were

keen to train for ferrying, supply and ambulance work. The girls who had previous experience and did fly had such an excellent record throughout the war that, had we been included in the Empire Training Scheme, we would probably have proved useful in a great many capacities. I was told that I was on ATA's waiting list and would be notified when ab initio training started. At the time it seemed probable this would be soon. So I was very thrilled when a kind instructor showed me round the HQ. Arriving - as usual on the wrong side of the airfield - I stood watching the planes taking off overhead, nearly having hiccoughs with excitement as it seemed that soon I too would be flying. Little did I know that it would take 4 more years and a 4000 mile journey before I could get my wings. We were standing on the tarmac when a girl arrived ferrying a Blenheim. She looked so competent yet so nonchalant and I felt enormously proud of my sex.

Meantime something had to be done and Civil Defence seemed a more attractive proposition than the Services. Hats off to women who put up with all the irritations of life in a community of their own sex - that is a great sacrifice - and most of them preserve their natural charm. But Heaven preserve us from military minded women. When they want to, they can out-bogey Colonel Bogey himself. The British she-Sergeant and female 'red-caps' are far tougher propositions than their American equivalents. Possibly through lack of worldly experience or because of their still somewhat inferior status, British women do seem more inclined to take it out on each other.

The London Auxiliary Ambulance seemed to be doing a real job in a very unpretentious manner and I decided to join them. The only snag was that Mum disapproved of me living in town (then the YWCA) during the blitz. So I had to have all my letters sent via a friend living in the suburbs, though this manoeuvre occasionally got him into hot water with his land-lady. I wanted to join the Ambulance in the spring but the first lot of papers must have got lost in the blitz as nothing ever happened. So next month I tried again. This time I did my driving test and waited to be assigned to a station. This isn't meant to be a gripe about delay because it was remarkable that the clerical side of the service kept going at all under the circumstances, but it was July before the posting came through. By that time Hitler had invaded Russia; the blitz was off; and I had gone off with a road show called 'Love without Coupons.'

Our ambulance station was rather like a club. On arrival one signed in, had supper (75 cents a night mess allowance) and from then on the night was ours except for a couple of hours telephone duty for the girls and picquet duty for the men. We usually went up onto the roof to watch the searchlights, then bedded down on mattresses on the floor. Most of the girls had driven right through the blitz and some of them were only 17 years old. They had certainly had a tough time. Unable to hit back, they had just had to take it, and all the time they were driving they had no idea what was happening to their own homes and families. One woman had even been knocked out by a corpse - a pretty unnerving experience. She was unloading it at the morgue, when the blast from a nearby bomb caused it to sock her one. All through the blitz

these women were not covered by the same compensation as the men drivers, and it was only a year later and after several days' debate in Parliament that it was decided that it was as unpleasant for a woman to lose a limb as for a man.

As a voluntary driver, I only had to put in one night a week at the station and be on hand if required. This left plenty of time to get on with the great quest for flying. There were many others doing the same thing - not only girls, but men who were too old for the RAF and some who had flown in the last war and wanted to fly again. We wanted them to train us instead of, as then, taking on anybody from anywhere abroad, allied or neutral, who had the necessary hours (then reduced to about 30). Please don't think we resented the others personally. They had come to help out at a difficult time and we appreciated it. A really cosmopolitan ferry service including us, and maybe an ambulance and air relief service on the same lines, possibly operating through the Red Cross would have been a grand token of our war aims. But how would the Royal Navy have felt if, when we took over those US destroyers in 1940, we had also hired US crews at higher rates of pay and told our own men that they could stay at home and press somebody's pants? To be quite honest, it was not only a question of pride - at that time legislation was being introduced to conscript women for war work, though most of us were already doing something, it seemed so unfair that we were to be condemned to be servants and cheap labour without being eligible for the better jobs. Several hundred would-be pilots signed a petition and sent it off to the Secretary of State for Air but the reply just said that as we needed US help to win the War it was necessary to humour them, which wasn't much of a compliment to either nation. Next I tackled a Member of Parliament I knew slightly and, having been passed from one Department to another, was again told that a training scheme was being planned and that I was on their list. This was in the autumn of 1941. So after the panto that year (Jack and the Beanstalk at Cambridge, shuttling back and forth to be at the Ambulance on Sunday nights) I applied for a job at an aircraft factory as, that way, it might be possible to learn something of the technical side. Though I had registered with my age group some months previously I had heard nothing, maybe because of the Ambulance and maybe because dancers and other entertainers were meant to be in reserved occupations so long as we had a contract. The labour exchange seemed a bit hurt that I existed at all because it was Irregular. With the best of intentions they sent me to a training centre where they didn't do any aircraft work at all and tried to turn me into an instrument maker - a job which requires natural aptitude and the patience of a saint. It was surprising to see the apparently inherited talent of two Swiss girls. Personally I spent a whole week trying to get a small piece of metal, the thickness of a dime, square in all directions, and it never did come right anyway. Then I wangled a transfer to Croydon and managed to get in on the first women's aero-engine course held there. We had three weeks of bench-fitting - days and days of trying to file flat - phew! and about six weeks actually on engines, this being preparatory to work with a firm doing Merlin overhauls. The course was very elementary, though sound and was designed to give future employees an idea of the functions of the various parts and of the materials of which they were made. The instructors were always ready to give more detailed information. None of

the other girls had even driven a car which might have helped them acquire a little knowledge of engines, but motoring is so expensive in Britain (tax of \$5 a year per horse power and gas 50 cents per gallon). Wages are so low that few working girls get the chance to drive.

While on the course we were paid 42/- (about \$8) a week subsistence allowance. The youths got about the same until they were 21. Then they automatically got the full men's rate of 75/6, nearly twice as much, though many of them were living at home with their parents, while many of the women had dependants to support or were Servicemen's wives struggling to keep a home together on the pitifully small British soldier's allowance (for a private's wife with two children this works out at about \$6.5 a week from the Army and a nickel a day from her husband). And who was this hard-hearted firm paying these very unequal wages? - the British Government via the Ministry of Labour. In addition to this we had proficiency tests. If you passed, you stayed for more training but if you failed, you went to an unskilled or semi-skilled job. The girls did absolutely the same tests as the men and were judged by the same standards, the examiners being unable to tell whose the work was anyway. Yet the men received \$1.25 a week proficiency pay and we were only allowed 75 cents. What did the Ministry of Labour think that men could do with the odd 50 cents that we couldn't?

After we had completed our course the school held an exhibition in a shop window in Oxford Street to encourage more women to enrol for war work. We had an old engine to pull to bits and re-assemble, and were meant to answer any questions. One day a very dirty old man with a tobacco-stained white beard down to his waist announced that he had come to tell us all our mental abilities according to the bumps on our hands, but we didn't let him. A harmless looking middle-aged lady took me on one side and told me she had invented a wonderful bomb. It was fastened to a balloon with a clock and needle attached. At a given time the needle burst the balloon and the bomb dropped, the idea being to let the aircraft get home before that happened. She said she had sent the idea to the War Office who had replied that they were considering the matter.

At this time Mum was one of the few civilians left in a big block of apartments largely taken over by Service personnel attached to the US Embassy and life there was lots of fun. My first American boy-friend was called Biff (which sounds odd in English) and was just like Americans always are in funny stories and hardly ever are in real life. He had always seen a bigger and better one of everything. Probably he was homesick really. What should have been necking parties usually finished up as cushion fights. The hard thing to get used to about Americans was that they wanted to spend a lot. Englishmen are not at all stingy but they get so little pay that, if you had an expensive evening out with a Serviceman, he could not afford to do anything else until the next pay day. Biff had a girl-friend in the States who, although only 22, had a degree in philosophy. This sounded odd as nobody would have such a degree in England unless they were considerably older. She sent Biff some first rate lipsticks to give to the girls he met. Her philosophy seemed very sound.

Fortunately instead of going to the factory, I was taken on by ATA as an engine fitter at their headquarters. As this was an organisation of real flying enthusiasts, often veteran flyers, we girls got a good break. We worked on many types of single and twin-engined ships. The taxi planes used to carry the pilots to the various factories and airports every morning and pick them up in the evening. We did principally 40 and 80 hour checks on Oxfords and Ansons and on the training planes from the Advanced Flying School - Harvards, Blenheims (unpopular because the engines were so dirty), Wimpys (Wellingtons) and Hudsons. Two full-time RAF instructors gave classes on different types of engine every time work was slack because of bad weather, and every other morning throughout the winter. We had a first rate supervisor who managed to get us issued with full RAF toolkits, including everything except US sizes in tools which were both hard to get and expensive. Tools are always rather a problem on a very small pay packet. The bottom is a good place to start on any job and now, as a pilot, I do appreciate the time I spent as a fitter. It gives you an enormous respect for and confidence in both engines and ground crew, enough respect never to interfere with each other. Financially British women start at the bottom minus. They think of the lowest rate they can possibly pay unskilled labourers and pay us two thirds of that. We started at approximately 23 cents an hour. In fact the only thing that made our wages liveable was the amount of compulsory overtime, as no job was considered full time war work unless it was for at least 56 hours a week. We worked 9 hours a day 7 days a week with the eighth day off. Every six weeks we got two days off together. British war plants and other industries only pay overtime after 48 hours, rather than 40. This may seem long hours by some standards but the work was interesting and we enjoyed it, returning to our billets every evening happily tired, usually covered with engine oil even to the roots of the hair, and with the feeling of really having achieved something. Some of the girls were would-be flyers and some were local working girls who had been taken on for quite humble jobs like washing aircraft and had become infected with the general enthusiasm. In their case ATA later sent them onto a first rate government engine maintenance course for three months, which had only just been opened up to females three years after the outbreak of war.

On the job we worked in pairs, one couple to each engine so that one really got a chance to learn and do something. Usually one started with a man partner. Then when he was called up or posted elsewhere, one became the senior partner who signed the check sheet and was given a junior to help. On the wall was a huge sign saying 'Remember a Concealed Mistake may cost a Pilot's Life.' We were very proud of the fact that some aircraft were serviced entirely by women, subject of course to final Air Ministry inspection, and then flown away by girls. ATA had a better non-accident record than any other flying service, with the women's section topping the lot.

At first it was assumed that we girls were just working for pocket money and would never want a rise. Then the Union took it up. Unions in Britain are far more homely affairs than in

the USA or Canada, with very few paid officials. By law union accounts have to be properly audited, so they are very honest. Union Shop is an issue that never seems to arise nowadays. The initiation fee is usually about 25 cents and the weekly subscription is the same for men and women on the same rates of pay, and 12 cents for women getting less, i.e. most of them. During the war British Unions never took the same view as in the USA that unskilled work should be paid the same rate regardless of sex, but expected us to start at two thirds the rate and with the chance of catching up after 32 weeks - that is if one's male workmates have not already received rises. Unlike American Unions most of which received women from Pearl Harbour onwards, the best British Engineering Union, the AEU, could not bring itself to accept us at all until 1943. Later trade tests were introduced and these, together with general efficiency and length of service, were used as the basis for rises - a very fair scheme. After several months it was possible to reach the rate at which the unskilled men had started and with the ATA, if with no other firm, one could eventually reach the full skilled rate of about 40 cents an hour.

It is generally held that the cost of living in England is low. It would be more correct to say the cost of existence. If one wanted to live as comfortably as Americans live, even before the war when things were still available, one had to pay about as much. It is possible to get a roof over your head and a full stomach cheaper than in America but most of the things which make life comfortable and fun cost more. In Croydon one could get room and board for \$5 a week but there was no running hot water and, if you wanted to go to the lavatory during the night, it meant going to the 'small house' at the bottom of the garden. Every week my landlady did her washing in an old-fashioned copper and ironed it all with a flat iron heated on the fire. This was by no means a poor part of London. The majority of British women have never even seen a washing machine and probably do not believe that they are really practical. Rail and coach travel before the war cost about as much, calculated on a straight rate of exchange, as it does in the States now. So do radios and movies. Motoring costs a lot more. Working class people don't have fridges, or ice-boxes for that matter, yet they are told that in spite of the low wages they do as well as their American equivalents because the 'cost of living is lower.' So far not many have had the chance to visit the USA or Canada to see just what they are missing. This is not a gripe about necessary economies. How can we expect one small island to compete with half a continent? Probably we will never be able to live as comfortably as Americans unless Europe is joined as an economic whole.

Days with ATA were happy days. In the evenings we used to have terrible darts matches with the fitters playing the riggers. Our airfield was in the Thames Valley in the part where the villages still have village greens as in the nursery rhymes and we spent happy hours in the old timbered pubs. There was only one snag in life - as yet no chance of being a pilot. The ATA definitely did their best for us and several times a training scheme was rumoured to be just starting. but although the organisation was civilian and officially under Aircraft Production, in flying matters they were largely dominated by the Air Ministry. Every time they attempted to

launch an ab initio training scheme the idea was nipped in the bud by the old 'dead-beats' of that Service, the Service which was using British girls as unnecessary servants while other people came and flew for us. And what a cosmopolitan crew ATA was. At one time, of 150 women pilots, 50 were from the USA, while the remainder included girls from Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Free France, Holland, Belgium and other countries all easily identifiable by their shoulder tags. As mechanics we didn't mix with the pilots much and they received such an enormous ex-patriation allowance that no English working girl could have afforded to go around with them. The Americans had such lovely sheer stockings too. One of the US girls in the same billets, the sort of billets I would never have been able to live in if I hadn't had some pocket money of my own, had come over unknown to her parents who thought she was teaching ground school in California. She didn't want to worry them, so every time she wrote home she sent the letter via a friend in Los Angeles to repost. How's that for enthusiasm? Another Chilean girl had learned to fly in Chile especially to join. The men's section included two royal princes from Siam. It was three years since the beginning of the war and still nothing was being done for British girls. So we watched them all flying with that aching, wanting to go feeling that you get at the bottom of your stomach when you watch a plane take off and wish you were in it.

Sometimes we went up on test flights of aircraft we had worked on as a sign of confidence in our work. My first such flight was memorable as for quite a while we couldn't get the wheels down to land (bless the riggers) and the one-armed pilot had quite a time of it. Later it was arranged that we should have a routine flip at least once a month - a sensible method of encouraging the air-minded public of the future. Once I got a ride all the way to the nearest airport to Bala so that I could go to a dance there in my two days off. This was really against Air Ministry regulations but - well - it was arranged! At that time transport had to fly at no more than 1000 feet for identification purposes. At this height the country looks most exciting. You can see each house complete with its garden and perhaps a little park or lake and say to yourself as you go along "Now I'd like that one - no, that one." England is full of nice houses one does not see from road or rail. And you don't realise how small the place is until you get above it. At only 1000 feet we could see the dirty smoke concealing Birmingham just to the right at the same time as the Welsh hills to the left. The Wrekin stood up ahead for about 20 minutes and a few moments later there was the Wirral peninsula looking just like it does on the map. A beautiful squadron of Spitfires crossed just ahead of us and we flew right under the arc of a rainbow. Perhaps it is silly of me to write so much about an hour's flight but I cannot ever describe how much I wanted to fly.

Wanted to fly - and thought to myself "Those girls learned to fly in America. That's a place where you can learn. And there are planes going there regularly now. Flying across the Atlantic every day. I'll get myself transferred to the Atlantic ferry base and, if I'm half the woman I think I am, I'll get across somehow." The transfer was easy to arrange. ATA had a base at the ferry terminal and, though the whereabouts was not published, it was easy enough

to find out by means of the grape-vine that always springs up between airfields. It was also easy to arrange a transfer by telling the Establishment Officer that I had a boy-friend at the nearby naval base. I had too but he was the last person I wanted to meet as he had a wife there he thought I knew nothing about!

In October 1942, having already tried to get a chance to fly for over 2 years, I was posted to the transatlantic ferry port at Prestwick with the fixed determination to get across the Atlantic.

Chapter 4

Prestwick Airport was an eye-opener. So too was Scotland. It was more like going abroad than living, as I did later, in Canada or the USA. At times the broad Ayrshire accent was completely baffling and it was so silly to have to keep saying "What? What?" to one's workmates.

Here, as at the HQ, the girls were doing all manner of work on aircraft both as fitters and riggers, and including such unpleasant jobs as continuous dope spraying. Most of us got about 24 cents (1/-) an hour and our rises came through pretty regularly and were about 1 cent (0.5d) every six weeks. Unfortunately we did not get the same excellent instruction as before - in fact we didn't get any except what we could scrounge as the Commanding Officer apparently disapproved of females being instructed. Through the efforts of the Women's Supervisor a scheme was proposed through which the girls were to go to HQ for a six week course with all expenses paid. Most of the Scots girls had never been to England or seen London. None of them ever went because, as they said, "Our men say they won't have anything more to do with us if we go South!"

Perhaps the first feature of Scottish culture which really strikes one is the pancakes. They are the little thick ones that in other places one eats as soon as they are made or else throws away. In Scotland they are bought readymade and served on every possible occasion - such as fried with the bacon ration or like cold leather with jam. Undoubtedly one of the silliest legends is that Scotsmen are mean. Quite the opposite, they are very generous indeed especially to anyone new to the country. But who starts all these stories about the men from Aberdeen? The Scots of course!

The Home Guard band was glorious. On Sunday mornings they would march around the tarmac for an hour or more, usually while we were waiting to push out the aircraft, and all work would be stopped to watch. Each kilted piper would come to the centre separately and play while the others and the green-trousered drummers marched in varying formations all to music and with never a word of command. Marches and reels, always the same yet different disturbing rhythm - lovely barbaric noise. Soon the bottom of one's stomach was completely out of control. Oh, how lovely are Scotsmen in kilts, especially the ones with white socks. Then off they would go without a word, marching away down the road fainter and fainter, as bagpipes were meant to be heard, just a disturbing suggestion of something happening in the distance. In the distance it was all right, but not so the mechanic who practised in the hangar in the lunch hour. Heaven preserve us from anyone who plays bagpipes in a tin hangar which echoes! Scots dances are fun too and we used to practise the sword dance during our lunch hours with all the incidental whoops and yells. Obviously the original idea was to keep one's feet warm in winter and for that it is excellent.

Work here was interesting too, as we got a chance to run engines. In fact the nice Irish Engineer Officer let another girl and me have sole charge of the daily inspections and engine running of the Tiger Moths. These are about the most primitive type of British trainer - open bi-planes without brakes or other refinements. We use to inspect the engines, check the fuel and oil, run the engine and sign for it. An apparently very young lad checked the airframe daily. It used to be mighty cold if you were the one holding down the tail with the slip-stream blowing the gravel back at you in the dim grey light of a frosty Scots dawn. Some mornings there would half a dozen or more Moths, other mornings none. We were very proud of our charges and, in spite of their age, none of them ever had any trouble while flying under our signatures. Later we got promoted to running Rapides (sometimes called Dominies). These were twin-engined De Haviland bi-planes with 7 or 8 seater cabins, and sometimes with luck an Anson or two.

In the middle of winter in Scotland it is not really light until about 10 am (including daylight saving). It would take about 20 minutes to warm the engines and, as one watched the sky get light, lovely flocks of birds would sweep out to sea in perfect formation. They could get away earlier than the ATA planes which were only allowed to fly in daylight (Movie producers please note - your heroine never came in on the beam in real life!).

I was learning to taxi and that was fun too, just a little like what it might be learning to fly. Single-engined ships were easy but with two engines one is apt to make a lot of noise and just go round in circles. I had the support of the Irish engineer for my taxiing but the man detailed to teach me was a broad red-head by the name of Big Jock, all out for promotion and someone who disapproved of women doing anything other than running his errands. We went around the field hating each other like hell! A constant source of joy was Michael, my Irish mate, who had definite literary inclinations. At frantic moments when, with our heads deep in the engine and a starter or some other inaccessible attachment hanging on fingernails and a hope and a prayer, Michael would start dreamily quoting Omar Khayyam or Napoleon's letters to Marie Walewska. His stock of literary knowledge would be further revealed by several drinks after work. He was a very good mechanic too.

About this time the field was invaded by large numbers of US Air Corps. It was fun getting to know them and not very difficult either! Two facts about Americans were immediately noticeable. First that, on the whole, they were considerably larger than our men, and this isn't imagination either for when it was attempted to X-ray US soldiers with our plates, it was found that it was often necessary to put two plates together. It looked as though the Yanks had more room to grow up in and more vitamins when they were young. According to Sir John Orr a seventh of the children in Britain before the War did not get enough to eat. If the Yanks were taller, they were inclined to be 'gangly' and did not carry themselves as well as others.

The other striking thing about the Air Corps was their hats. Every time we saw those mechanics they seemed to be wearing something different. One day it would be forage caps; next day a round creation with the brim turned up, as worn by baby boys; the next day cloth jockey caps. We wondered if they were given a choice as to the most becoming style and on every possible occasion we found an excuse to go through the Yank hangars just to see what they would be wearing next. Probably they were not used to seeing several thousand women working on an airport and doing so many, and often such rough jobs. Soon we were followed by cheerful whistles and familiarities, though not being well-versed in current American we were never sure just how familiar the remarks were meant to be. Soon we were accepting gum from them and getting rid of it as soon as we had politely gone round the next corner as at first there seems to be no sense in chewing something after the taste has gone. We thought we were getting on fine until we asked a sergeant what he thought of British girls and he said "At home we bury our dead!" All things considered, they gave us a very good time and were tremendously generous about things like silk stockings (most of which seemed to come from Egypt and Algiers). This caused a great deal of heart-ache among the snobbish small-town element whose daughters, successfully married off to officers at the beginning of the War, now had to wear heavy utility hose while many of the working girls - the waitresses, the cinema usherettes and even the town bad girls ran around in lovely sheers. It would have been fun to introduce the Americans to more of our own friends but here one was up against two snags. Firstly so many of the nicest members of the old gang had been sent abroad - to the Middle East and India - and secondly the colossal difference in pay made mixed parties rather impossible. An English Tommy gets 4/3 (about 70 cents) a day plus a possible nickel extra for each 6 months of service. A girl private gets 14/- a week - less than 3 dollars. Both these rates are those received at the end of the War after several increases. How could they possibly compete with the US minimum of 50 dollars a month for both sexes plus 10% overseas pay? Furthermore most of the US Air Corps seemed to be Technical Sergeants. We found that if we asked them along to a mixed party or an evening in a pub, they paid for everything which made our men feel awkward.. On straight boy-girl dates they were grand but, apart from feminine companionship, there was little you could give them as they had everything sent from home - their own candy, their own canned beer, canned peanuts, concert parties. They were so different from the other foreign soldiers - the Dutch, the Czechs and the Poles, most of whom had no news of their families for several years. I mention this because, though I do like Yanks a lot and they are such grand company, one sometimes feels that they would have understood Britain much better if they hadn't always been so incredibly rich! And incidentally please excuse the constant use of the word 'Yank'. Some of us do realise that there is a difference but it is hard for us to distinguish and the word is just meant in the same general and friendly way that you call us 'Limeys' which is a term for which the origin seems to be a complete mystery to most people.

One evening the enlisted men held a dance to which we were all invited and introduced to something new - Coke. To the hard-drinking Scots a teetotal national beverage seemed rather

cissy but a sergeant told us that if we put enough cigarette ash in our cokes, we could get a 'kick' out of it. We used a great deal of ash - it tasted terrible and nothing happened! The general opinion seems to be that Yanks were fresh, but pleasantly so, and I expect the majority of us would have been disappointed if they hadn't been.

It had long been a sore point that, although we girls were doing the same work as men on the ground, we were not then eligible for training as Flight Engineers. Another grievance was that no females going on leave were allowed to fly unless they had the equivalent rank of Squadron Leader in the WAAFs (Air WACs). At decent stations such as our HQ this was not enforced but at Prestwick it was. If you were a man you might possibly scrounge a ride if there was anything going your way but if you were a female - nothing doing. As we only got one consecutive 10 day holiday in the year in which to go home, a day's travelling both ways made a big difference. Also a third class return ticket from Glasgow to London cost L4-2-1 or about a whole week's pay. Neither are the 'powers that be' half so kind to Service personnel in Britain as they are in the USA, where most airfields seem to have some organisation through which men and women going on leave can get a ride. Four-engined ships would leave Prestwick for England several times a day empty, or carrying just a few big shots, while the luckless troops and ground-crew would have to spend 12 hours or more on a desperately overcrowded train unable to get food, often standing most of the way or with both sexes sleeping on the floors in the corridors. The best thing that can be said about the night train from Glasgow was that it was cosmopolitan. It was nothing to be sandwiched between a handsome Norwegian and a dashing Pole with your feet entangled in a recumbent Czech (they are supposed to have a great sense of humour but in Czech or Slovak that is not much help!). The soldiers used to kindly bring us tea in their tin mugs as the train never stopped long enough for one to line up for a drink at a station. Perhaps one reason why US Service personnel and government employees are treated better is that American mothers are so much more active in creating formidable organisations to lobby for the welfare of their young. The very top ranks of the British Services are the only ones that are better paid than their American equivalents and they are proportionately that much more spoilt.

Someone suggested that as our new Minister of Aircraft Production, then Sir Stafford Cripps, was just back from Moscow and had presumably seen women enjoying real equality, I should write to him about our complaints. So I did and sent a thoroughly flippant letter with cartoons. We girls did not think that Cabinet Ministers really took any notice of mere mechanics and were very touched to get a reply stating that any woman with the necessary qualifications could be a flight engineer. As for the transport situation, that was the RAF's pigeon, so nothing could be done. His secretary also thanked us for 'brightening our lives with your amusing illustrations'. We sent the bit about flight engineer training to the Technical Establishment Officer who seemed a little embarrassed and replied that he was not sure about the position of females. The next summer the first woman flight engineer flew with ATA and, as a crew of only two are carried on internal ferry flights, this meant that four-engined ships were being

flown with only women on board. The girl in question should have been flying long ago as she had both a pilot's and a ground engineer's licence. Why should talent like that be wasted just because of sex? By the end of the War there were 9 girls licensed to fly the largest ships and 4 other women flight engineers.

And why are we always called 'females'? Probably it isn't necessary to be called a 'lady', but why be so biological about us? What is wrong with being a woman? Even our washroom door at Prestwick was labelled 'FEMALES'. All phases come to an end and one day a notice appeared on the board "In future no females will taxi or go up in aircraft on test flights" - and was this female sore! The nice Irish engineer could do nothing about it as the order came straight from the CO of the Station. The Scottish girls were apparently used to taking this sort of thing lying down; so I went on strike solo and just sat in the washroom reading the newspaper. Unfortunately this was embarrassing for the more sporting officials and it was illegal as I hadn't given three weeks' notice. So next day brought an interview with the CO and by that time I was roaringly angry. Fancy working on aircraft and never getting your feet off the ground. What did he think we were - sub-human? Just beasts of burden to work and take no interest in what we did? It was contrary to the policy at headquarters and what was wrong with my taxiing? I was the only woman learning and, unlike some of the men, I had never run into anything. But the CO said no; flying involved hardship; there might possibly be a crash; and it was therefore unsuitable for women. Silly old man, what did he know about hardship? He didn't even work an 8 hour day, let alone the 9 that we did (Later it became 10.5). He didn't stand in a line-up in the rain at 7.30 every morning waiting to get onto a bus. Oh no, around half past nine a nice little girl fetched him in a car. Another nice little girl took down his letters for him. Probably another girl brought him his mid-morning cup of tea. At lunch time he was motored home again to feed (He didn't stand in line for it). He didn't run open planes before it was light with the wind whistling round his neck (and we wouldn't have missed that privilege for anything). Neither did he work out of doors when it was so cold that one had to tie the wrenches to one's belt or keep climbing down to pick them up every time they slipped out of numbed fingers. He didn't work for 25 cents an hour, just longing for the next test flight - the sign that you were ready to risk your neck on your own work. This isn't a gripe about starting at the bottom but about being kept at the bottom by the sort of person who started well over half way up. Next, in the afternoon maybe our hero would suffer the awful hardship of flying over to the next station just to see what was going on. So off he would go for an hour or two, possibly flying himself or, more likely, being chauffeured by one of the junior pilots. And at 5pm he would be driven back to his own warm fire-side. This lordly being deigned to say that he didn't especially disapprove of women pilots and that they 'seemed' to be proving satisfactory. Satisfactory! Hell, some of those girls handled four-engined ships, while he never rated more than a clumsy two.

There are some very charming Englishmen who are far more chivalrous and considerate than they need be, like Sir John Grieg, but we also have some of the most damnably spoilt and

selfish specimens on earth. The trouble is that tradition and the whole set-up makes it easy for them to be that way. One advantage of being in a civilian organisation staffed with a few would-be military men is that one can be really rude and no-one can do anything about it. The trouble was that I'd been seething with rage for 24 hours and, though I did not really feel at all that way, tears kept trickling down the side of my nose. It was very embarrassing and we both pretended not to notice. Since then I've learnt how to be politely rude to people but, in case you think it weak and womanly to let tears trickle down your nose, if I had been a man I would have socked that old humbug. Why does being a woman have to be so bloody undignified?

Officially one could not leave a job or get the sack in wartime but I managed to 'get my release' and landed what sounded like a wonderful job as a Trainee Flight Engineer with a civilian firm operating from the same airport.

Meanwhile what about the important business of getting across the Atlantic? Well, I'd had one attempt. There was no difficulty in getting information about the trans-Atlantic planes and for the benefit of any would-be spies, here is a tip. The people who talk most about what they should not are middle-aged men who are not doing as important a job as they think they should be. And flattery gets you much further than sex-appeal which can become complicated. It was easy to find out what time planes started (then about 3am) and on what nights, for at that time the service was still spasmodic and a lot depended on the weather. At dusk after work I hid myself in a bush by the Ferry Command buildings and waited. After a while it was difficult to keep awake but, if one went to sleep, the rats got fresh. Soon after midnight there was a lovely rushing sound of slow-revving props and two Liberators lumbered onto the tarmac just in front of me. There they were, left apparently alone and unguarded. Now I didn't know much about Liberators then, never having worked on them, but I had done a little preliminary reconnaissance in the hangars and hoped to hide among some baggage. I knew it was a pretty hair-brained scheme but I did so want to fly and, while I enjoy being a woman, it was so futile being a 'female'. I sneaked out and tried the underneath door but it wouldn't open. As it turned out, this was a good thing. The only other way was through the nose-wheel opening. So in I climbed and, selecting a spot clear of the nose-wheel mechanism, made myself scarce under the flight-deck. For several hours nothing happened except that people came and tested every possible motor and gadget. Some cheerful clowns arrived with a bowser to fill the fuel tanks. They were very 'braid Scots' and funny, like the grave-diggers in Hamlet. It was a good thing that I didn't laugh out loud. Apparently we were being delayed by the weather and there was much talk about the cold front that was holding us up. About 7am the interior lights were switched on and I saw that the ship was full of Yanks asleep on bunks. In the dark I had got into a US Air Corps plane by mistake. There followed half an hour of great activity. Sleepy heads peered out from under blankets to inquire "Wassa Time?" Amidst much yawning manly bodies were shoved into shirts and trousers. Worst of all, a routine inspection seemed to be taking place. This couldn't last much longer and there were too many people around for me to get out. Eventually the inspection reached the nose-wheel compartment and the flight engineer

came down to turn on the taps on the anti-icer tanks. It was fun watching the expression on his face when he realised the object on which he was shining his torch was in fact a pair of legs. He opened his mouth as though to say something. So I stepped down and said “Don’t mention it!”

“What are you doing?”

“Stowing away - “

“Oh you are, are you - “

“Yes, I want to go to America.”

“Oh you do, do you - “

“I want to be a pilot.”

“Oh.”

Pause.

“Well, unless you intend to turn me over to the guard, I’d better go and have some breakfast.” There followed another awkward pause in which we both looked embarrassed. He didn’t look any older than me and I felt sure that, if I had the same training, I could have done the job as well. And, oh how I wanted to go with them. Conversation within the ship had stopped. Obviously we had been overheard.

“Scram” he said. So I scrambled and half an hour later they left for the USA. Probably it was a good thing I didn’t get away that time as, with that cold front, we would probably have encountered the only real hazard - travelling at a height where oxygen would be required. I never saw that Yank again but he has my blessing and it is a big one.

When I got the job as Trainee Flight Engineer I stopped doing such foolish things as stowing away. This seemed like a real break. Officially the firm did not recruit women for the job but the Supervisor of the Flight Shed had already taken on two girls who ran errands for the flight squad and scrounged what information they could. Needless to say, this supervisor and his assistant were real flying enthusiasts who before the war had designed and flown their own aircraft. A real flying enthusiast will encourage anyone who is keen - even his own grandmother! Our boss was noted for his terrific temper - he certainly could bawl anybody out more effectively than anyone else I’ve met before or since - and he was fondly known as ‘the gaffer’. Our training was very unorthodox and we seldom got any proper instruction (3 lectures during all the time I was there). But we were allowed to work on any section and collect all the gen we could. As anyone who has worked on big ships will agree, you can ask questions for three months without repeating the same one.

Hours with Scottish Aviation were very long. Four days of the week we worked for 10.5 hours - from 8am to 7.30pm with an hour for lunch and two 15 minute tea-breaks. This meant that by the time we got home, washed and fed it was too late to go out anywhere, as the movies all

started around 8 o'clock, even if one had the energy left! On Friday (pay-day) we stopped at 5.30 and, oh, the sing-songs that used to take place in the 'Wheatsheaf' on Friday nights and how baffled the poor Yanks used to look while trying to hot up a particularly soulful, beery, Celtic rendering of the 'Rose of Tralee'. On Saturday one had the after-noon free and a chance to line up for one's week's rations. On Sunday there is nothing to do in Scotland except stay in bed or go for a walk if it isn't raining. The bad part of this arrangement was that we missed the double pay on Sunday which made an enormous difference to our small pay packets. Sometimes the men worked every day for weeks on end but women were officially prohibited from putting in more than 60 hours in one week. Even so, they sometimes had to be prevented from exceeding this, usually for financial reasons. We lived entirely for flying and, if flying went well, life was good.

At first everything seemed to go fine. Everybody with information appeared to be only too willing to share it which was really very kind of them. There was always the possibility that, had we girls been able to take over completely, the men would have been called up for the Services. Undoubtedly the average man is a nice guy and it seems to be only those who are not very sure of their stuff who felt that their dignity was jeopardised by helping us. The heads of the different sections were all very helpful - I even managed to scrounge two weeks on autosyn instruments which were then new to the country. So too was a brilliant young Chief Flight Engineer with the glorious name of Bobby McRobert (generally known as McRabs) and the AID (Air Ministry) Inspectors who were always willing to lend technical manuals. After several months I got my AID approval for ground-checking Pratt and Whitney engines and was the first girl in the field to get it. This meant that I could go round with the inspectors running engines for them, recording the instrument readings and diagnosing snags. This last was especially interesting for there is plenty that can go wrong with a Liberator - variable pitch props, turbo-superchargers, hydraulic system, vacuum for instruments and de-icers, and many other things. It's rather like a colossal jigsaw puzzle.

By now we three girls were getting a higher rate of pay than any of the others on the Liberator Modifications and Repair Section - 30 cents an hour - just about what the unskilled men labourers started at. Actually my engine checking approval would have been of little use if I had had to rely on the hangar foreman for opportunities to use it. Although I topped all the firm's Flight Engineer exams (we only had three and McRabs and the next best man didn't compete) and never got less than 75%, this foreman was very anti-feminine and no flying enthusiast. So in retaliation we used to innocently ask him questions to which we had previously learnt the answers and which we suspected would flummox him. One could always go over the foreman's head direct to the boss but this looked bad and anybody suspected of making up to him was referred to as "Pee-Heeing the Gaffer". The worst of being a woman seems to be that however fair men in general may be, sooner or later one always seems to come up against a prejudiced twerp who is in a position to keep you down. Fortunately the AID engine inspector, being employed directly by the government, was to a certain extent

independent of the foreman and I was sometimes able to do runs for him. I had another good friend in the man responsible for all Liberators parked on the field. Every six days these had to have their engines run to prevent corrosion, and by going around with him I managed to get 3 or 4 runs to do in a morning. I was developing a positively maternal interest in B 24s!

About this time the mascots and mottoes painted on US planes began to attain formidable proportions. We were used to seeing complete ships called after the pilot's girl-friend, but with various parts of the plane named after the girl-friends of the rest of the crew, the whole thing resembled a man-about-town's address book! It must be nice having an aircraft or even just a gun named after you but RAF regulations do not permit that sort of thing. Then came the Disney mascots, the idea of which grew until sometimes complete cartoons were painted along the side of the fuselage. Now few British aircraft are named personally which is a pity for when you are dealing regularly with several hundred, as our firm did for Coastal Command, it is much easier to remember the peculiarities of something with a name than with only a number. A few of ours had been seen bearing such dignified titles as 'Duke of ---' or '---- Castle' while the Fleet Air Arm (boys will be boys) had even gone so far as to paint a devil on one of theirs. Then all names were officially banned on British aircraft and even the discreet lettering on Mr Churchill's 'Commando' was temporarily removed. We guessed that the 'powers that be' must have suspected someone of enjoying themselves, and the cause soon became pretty obvious. The Yanks came out with a series of Varga girls wearing less and less until one morning the whole hangar turned out to see a B 24 decorated with the mascot to end all mascots - an enormous nude twice as large as life and three times as curvaceous. Underneath was written "This is worth fighting for."

The next step in my career was to get my flying approval. Here this became more complicated. Though officially we got no instruction in flying routine I scrounged all the gen I could and took the 'check-off' lists home to learn them by heart. All that spring we had plenty of chances to go up, thanks to the Gaffer's reasonable attitude in these matters. We stood on the flight deck behind the flight engineer in order to learn the routine and checked the main wheel latches while he checked the nose-wheel and vice versa before landing. At first flying in a Liberator felt like taking off in a double-decker bus - there seems to be so much metal hurling itself into the air.

The flying home on leave situation improved too, for we discovered that the Yanks ran a service direct to London twice a day and they weren't at all allergic to 'females'. If you worked on the airport and there was room for you, you got a ride. It was wonderful getting to Town in less than 2 hours and arriving clean and ready to enjoy oneself. Later the service, though still using US planes, was operated through a RAF system of priorities through which it was possible for a boy-friend to get a ride just because he was an ex-officer, though no longer on active service. But, being a mere woman, I was out of luck again.

Of our three test pilots, one was very definitely anti female flight engineers. In fact he wouldn't take up more than one woman passenger at a time 'in case they panicked.' Needless to say he was the most jittery of the three and possibly with good reason, having recently landed a Spitfire on top of a Botha (No, there wasn't a blonde in the cockpit of either!). Obviously it was no good approaching him for a test. So I asked the Gaffer who arranged for me to go up with one of the others who was both calmer and more competent. He meantime came along to supervise. Well, I can't say that my one flight as a flight engineer was a success. In fact I think that poor pilot had an unpleasant half hour. This is how it happened. On the ground the boost pressure seemed a bit too high and I wanted to adjust the stops accordingly. But the Gaffer said "No, leave it." Manifold pressure increases when the ship is actually moving, and at take-off the needles on the dials were well beyond the danger mark. Now it did seem a pity to risk cracking the cylinder heads, so I tried to ease things back a bit. The Gaffer thought I was going to cut off the power before we were off the ground and jumped to the throttles. After that, we ran into a thick rain squall and, as my reputation had already sunk quite a bit, he brought her in. So, although I handled a take-off as a flight engineer, I never did a complete flight. However I bet you most people wouldn't have done any better entirely on scrounged gen and it is a job that women can do, as is shown by the record of those 4 girls who later flew with ATA. The Gaffer and the pilot both agreed that it might have been worse and said I could have another try - but from then on things were very slow principally because we had scarcely anything to fly. The firm was doing all the modifications to new B 24s arriving from the USA. After a while major 'mods' found necessary on active service would be built in during the original construction which meant that sometimes for months on end our firm would do little work that required test-flying.

The foreman tried to lay my flying ambitions by putting me onto driving a horrible little tractor called "Hesperus". It was definitely a 'he' in exactly the same way that ships were originally 'shes', because only a member of the opposite sex could appear at once so intriguing and so cussed. In his better moods 'Hesperus', if not exactly airborne, would sometimes have all four wheels off the ground at the same time provided one hit a bump fast enough. At his worst he had 'slow-running' trouble and would suddenly give up - usually when one had a whole string of battery carts in tow, blocking up the track just when the Air Corps B 17s were waiting to pass ready to take off for their morning flight. As 'Hesperus' had no self-starter and was so heavy that I couldn't swing him fast enough to start (not to mention that the brute might kick if he backfired), this usually led to considerable delay. Heads would be stuck out of windows and hatches with probably rude remarks in American.

It was typical that a woman should be landed with something beyond one's physical powers while many of the more intelligent and less muscular jobs were banned to us. The girls at Prestwick Airport were certainly eligible for all the heaviest, dullest and dirtiest jobs - often done with obsolete equipment. In the flight squad for instance it was we who were sent to run after the men, pulling the battery carts and carrying the step ladders and heavy fire

extinguishers. The information we scrounged was the reward for these services. Not that individual men wouldn't have helped us but when you are officially detailed to do a job it is hard to get out of it. No woman with any sense ever risked straining her innards, but if one thinks that by being keen and obliging one had a chance of getting something better such as flying - well! We were used as labourers in just the same spirit as hundreds of women were used as luggage porters on the railway stations while the 'gentler sex' was officially barred from such now relatively safe jobs as long-distance flying. It is only when a job involves prestige and decent pay that the authorities start to consider 'hardship'. This sounds like one long prolonged gripe but, neither in real life nor in fiction, do girls go trespassing round the world without provocation.

About this time ATA were at last allowed to launch an 'ab initio' flying training scheme. It was now almost four years after the beginning of the war. Many of the would-be pilots were in the Services or in positions in Industry which they could not leave. It was so late in the war that only 30 students were ever graduated for ferry work, though of these over three quarters reached Group 3 rating (i.e. flying two-engined ships). Most of them put in 400-500 hours of useful flying time. Of course I applied but came up against the difficulty of getting my release from Scottish Aviation. Though I passed my medical for flying training, all the vacancies were filled. It took five months to get free of that firm and how the time dragged now that our chances as Flight Engineers seemed so obviously phoney. The firm was operating on a cost plus 10% basis. The bigger the payroll, the more they made and consequently they were thoroughly over-staffed. It was generally believed that, rather than establish the precedent of paying good wages and encouraging skilled workers, they took on a superfluous number of unskilled.

Not only were we unable to leave but we had to account to the foreman for any time we took off for any purpose whatsoever. If we were away for more than 2 days, we had to produce a doctor's certificate. Being unpunctual in the morning could lead to serious trouble too. Three minutes after 8 counted as being on time but 4 minutes after was considered late with quarter of an hour knocked off one's pay. Here again the Yanks were helpful and often when struggling along the last mile round the field, they would give us rides in jeeps and one would arrive amidst a cloud of dust in true Western style just in time to clock in at 0803. Both absentees and workers who were persistently late were liable to be punished. Offenders were hauled up before the Works Committee, then before the National Service Officer and sometimes in court where they were fined or sent to jail. The wisest thing was not to turn up for the Works Committee in the first place, in which case they didn't usually bother to look for one. Nobody would have resented these measures if they really had increased efficiency but what rankled was that the firm apparently had unlimited licence to waste our time. Some people became experts at acquiring 'sick' leave to go on hiking parties up in the Highlands or shooting and fishing in Argyll.

Once having clocked in no-one minded whether we did nothing or not, provided we didn't embarrass the foreman by being seen doing it. Undoubtedly the 'cost plus' system led to enormous waste of time and money. Most of the women 'directed' to the Airport by the Labour Exchange were local working girls, young married women or Servicemen's wives. Sometimes they had children in which case they were not compelled to work but often had to in order to eke out the miserable allowance and keep their homes together.

Nobody bothered to find out if they had any interest in or aptitude for engineering work and the firm had no motive for developing any ability they might possess. They were all given a few weeks' instruction in sheet metal work at the firm's school, then appointed as engine-fitters, electricians, etc with no chance of learning even the rudiments of these trades. There was no system of instruction for workers - as there had been at HQ with ATA - and all a great many of those girls ever had a chance to do was to fetch cups of tea for the men. Many of them would have done well with a bit of encouragement; yet it is on work under these conditions that women are judged.

It was hard to know what to do with ourselves for 10.5 hours a day now that our chance of becoming real flight engineers seemed to be proving so phoney. While members of other squads were very obliging about giving information, anyone doing part of their work was not popular as it meant that they again had to look for something to do. Usually we congregated in a hut belonging to the Duty Crew (sometimes known as the Dirty Crew!) where we made cigarette lighters, repaired bicycles, told stories and, strangely enough, read poetry. Which poetry? Why, Robbie Burns of course - in Ayrshire he is regarded as a greater authority than the Bible. We were also fond of Robert Service's Yukon poems.

Politics was a constant source of discussion and anybody working at Prestwick might have guessed how the next election would go. While holding nothing against the 'Gaffer' who was only a salaried man, the firm was thoroughly unpopular. At the beginning of the war it had been a genuine little flying school run by a few real flying men but when Prestwick was destined to become the Atlantic Ferry Base some wealthy speculators had invested in it. During the war they had acquired what was probably the best developed airport in the country with two cement runways (one a mile and a quarter long), 22 large hangars up to 1943 each capable of housing big aircraft, and the monopoly of landing facilities and repair work on the Trans-Atlantic Ferry for as long as it should terminate in Scotland.

Among the most unpopular of the Directors was the owner of a large share of the local coal mine. Some of our girls lived in the gloomy one-room tenements owned by the mine company but one would never have guessed that they came from such homes for Scots people are phenomenally clean even in adversity. In fact they spring clean their houses several times a year. We thought that as the airport had been built by conscripted labour and paid for out of the taxpayer's money it should belong to the nation - a point of view which was supported by

some sections of the Scottish press. The investors seemed to be doing so well out of this war that one wondered what was going to make them use their influence to prevent the next.

All day we watched planes arriving from romantic parts of the world. The Trans-Atlantic Ferry arrived each morning more punctually than the train from England, with eager Service passengers peering out to get their first impressions of Scotland as they taxied round the field. The mail to Iceland left and returned on the same day. The grey and white aircraft of Coastal Command like seagulls. The khaki coloured attack ships in the dark camouflage of the Western European Theatre and the vivid blues and yellows of aircraft from the Middle East. At that time I'd have sold my soul to be going anywhere new. But even the few BOAC passenger planes did not carry stewardesses. There were no travelling jobs for girls. Later the aircraft being flown were infinitely more comfortable and relatively easier to handle than those that women flew in the pioneer days of long distance flying.

Eventually I managed to persuade the Labour Exchange that I was 'redundant' and was allowed to leave. Meantime I was to go for an interview for the proper flight engineer training which had now become available for girls with ATA. It was illegal even to be interviewed for a job without a permit from the Labour Exchange, the women's section of which is noted for its rudeness. This time they excelled themselves by apparently losing my papers and haughtily telling me that I 'didn't exist'.

For a whole month I was 'non-existent' (holidaying at Bala) and the heart-breaking part about it was that I knew the chance with ATA would not last, but still I could get no sense from Officialdom. One morning I got a letter to say that the Flight Engineer Training programme was closing until next spring.

This was the last straw. I decided to go back to Prestwick and stowaway again.

Chapter 5

Before attempting to stow away on anything as ambitious as an aeroplane, it is wise to put in a little practice on something else. If I did travel back to Scotland without a railway ticket, it wouldn't be so very serious, would it? I borrowed a pencil and bought a stamp from a fellow traveller, scribbled a non-committal note to Mum as to why I wasn't coming up to London and posted it at the junction. Before leaving I had borrowed a pair of slacks and a sweater of Brats because you can't do hectic things like stowing away in a good suit. The slacks would be a bit tight but they would do. As the whole project was so obviously screwy and hopeless, I carefully didn't think about it all the way there.

The journey took all day. I changed in the train and left my suitcase at the station. The airport was wrapped in darkness and for the time being I could think of no way of getting in without a pass; so I spent the night in a hotel. This was expensive. Besides, wearing slacks one could pass as a hiker for one night but after that it might look suspicious. So I moved to the nearest Youth Hostel which only cost about 30 cents a night. Passing the airport in a bus, I saw just what I wanted. For several hundred yards the barbed wire had been removed to level out a mud embankment and had not been replaced. In case this sounds careless, please realise how difficult it is to guard an airport of that size. I had of course been there at night before when I worked there. In those days the best way on and off was the route the troops used when they came home after hours from the pubs. A large part of one side was guarded by only a stream and two strands of barbed wire. Do you think any self-respecting saboteur is going to mind getting his feet wet? Yet there had been sabotage on the airfield and, as a protest, some wits had later 'penetrated the defences' and gone round marking things 'this building blown up' or 'this aircraft destroyed'.

Next night saw my first attempt. It was only necessary to sit on the wall and drop down onto the mud. I don't know how far down it was - just far enough to say "one, two, three" in the air. There was a light frost on the puddles and breaking it sounded just like going through a cucumber frame. I was afraid the sentry further up the road might hear. My shoes came off in the mud too, which wasn't much help. From there on I had to crawl about two hundred yards up over the embankment, past the new buildings and onto the perimeter track. The scene was constantly floodlit by the headlights of cars passing on the road. Those that kept to the blackout regulations were all right but some of the Yank transports seemed to think they were still in the middle of the USA. I had to keep throwing myself down behind big lumps of mud. Once on the track there was no need to worry. Several thousand girls were employed on the field and I was wearing the regulation blue overalls and cap. I just sauntered across the tarmac and noted what ships were being loaded. The first night there were only DC 4s. No good.

As it was impossible to go back up the wall, I went out through the main gate with a cheerful 'good-night' to the guard which consisted of RAF Police, US MPs and the firm's own outfit

(not to mention the Home Guard patrols!). I knew they would never bother to check my pass, and they didn't. The same thing happened next night. This might have gone on indefinitely, as stowing away successfully depended on so many things. It couldn't be done except on a British B 24 modified for freight. There were not many of these and at that time they were only used on the Trans-Atlantic run about once every two weeks. The best idea seemed to be to get on board during the engine run before take-off, as it was too risky on the tarmac. That way I could avoid the inspection. But there was only one sufficiently secluded runway, and suppose they weren't using it that night? What if there were too many people about? And soon there would be a moon again.

But I was feeling obstinate and desperate. A great many people have probably felt a great deal more obstinate and desperate about officialdom in all its forms and not been in a position to do anything about it. Like most things you carefully avoid thinking about and which you think you aren't worrying about, you suddenly have dreams about them. Mine was like this. I would find myself on the airport at night ready to get into a plane, when I would discover a piece of rope in my hands. Following it back over my shoulder, I would find it attached to the head-collar of a horse which we had been riding at Bala - a comic character with large feet. Now having a horse with you makes it much harder to stow away; so I would take him off to the station and try to send him home. This happened several times. At last I got him into an open truck and then began to worry whether the poor dear would catch cold. So I put a coat on top of him and tied a khaki knitted scarf round his neck. He looked rather sweet. Free at last, I started towards the plane again only to find the same piece of rope in my hands, and I knew just what I was going to find at the other end of it. Some nightmare, being haunted by a horse!

The third night, on 19th November 1943, things really happened. I was late getting onto the airport as there seemed to be extra traffic on the main road. I had to wait some time before I could get over the wall. But on the tarmac, there was a British Overseas Airways Corporation Liberator freight-carrier loading up - just what I wanted. It was a mile to the far end of the runway and there was no time to lose. It would be just bad luck if a patrol stopped me, but not very likely. No-one did. Half way there the Liberator set off, taxiing up the runway as there was no incoming traffic at that time of night. It seemed as though I would miss it and I ran as fast as I could, falling over the grass verge in the darkness. At that time Prestwick Control Tower was being rebuilt and traffic was being signalled out from a radio-equipped car standing at the end of the runway. The Liberator turned with the car on its port side. By the time I got there, I could hear the lovely 'Wheeee' as the flight engineer brought his supercharger in. The headlights were out to avoid strain on the batteries during run-up. The man in the control car must have seen me but he probably thought I was a worker going home. I crossed behind the plane, well back to keep out of the slip-stream, and went round in a big circle to avoid passing in front of the lights at the end of the runway. Inside I knew the man on the starboard side would be busy checking his instruments.

I took a deep breath, jettisoned the haversack with my pyjamas, compact, etc in, and made a dive for the nose-wheel opening. The underneath of a Liberator is only about two and a half feet from the ground and it took only a few seconds to wiggle in and climb up onto the anti-icer tanks. We had often said jokingly “What about a ride across tonight?” It looked easy enough and it was. A minute or two later we taxied into position and stopped. I suddenly thought ‘They must have seen me get in from the control car on the other side. They have probably radioed that they suspect there is a stowaway on board. That must be what we had stopped for’. But no. With a gradually increasing roar off we went. Oh, that grand feeling of acceleration. Soon we were batting down the runway with the engines drumming on that lovely deep note at full throttle. I could see the concrete racing past down below. Soon by the feel of her I knew we were airborne, though the wheel was still spinning. Then it retracted sharply and the doors shut. How often we had matched that process on jacked up ships just to be sure we knew the working of every part of the mechanism. It was grand getting a front seat view of the thing in action. I couldn’t believe that I had really got away and that it had all really happened. All I had to do was stand there until we reached the other Continent.

And this was the service used by Churchill and all the other big shots. How easy it would have been to put a time-bomb in the plane instead of myself. Probably everybody who really considered the matter has thought how careless officials on both sides in a war appear to be.

Perhaps you have been wondering if this unorthodox ride was in any way endangering the ship. Please may I explain that BOAC ships always travel at well under capacity loads. I was practically under the flight deck, within two feet of the pilot and co-pilot, and not as far forward as the bombardier would be if carried. So I was not likely to affect the centre of gravity. Furthermore, as a mechanic, I knew better than to meddle with anything. A fully loaded Liberator weighs about 25 tons and has four engines, each capable of developing 1200 hp. So my weight was not likely to make any difference.

Once away the journey was very dull. I had an excellent view of Furry Boots, the pilot, and Shoes, the flight engineer. By bending down a little it was possible to study them up to the neck but beyond that it did not seem wise to investigate, as if you look at a person’s face it seems to draw their eyes to you. It was fun guessing what the rest was like and sometimes it was a great temptation to tickle their toes. For a while there was quite a lot of activity and the radio operator and the navigator came into view several times. We must have been getting onto the right heading. It was rather like looking at a silent movie because the droning of the engines made it impossible to hear what was being said. Then we settled down and switched onto the automatic pilot - an old-fashioned Sperry, not electronic, and it was remarkably smooth. At first I was too excited to feel sleepy, but later it would have been nice to be able to relax a bit. I did sit on the shelf for a while now and again but I was afraid of falling asleep and rolling onto the nose-wheel doors, in which case I should have fallen out when they were opened, and that would have been unfortunate! Standing up I could rest my arms on the cross

beam supporting the floor of the flight deck and I did doze off every now and then, only to wake up with a start every time I began to sag in the knees. Only the blue instrument panel lights were on now and I wondered if the pilot too was having forty winks. If that job involves hardship, the average scrub woman deserves a halo!

Fortunately we did not cross at any great height. I did not know until much later that the Liberators normally crossed the Atlantic at a height of at least 15000 feet. That night the weather was unusual and the most favourable winds were between 4000 and 5000 feet. The ship climbed to that height and never went any higher. It would have been bad luck to have been caught without any oxygen but that was the only risk involved and there probably never was a completely risk-free adventure. The cabin heater was turned on and, as this was just in front of me, I nearly roasted. It is a little oven burning petrol vapour from the blower section of the engine, ignited by a sort of perpetual spark plug. The fumes didn't actually leak but my throat got so dry that later I could hardly speak. Under my overalls I was wearing a leather jacket that Daddy had in the last war in case it was cold. It was a case of just melting slowly!

After a long spell of standing in the dark it became apparent that we were getting somewhere by the popping in my ears as we gradually descended. It was noticeable too when the pilot took over again. No-one can fly nearly as smoothly as 'Geordie' (Captain W L 'Geordie' Stewart of BOAC, the first man to complete a hundred Atlantic crossings. On Christmas Day 1954 'Geordie' Stewart was landing at Prestwick from London prior to yet another Atlantic crossing (by that time he had completed over 300) when he crashed in a BOAC Stratocruiser. Stewart and his crew escaped but, of the 29 passengers, only one survived. It was the end of his flying career). I don't know how long the ocean crossing took, as the clock does odd things. When the doors re-opened it was dawn and down below was a stretch of swampy land - the New World. I thought of all the Atlantic behind us full of fish and ships and U-boats and I thought "Huh, herrin pind". Columbus didn't feel half as uppity as me. We circled out over the sea again and then came in to land. After a bit of taxiing around the engines were stopped. The crew could be heard discussing eggs and bacon and coffee. I suddenly felt awfully hungry. Gander, Newfoundland didn't sound very inviting as the wind was howling and it was not a good place to be put off. Just underneath the edge of the flight deck was a bracket originally intended to help the bombardier climb into the nose. When the ship was modified, this had not been removed. I had tucked my feet into it and doubled up behind the engine control pedestal so that my legs would not be seen when the flight engineer came to check the nose-wheel lock before we landed. Fortunately I stayed like this for some time as apparently there was some trouble with the shimmy dampers and the flight engineer was fiddling about just below me, swearing so fluently and with such feeling. I was afraid he would hear me laughing.

We re-fuelled and after about 45 minutes took off again. It is sad to think that all I ever saw of Newfoundland was concrete and a bit of swamp. The rest of the journey down to Montreal lagged terribly. I had thought it would only take a couple of hours but it must have taken four

or five. As it was by now broad daylight I dared hardly move. Furry Boots was very restless and for a while it seemed as though he suspected something, but apparently his feet were cold. If I had known that I was going to be caught so soon after arrival in Montreal, I would have come out, travelled in comfort and seen a bit of the country. But as it was, I hoped to get to New York where I had a letter of introduction to a friend of a friend. As we circled over Montreal prior to landing at Dorval Airport I got quite a good view of the town which looked very square and planned compared to the jumble of British towns where the streets all seem to run into a huddle in the middle.

Once on the ground the crew all departed. The freight and mail were unloaded and the plane was towed off to another place. This took about half an hour. I had lost all count of time. Actually the whole journey took about nineteen hours and, in case you wonder if standing up all that time wasn't hard, I can say with no exaggeration that it was better than a lot of those train journeys from Glasgow to London. Though we had left Prestwick at about 9pm the night before, owing to the juggling of the clocks, it was now half an hour before lunch time and if I had waited a bit longer, I could probably have got out unobserved, though I doubt if I would have got off the airport. As it was I slipped out while the engines were being run for oil dilution as no-one could be working on the outside of the ship while the props were turning. It is a disconcerting sensation to step out into a strange world with no idea which direction to go next. There was no-one in sight; so I just headed for the next ship up the line and was congratulating myself on getting away with it when a voice behind me called "Hey". There was a civilian mechanic following me inquiringly. While standing on the other side of the plane he had seen my legs getting out, and apparently female legs getting out of large aircraft were still quite a novelty at Dorval.

"You looking for someone?"

Frantic thought - "Yes, have you seen Mr - er - Hope around here?"

"Hope? Hope?" My accent must have sounded suspicious for he said "Say, did you come over on that ship?"

Me, very nonchalantly "Oh yes, BOAC", trying to look as if I owned the whole Corporation in spite of muddy overalls and a sweat-streaked face. It didn't work for he said that maybe we had better go and see the Security Officer. I agreed that it was a trifle irregular, but I only wanted to learn to fly; so couldn't he overlook the matter? That too was impossible, but guessing that I was hungry the kind man insisted on giving me half his lunch packet - an enormous slice of currant cake.

And so I was caught.

Chapter 6

Have you ever felt like a goldfish in a bowl? The mechanic hurried me off to the nearest security post. It was in a first aid station, an enclosure with glass sides. By now a crowd of curious employees of Trans Canada Airlines had gathered outside and it really was a temptation to open and shut my mouth and flap my fins. Soon we went to the Security Headquarters which was better. The Press later wrote the story up as though the first thing I did was smother my face with cold-cream and wriggle into a rubber girdle such as had not been seen at home for several years. But that was not what happened at all. I was given several cups of tea and some cigarettes and I was asked a great many questions. Everybody was very nice indeed and very sympathetic about me wanting to fly. They were also very pleased with themselves because, unlike the police on the other side, they had caught me. Numerous officers blew in just to see what had turned up. Quite big stuff too - WingCos and Group Captains galore. But never having had any boy-friends higher than Flight Lieutenant, my recognition did not go beyond that rank, which was a pity because otherwise it would have been very impressive - for this was the Headquarters for all of Transport Command West of the Atlantic. Eventually the Air Commodore himself arrived and was charming. In fact he greeted me just as though I was the last and long awaited guest at a cocktail party. They were a nice crowd.

The pilot and co-pilot of the Liberator also came along, looking very unhappy indeed. It turned out that a W D (Canadian Air-WAC) had previously stolen a ride across the other way but with the connivance of the crew in hopes of rejoining her husband. Although she was allowed to stay, her friends were kicked out of the Service - a fact never released for publication. The poor girl never saw her husband again as he had been sent to another theatre of war and was killed. The Captain of Liberator AL819 need not have looked so unhappy as neither he nor his crew could be held responsible for my escapade.

It was Saturday afternoon and not many people were out at the field. Mrs Parry, a civilian in charge of the WAAFs (British Air-WACs handling communications), kindly hurried out with a suitcase containing everything that a woman could possibly require and including some face cream and make-up. In the meantime I was put on parole and given a free run of the station and a blank cheque on the cafeteria. It was a wonderful feast - ice-cream, tomato juice, lots of eggs and oranges - things we had not seen for ages. One of the policemen who was lunching with me looked vastly surprised at the amount I managed to put away. It was surprising too to see ordinary mechanics feeding in the big main cafeteria with such lordly beings as pilots, in fact with all but the most gilded of brass-hats. In Britain a workman seldom sees an officer eat. Though at Prestwick the food was good, the workers always fed in a separate canteen which usually smelled of months of fish and chips.

It was arranged that I should stay in the hospital - a kind exception as they did not normally accommodate women. I was just having supper with the MO when the Immigration officials phoned up to say that this was Very Irregular and could not be permitted. So off I was sent to their own lock-up, escorted by a most imposing body-guard. On the way we had to wait at a level-crossing while a freight train went by. One of the Security Police Sergeants explained how one stowed away by 'riding the rods' - apparently a personal experience. At various times I met several Canadians and Americans who had done that. In fact there must have been thousands of people moving around in that way during the Depression. This never happened in England. For one thing the rail-cars are not built right.

The Immigration Lock-up on St Antoine is really just a jail, except that the food is much better - or so I am told by people who have tried both. It is a grim old building with dirty stained walls bearing signs of violence from previous occupants. The door of my room was just iron bars, so that had there been anyone else living on that part of the floor it would have been impossible to use the built-in toilet without being observed. Right among the regular dormitories was a padded cell. The only chance of fresh air or exercise was an hour a day on a small sooty iron-barred balcony. There were no recreation facilities whatsoever, not even a book, and the luckless inmates were not allowed to keep more than 5 dollars to buy anything they might want. If your conscience worried you, you could send for the chaplain, but mine did not. I had not been there for more than a few minutes before I was told that the last girl stow-away had been locked up for 6 months before being sent home. She had been a young widow from Liverpool who found that life there was no longer bearable; so she decided to see the world and stowed away on a ship. This story has a happy ending for she fell in love with someone on the way back and married again.

Now of course stowing away is illegal. I know I broke the helluva lot of laws and if I was to be treated as a criminal, that was my look-out. But in peacetime a great many people get deported for things which they really cannot help at all. Very often they are just poor people who come out and hit a depression or become ill and cannot support themselves; and they have to be sent home. It cannot be much fun being sent back to some primitive European community, say somewhere in the Balkans, when you are ill and have no money. Before the War whole families, often including young children, were locked up in that grim old building for months on end. They were poor people and their own countries had no real interest in them. No-one else wanted them and they were shut away without a public hearing. You need Charles Dickens to give full credit to that house on St Antoine. Would it not be possible to separate violent and criminal deportees from the others, and maybe provide a sitting-room and a few old books, so that even if the poor wretches cannot stay, at least their last memories of the country would be happy ones? People often ask whether many British people will settle in Canada after the war. If times are uncertain, people with only small savings will stay at home where they can draw the dole rather than risk being kicked around abroad, for unfortunately one still has few rights as a citizen of the world.

If the Immigration Building was grim, the staff at least were charming and as I was the only undesirable female alien at the time it would have been very lonely without them. The Matron was young and interested in the theatre. Another attendant had a son flying in England. Perhaps my best friend was a little French girl called Rose. She was what is generally thought of as typically Parisian - small and dark, she wore smartly absurd little hats, and yet the big thrill of her life was shooting. Her eyes would light up with excitement as she described lying in a swamp waiting for geese or stalking deer in the mountains. Rose was a real friend. She brought in papers with the write-up of the adventure and apples and bottles of pop, though I had not a cent with which to pay her back. Furthermore she washed my hair with a wonderful French shampoo which I have never been able to trace since. She said she would get me some new clothes in on approval if I was to be sent back and could find any money, so that at least I would have something to show for my journey. It passed some of the time to knit the sleeves of a sweater she was making for her small son, for she was a widow. Being locked up for a short time is not bad really and it is a grand chance to catch up on some sleep.

Down on the men's floor were three Merchant Navy sailors who had missed their ship and two Chinese who looked like twins. We used to pass outside the dining hall at meal times. But when I asked if I could feed with them so as to have someone to talk to, I was told that that would never do. Why? One of the sailors was a devout Roman Catholic and sent me piles of religious magazines which were an improvement on my only other literary fare - "Lurid Love Stories" provided by one of the kind attendants. At least the catholic magazines were a reflection of how some of the world really acts and thinks. Another sailor looked a terrific bandit. He always gave me a very lewd wink every time we passed; so I always gave him one back as I did not think there was much he could do about it anyway.

On Monday morning I had to appear before an investigating committee consisting of one man and one woman. They were very fair and pleasant but decided to deport me as I had no visible means of support, which seemed a silly thing to say in a country which was just howling for war-workers. Probably the real reason was that they had no power to make exceptions. Anyhow I appealed to Ottawa against the decision. On trying to cable home to find out whether we had any cousins in Canada who could have helped me, I was told that civilian cables were not permitted in war-time. This sounded a bit bogus and when a message of congratulations arrived from a friend at home, I began to think that they were pulling a fast one. Why do some people think they can get away with telling women the sort of lies they would tell a four year-old? Next day we heard that someone had flown over from Ottawa to investigate the matter - very impressive. I was told that a pack of reporters was figuratively howling at the door, including some from New York and Washington. This was rather disconcerting as, even before paper rationing, this sort of story would only have received a few lines in the British Press which is not half so interested in the personal angle on things. One rash man even tried to slip a few hundred dollars into the Security Officer's hand. At first all

that they were able to find out about me was that I had been born in Manchester and I was consequently written up as a 'Lancashire Lass' - Eeh, Bah Gum!

After the interview with the Immigration Committee the local papers came out with a complete description of what I was wearing and reported practically word for word what had been said during the inquiry, even though it had been held privately. I was later told off the record that the story had been sold by someone who was suspected of dealing in visas, though nothing was ever made public. Later we read of immigration officials being prosecuted for smuggling dope and furs and there was a big outcry when they interfered with a US citizen of Chinese origin. This is not an attack on the Canadian Immigration Service which is probably neither better nor worse than any other. But this whole business of nationalities and frontiers provides a wonderful opportunity for unscrupulous people to kick others around for their own benefit.

A spot of comic relief was provided by the doctor during the routine examination. He appeared to be a surly old cuss and never made one conversational remark. Just two things seemed to worry him - that I might be either tubercular or pregnant - and to find out about the latter he spent a lot of time prodding me around and asking pointed questions. Well, if he really suspected that I had been got into trouble and had had to leave home, he must have thought that I had taken a pretty strong line out.

The next Wednesday, having been locked up for just 4 days and when it was beginning to get rather monotonous, my guardian angel the Security Officer arrived back from Ottawa with the good news that I was free and could stay for 6 months after which the whole thing would be re-considered and then maybe I could apply for Canadian citizenship. This was grand of them. One local paper published an editorial headed 'Welcome to a Lady'. In fact Canada and the Canadians were wonderful about it.

We sneaked out of the back door into a car, holding a coat over my face to avoid being photographed (like a really notorious character and feeling appallingly smug and pleased with myself). We were then whisked off to the airport followed by numerous telephone calls and telegrams from the frustrated reporters. In the meantime I was free. So on with the great business of flying. And this is where the rub came - there was no civilian flying in Canada. All the schools had been taken over for the Empire Air Training Scheme.

Amongst my fan mail, all of which I answered personally, was a letter from an American girl who was training to fly for the WASPs but apparently this was limited to US citizens. Britain is probably the only country where one has to be a foreigner to get the best jobs. Anyhow, even if it had been possible to circumvent all the difficulties of getting into the States, I had no money to pay for my training and the financial offer from my American friend at home had run into a banking snag. British currency restrictions limited the amount sent out to official evacuees to \$50 a month but, as I had left without permission, I could not get a cent from

home. Well, it would be an adventure being completely independent for a change. Some American and Canadian soldiers had given me a few notes just for luck, and this was enough to buy a coat, dress, change of underwear and a pair of pyjamas. Some WDs gave me a lovely pink satin nightie, a dressing gown and some shoes and the landlady of our apartment house gave me what every woman probably wants at some time or other - a super slinky sophisticated black dress. My \$30 winter overcoat needed some alterations and I was rash enough to leave it at the shop under my own name. The reporters got onto this and someone phoned the Security Officer and said that his protégé had been seen down town buying \$1000 worth of furs; so he might as well come across with the whole story.

Perhaps you wonder why I did not sell the story. English people are traditionally meant to hate publicity and to be modest. I did not really feel like that at all. But the idea took a bit of getting used to and I was told that, once the Press got hold of me, life would be unbearable. The RAF were certainly being very nice but they said "One word of publicity and home you go". So I lived under a false name and was poor and good - unnaturally good. At first certain BOAC officials seemed to think that I might work until I had managed to pay them the equivalent of my fare across the Atlantic. This sounded like a life sentence. Fortunately it was illegal. If any steamship company or airline is careless enough to allow a stowaway on board, it is their loss and they can also be held responsible for getting them home again. There had been some talk of me working for Trans Canada Airlines and I had done part of a written exam on Liberators satisfactorily but it was decided that it would not be wise to start until permission was received from the authorities in Britain. I was given a grant from the benevolent fund and later got a temporary job looking after the 2 small daughters of a Group Captain which enabled me to repay it. With regard to the flying, there remained one hope - the USSR.

Probably you read the stories about the Russian girls who were flying planes 'over polar snows'. Well, it did not take much inquiring to find out that that meant via Alaska. The telephone directory showed that the nearest Soviet Consulate was in Ottawa. By saving my lunch money and various small sums kindly given to me to take myself to the movies, I collected approximately enough for my fare. It did not seem advisable to get the money from the airport in case the Russian idea was not officially considered a good one. It looked like one of those things that it is best to do first and ask about afterwards. There came a day when I was not likely to be missed and off I went to the station only to find that my funds were a nickel short of the price of a return ticket. This was heart-breaking and, just as I was about to leave the station, I decided to go anyway and trust to luck about getting back. The Russian Consul seemed very young and surprised but nice about the matter. He said they were foreigners in Canada and he could do nothing to influence them. The ferry as far as Alaska was operated by the US but from there Russian pilots took over. "Maybe if you were in Alaska ..." he said with a twinkle in his eye, penetrating the almost oriental air of inscrutability. He would not tell me whereabouts in Alaska to go or whom to apply to, but he lent me a dollar to get home and that left 20 cents over for lunch. All the way back I kept thinking "Maybe if you were in Alaska ..."

Probably that consul thought I was crazy and crazier still when he got his dollar back by post a few days later.

On the train between Ottawa and Montreal I sat next to a dear old Canadian brigadier who looked just like a mixture between the Duke of Wellington and C Aubrey Smith. He was full of old world courtesy. Guessing that I was English and suspecting a war romance, he asked me if I had had a good crossing. I said "Oh, uneventful". He explained that the last time he had been to Britain he had flown back and maybe after the war I too would be able to fly across the Atlantic. He was so kind and fatherly that even if I had not been travelling incognito I would never have had the heart to spoil things.

When, after 3 weeks waiting, we eventually received a reply from London, the Air Vice Marshal had to tell me about it personally. The AVM had been in bed with flu when I arrived and no-one had dared to tell him what had happened. The first time he heard about it was over the radio in a local news bulletin and he was almighty peeved about it. It was a sore point with the Air Marshal in London too, as he had to go up to Prestwick to inspect the defences, which must have given him a considerable headache. From what I knew of British officialdom there might be trouble brewing and I had no wish to be shanghaied off and locked up again. It would have been possible to get out of that Immigration Building had one been able to pick a lock and, from a source that doubtless would have shaken officialdom to its core, I was presented with two gadgets for doing this. I stuffed them into my girdle together with a \$10 bill and they stuck into me every time I bent down.

The AVM had sounded very nice but he opened the interview on a bad note : "So you are the bad little girl who has caused us all this trouble." Now I was not so old that I wanted to be 'little girdled'; so I said "Yes, I expect it gave you a headache" and from then on we probably made a bad impression on each other. Apparently the message was "Send the girl back and do not let the story get out" but, as they could not publicly contradict the Canadian authorities, this had to be done diplomatically. I was to be sent back in 4 days time and, as a special treat for being good about the Press, the journey was to be by air. What a line - "Be a good little girl and you will get a ride in a great big aeroplane" - and me, a half trained flight engineer. The AVM said that I would probably be fined for leaving the country and if I sold the story, I would probably be sent to jail. If he had wanted to make me sell it and bolt, he could not have put it in a more persuasive manner. So long as it was to oblige the people who had helped me in Canada it seemed reasonable enough to keep quiet but I was beginning to suspect that maybe the Press were not as terrifying as everybody made out. I was just being shut up to save face for certain people at home.

Besides, cash was necessary. "Maybe if you were in Alaska ..." Long distance ferrying across Siberia half way round the world is real flying and British and American women had done such flights before the war. Perhaps if I started as a mechanic, I could work my way up. I went

straight back to town, phoned the owner of a paper and arranged to meet his news editor in the lounge of the Ritz Carlton immediately. This was not a good place as several brass-hats lived there. So we did the deal over a drink in the Yacht Club bar. At first talk hovered round the \$750 to \$1000 mark for the North American rights but we eventually settled on \$500 and 50% of anything over that. When one is used to thinking in Pounds, \$500 sounds an enormous amount. It was agreed that the English rights should be sold separately and, when someone phoned up to inquire about the Australian rights (which did not sell anyhow), I just took two aspirins and went to bed. We decided to hold the story for a week or two which would give me time to either get that flight home or make a get-away. To add to the excitement, an anonymous Mrs A phoned to say that her two sons in the Air Force had told her that I was being shanghaied back and, if it would help at all, she was ready to hide me in her house in the mountains. This was real melodrama and very sporting of her. We never managed to meet but - thank you very much indeed.

In the long run the AVM found that he had no room for me on the plane and it was decided to send me home by sea after Christmas. I asked permission to go and stay with a lady in Toronto who had kindly asked me to stay. I had a sort of hunch that I might change my mind on the way and the journey might be longer.

I had written up my story, apparently efficiently, and tried to get sent by the paper to Alaska to get a story on the Russian girls. The news editor thought this was a good idea but the owner of the paper said no; the north-west staging route was still on the secret list and he would probably not be allowed to use the story. Still, if I could get anything by the censor ... Edmonton was said to be full of Russians, going to ball-games, sitting in drugstores. There were only three days left until Christmas. It was impossible to get an airline priority but by rail there was just time to get there and, if I did not contact the Russian girls, to get back in time for the boat. As it was I nearly missed the train, in which case the rest of the story would have been different. Arriving at the station just two minutes before the train was due to leave, I found there was a long line in front of the booking office. Seeing my agonised expression, someone pushed me to the front. The clerk seemed to take hours to fetch the ticket and change. As usual several pairs of shoes and parcels were tied to the outside of my little suitcase and I tripped over something and fell down the stairs onto the platform. Scrambling up again, I shot into the nearest train door and landed breathless at the feet of a rather surprised looking coloured porter. Four hours later the train left.

Chapter 7

Now we have some pretty good railway trains in Britain. The Silver Jubilee does the run from London to Newcastle at an average of 67 mph. We hear so much about Canadian Railways that I expected them to go batting across the continent from coast to coast at much the same speed. So it was rather a disappointment when we crawled along occasionally hitting the high at 35 mph and stopping to blow the whistle before going round each curve. It is only after several hours that you realise how very comfortable they are and how remarkable it is that the service can be operated at all in winter. After living on a crowded island, the backwoods between Ottawa and Vancouver were a revelation. It is unbelievable to travel for more than 24 hours without seeing a real town, the few halts consisting of small groups of houses all centred around railway activity, and for hours we passed through a wilderness of trees, rock and snow without roads, paths or signals. Winnipeg and the prairies on Christmas Day looked bleak and dreary but inside the train everything was very cheerful. There were several graduates from an Air Force Flying School going home on leave and many sailors going through to Vancouver. Probably nobody in our coach was over 30. One WD and a sailor went into a huddle on the first evening and remained like that to the end of the journey. Our coloured porter was an excellent raconteur and entertained us non-stop with stories of the celebrities he had met; the jobs he had done which included dancing on the stage, playing in a dance band and being a steward on board ship during a particularly hot convoy to Murmansk; his girl-friends; the joys of marijuana; and eventually about his wife. He also spent a good half hour describing the glories of a zoot-suit, which was then quite new. That man ought to have written a book.

The only awful moment of the whole trip was when I lost my purse. I had just settled down for the night when I realised it was missing and that the last time I could remember having it was when I was cleaning my teeth. I hurried off to look in the wash room but it wasn't there. I rooted frantically among the bed clothes but without a sign of it. The sleeping car attendant had a good look too, but without luck. Here was a real fix - stranded in the middle of a strange continent without a cent. Just then the sergeant in the bunk below stuck his head out and said "Hey, blondie, you lost something?" and there was the purse which had slipped down behind the curtain. I could have kissed him.

A serviceman returning from overseas advised me to contact Mayor Clerk in Edmonton and ask him where to find the Russians. This sounded almost as much cheek as phoning the Lord Mayor of London to find out where to change for the Elephant and Castle, but he said that the mayor was a very good scout indeed. The first person I spoke to on arrival while looking for a hotel was an individual in a snappy little fur cap who replied with a charming accent that he was a stranger in town. It might have been a good idea if I had grabbed him and said "Excuse me but are you a Russian?" but on second thoughts I decided that might be considered rude.

Planes bearing the Russian red star in a white circle were zooming overhead all the time and I walked around with a crick in my neck through looking up and nearly having hiccoughs with excitement just in case they were being flown by Russian girls. Then I got through to the telephone exchange and asked them where Mayor Clerk lived and they said "Oh, he's been dead several years." But I collected the address of the current mayor, Mayor Fry, and went round to see him. There was no-one at home; so I parked the chassis on the door-step and considered what to do next. Just then the mayor and mayoress arrived back from church and very kindly asked me to stop to lunch. Mayor Fry didn't know if there were any Russians in town as that sort of thing did not come under his jurisdiction but he took the trouble to run me out to the airport personally and arranged for me to meet the manager the next day. Edmonton has a fine and rapidly developing airport surprisingly near the centre of the city. At that time it was very largely taken over by the US Army. Next day I got a conducted tour round the control tower which was very interesting. I also learnt that there were no Russians in town at present, though they did come sometimes, usually bringing a great many presents to take back with them, and that they took over the staging route at Fairbanks Alaska. It was not possible to go by bus up the Alaska highway. Women were only taken in large groups by prior arrangement because of the difficulties of accommodation on overnight stops. There was nothing for it but to fly and that was going to cost me practically all I'd got.

The evening paper came out with a story about me and a possible relation (perhaps a second cousin once removed by marriage) came round to the hotel. This relation had been a jockey until he was banned off the turf and had later done what sounds like a lovely job - the man who stands outside the circus tent and yells "Walk up, walk up, all the fun of the fair." He was now a foreman in the aircraft factory where his wife, the real relation, was working swing shift. Now the natural way to get to know a new relation is over a drink. So I suggested we headed for the bar, not realising that in Edmonton hotels this cannot be done. Suspecting I was desperately thirsty, the poor man insisted on running several blocks home to fetch his month's liquor ration which we had to smuggle upstairs to my room. What a strange local custom - and what a peculiar way to get acquainted with a new relation. He took me round to meet a friend who had spent several years up North and we looked at pictures of moose and caribou, dog-teams, people fishing through holes in the ice, northern lights and mountains - "You know how they call mountains after Big Shots like McKinley and others. Well, if they named each mountain after all the people in Canada, there wouldn't be enough names to go round all the mountains there are up there!" I went to sleep dreaming about all those mountains.

Having definitely missed the train to catch the boat, I sent a telegram to the Air Vice Marshal saying "Hot on trail of real flying job. Sorry to inconvenience. Please give passage home to a more deserving case." He was probably not best pleased! Waiting for the plane at the airport before it was light next morning, it suddenly seemed awfully sad to be going away from everything I knew and understood. I thought of the nice cosy cabin in that ship going home and how everybody would laugh at my adventures so far. Then I got talking to some people

who were also waiting for the plane and who gave me notes of introduction to several people in Fairbanks. The adventure began to seem fun again.

We took off in darkness heading for Whitehorse Yukon Territory in easy stages with many stops - Grand Prairie, Fort St John, Fort Nelson and Watson Lake. The lights of Edmonton glistened in a clean square pattern below but soon the sky began to show light. Then up came the cheerful sun. How vastly superior one feels up in the air catching its rays before the world below. And there were the mountains all along the western horizon with the sunlight glistening on the snow-capped peaks - like dragon's teeth. For a while we flew over prairie which, though so far north, is noted for its quick-growing crops. Then we struck out over the 'sticks' - millions of them! It was hard to believe there could be so many coniferous trees in the world. If all the warring tribes of Europe were suddenly dumped in that region, they would undoubtedly be so busy cutting down trees that they would have no time to have another war for at least 20 years! For several hundred miles we flew over the Alaska Highway (ALCAN) - a straight line striking across the country connecting towns which from the air looked no bigger than chicken farms. Frozen snow-covered streams also looked surprisingly like roads but would be distinguished by their many curves. Once we flew low to have a good look at the handsome new bridge over the Peace River. After lunch we crossed a range of mountains suitably draped in wisps of cloud. All in all it was not ideal country for forced landings, although there were snow-covered lakes where this would have been possible. US Army transports flying in the North have their wing tips and rudders painted scarlet so as to be easier to find in this huge uninhabited area.

Around 4 o'clock we arrived at Whitehorse, 1000 miles from Edmonton and an up and coming town lying 400 miles south of the Arctic Circle. This was the end of the route served by Canadian Pacific Airlines and there was no plane out to Fairbanks until next morning. The Whitehorse Inn, like its theatrical namesake, is made out of wood but square like a box and with no ornaments. Inside it looked a bit like the usual saloon in a Western, except that it had recently gone dry so that there were no bottles behind the bar for the customers to shoot at! Upstairs the illusion was continued by a magazine picture of a girl in Mae West costume pinned up in the room which I shared with a lady parson who was travelling to a religious convention in Kansas. She kindly gave me more notes of introduction to people in Fairbanks.

Tired and happy, I went to sleep that night feeling as though I had really reached a 'different' part of the world.

Chapter 8

Next morning brought to light the sad fact that my passage to Fairbanks would have to be paid for in US dollars or their equivalent. This made my Canadian funds shrink horribly and I looked like arriving in Fairbanks with only 2 bucks left - none too healthy a situation. It seemed a good idea to stay in Whitehorse for a day or two, get a job and in the meantime try and scrounge a ride up the remaining 600 miles of the ALCAN.

Whitehorse was well worth a second look. The impressively busy airport is situated on a shelf above the valley while the town is by the river, a tributary of the Yukon. The main street looks rather like something from a Western but with snow and several husky dogs around. These weren't working dogs from dog-teams as these have to be kept tied up or else they won't work but all the same they were impressive enough as they lay sunning themselves in doorways - the sort of dogs you step round very carefully.

Although it was in Canada, the town was at the time under US military law and the inhabitants were very grateful to the Army Engineers for installing a proper house to house water supply. There are three ways of getting to Whitehorse : by air, up the ALCAN or the old route by the Yukon and White Pass Railway which was built in gold rush days from Skagway on the Alaska coast about 100 miles away. In summer it is possible to go still further North to Dawson almost on the Arctic Ocean, travelling down the river in an old wooden stern-wheeler. Normally the river is frozen from October to April but this was a very mild winter and the first Christmas within living memory that it had not been ice-bound. The water was turquoise blue-green with big lumps of floating ice. The weather was very dry with temperatures around zero every night while at the same time the year before it had been 60 below.

I made several inquiries about getting a ride to Fairbanks. One kind old lorry driver tried to dissuade me - "You'll get there and maybe not get any flying; have no money; and then what do you think they will all be after?" I told him that by the look in his eye I had a pretty good idea. He even offered to pay for me to stay another night in the Whitehorse Inn, think it over and go back to Edmonton. Other people said that waitresses in Fairbanks earned \$8 a shift and as much again in tips, which was terrific. A handsome sergeant thought he could manage some transport next week. In the meantime he was off on a big hunting trip, shooting sheep from a jeep. Considered sensibly, the best thing to do was to get a job and then, having earned enough funds, move on. Working is far more of an adventure for an Englishwoman than it would be for an American girl under the same circumstances. One never hears of English people of either sex working their way through college. The best you can do is go to night school after a full day's work. Probably no-one has ever washed dishes, been a waitress or sold magazine subscriptions to get through Oxford or Cambridge. Perhaps a few self-made men have earned their education but it must have been with considerable sacrifice as wages are so low. With the help of the editor of the local paper I was able to get a job washing dishes at the Blue Owl

Coffee Shop at 60 cents an hour. Maybe that sounds very little by US standards but it was more than Bobby McRobert got as chief flight engineer in Scotland; so I was very impressed. The proprietor of the cafe had been there two years and reckoned that if the boom lasted another three he would have made enough to retire. So you can imagine how those dishes piled up, and to conform with US regulations everything had to be sterilised in boiling water heated on the wood stove.

Fixing the necessary financial formalities before going to Alaska led to a meeting with the local bank manager, Mr Hardy, who very kindly asked me to stay with his family. After reading so much Robert Service it did seem a coincidence to be staying with his successor. So you bet I had to write to the Dirty Crew and tell them all about it, and about how Sam McGee's cabin was still there. The bank at Whitehorse is about the remotest branch of the Bank of Commerce and, owing to the building of the ALCAN, the Canola project and the air staging route were doing an enormously increased amount of business. Six extra girl clerks had been sent up from Vancouver to help out and all lived together in an apartment over the bank. But in spite of all the funds that the bank must have had, it would only pay the girls' fare home on leave once every two years, though it was only one day's flight away. Mr and Mrs Hardy introduced me to many friends and later I had long letters from them all about the northern lights which never deigned to put on a show during my stay.

I met the Public Relations Officer from North West Service Command. He was a poet who had had some poems included in a magazine edited by a certain writer unofficially adopted as bard by the Welsh Ballet, which just shows how small the world is. He asked me to speak to the officers about my journey one evening before the movie. This was very exciting as I had never spoken in public before except to say "Beans, sir. Penny a bag" in Jack and the Beanstalk. The US Army certainly gave me a good time. We saw in the New Year rushing around from one dance to another and I was even introduced to the General who looked more like a successful businessman, whereas British Generals usually look horsy. Yanks in the Yukon seemed to live far more comfortably, as regards heating, buildings, food, etc, than most other people elsewhere. In fact the official view on comfort, trying to give the men the same things that they might possibly enjoy at home, such as washing-machines on board ship, is very different from the British attitude where you sometimes suspect that too much comfort would be considered bad for us. To this day they still take the bunks out of ships bought from the USA so that the men can sleep in hammocks as they did in Nelson's day. What fun it would be to take an Admiral for a ride in a coach and four when he is in a hurry. Dammit all, Nelson travelled that way!

There was another English girl working at the Blue Owl. She had got fed up with being a typist in London at \$5 a week before the war. So she had worked her way out as a stewardess on a French ship via Panama; married in Vancouver and come North with her husband prospecting for gold. They and their 18 month old son lived in a caravan on skids which must

be no picnic when the temperature gets down to 60 below. She told stories of camps North of the Arctic Circle where they listened to wolves howling at night. At the time her big ambition was to operate a caterpillar tractor on construction work as there was big money in this, but being a woman she wasn't allowed to. It sounded a tough life but maybe not as tough as trying to live in London on \$5 a week.

After two weeks I had saved enough money and, well, if I sold my liquor ration, would that make me a bootlegger? The ration in Yukon Territory is twice that in other parts of Canada, perhaps to keep out the cold, and the line up on the first of the month was something worth seeing. Watched over by a Mountie, it consisted of the most amazing characters who apparently came in from their cabins in the woods once a month just for this. They wore layer upon layer of checked shirts, had flowing beards and often long hair right down to their shoulders. At last with \$25 to spare I bought my ticket to Fairbanks and, complete with Army travel permit, was ready to go on with the Russian hunt. "Maybe if you were in Alaska ...". Of course the immigration officials were the stumbling block again - they have them even in the Yukon. Although I had an immigration card, I had no passport; so I couldn't go. Neither was it feasible to bum a ride up the ALCAN as I had at first hoped. The North-West of Canada is so sparsely populated that news travels fast and everyone knows all about everyone else. Also there are 9 checkpoints between Whitehorse and Fairbanks and the trucks are searched at each one. If I was caught and deported, I wouldn't be able to come back onto US territory for a year and a day. It seemed better to try and get hold of the passport which was being prepared for me to go back to England and which was presumably still in the hands of the RAF. The Maxwells whose child I had been looking after in Montreal had been posted out to Pat Bay near Victoria BC and had previously offered me the job for the duration with free flying training after the war. Only that was too long to wait. I could always rejoin them.

As it was too expensive to fly down to BC, the only thing seemed to be to take the train to Skagway which, though it was in Alaska, was meant to be a free transit town for people travelling to and from Yukon Territory. From there on I could go by boat to Vancouver. Of course if I could slip round to Fairbanks via Seaward

The Yukon and White Pass Railway is rather like one always imagines the Trans Siberia to be and which it probably isn't at all. We started out at 8 am in inky darkness, no-one having bothered to light the oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. Heat came from a wood stove which smoked abominably. For lunch we disembarked at the deserted town of Bennett on Bennett Lake. In gold rush days this was a town of several thousand inhabitants but now it had only a few dozen. The top of the pass was wrapped in thin white mist through which one could sometimes see the glistening sunlit mountains - very tantalising. On the western side the line descends very steeply and the train ahead could be seen creeping round the steep sides of the valley below. This line has scarcely been altered at all since gold rush days. Normally carrying one train a week in the summer, it was now carrying one a day all year round operated by the

US Army. It seemed to be standing up to the strain very well, though some of the high wooden bridges looked startlingly flimsy. We made the journey in almost scheduled time which was lucky as it had been known to take several days.

Once immigration officials came down the train asking us if we were Canadian or American. Well, as there was no alternative, I thought I might as well be Canadian; it seemed the nearest thing. Later we had to fill in forms. So I said 'Permanently British and temporarily Canadian' as, having both a Canadian and a British identity card and no passport, I didn't really know what I was - and furthermore didn't much care. This business of nationalities is very overdone, isn't it? It was after office hours when we arrived and very sensibly no-one gave a damn about my irregular international status. But any hopes I had of slipping round unobserved via Seaward were dashed. As I stepped off the train, there was a blinding flash, a yell of "Got you" and there was Margie Collins, a photographer from New York, who had been in Whitehorse taking pictures of life in the frozen North for various periodicals. In Skagway her assignment covered the railway where she had a grand time running around on a little petrol engine called a Casey, and the USO where I went along with her.

The Dock Battalion was having a dance that night and as girls are pretty scarce in those parts I collected enough dates to last several months. A brakeman from the Railway Battalion whom I had met on the train solved the problem by getting a Major to appoint him my official escort for the next evening. In Alaska the wolves really howl in the movies not only at Dotty Lamoure and Sarong but at all the 3 female members of the audience as they enter for, as they tell you with great pathos and candour, "We are not allowed out with the Indian squaws", who are generally known as 'smoked meat'.

Next day I contacted the local immigration officer, just to be on the right side of the law. He was a cheerful customer who had gone AWOL from France in the last war and seen more of the British Isles than I ever had. He had even been to Dublin and the Outer Hebrides.

The Pullen House, the only hotel then open, is a book in itself. Mrs Pullen who started it is still in attendance and the hall is full of photos of Skagway in its heyday - tall-hatted whiskered gentlemen riding in the first automobile in Alaska; Mrs Pullen also in a tall hat riding side-saddle; and again as a fine figure of a woman, hourglass style, in Indian costume with her lovely hair falling way down to her knees; and of course the notorious bearded Soapy Smith. The main street of Skagway still looked surprisingly like the old days but apparently they keep it that way even down to the holes in the road. In the museum were the gaming tables used in Soapy's saloon and his gun marked with notches for the guys he had killed. There was a big case full of the medals Mrs Pullen's son had won in the last war. He had been the first West Point cadet to have come from Alaska, was decorated for bravery by all the Allies, and was killed as a Colonel. The graveyard of the prospectors was a pathetic place. None of those buried there were over 50 which shows how hard life must have been, and there were many children and babies. Soapy was put right at the back with the sort of tombstone you might have

given a dog but the man who shot him had a monument which read "Crime Does Not Pay". The final link with the gold rush was a happy old drunk who weaved about the hotel offering pop-corn to all and sundry and reminiscing to all who could follow what he said.

Four soldiers were operating a radio station in connection with the USO - a good way of passing the long winter evenings, as reception from outside is generally very bad. They asked me to broadcast and after that I was never able to buy myself a meal in the town. Someone always spotted my accent and treated me.

It would have been fun to stay in Skagway longer and it was sad to leave after three days, though even this had its funny side. For some reason the boat was late leaving and did not sail until 5 am. Meanwhile a crate of liquor had accidentally (?) come adrift and, hating to see such waste, certain persons on the dock had put it where they knew it would be appreciated. I had been spending the evening with the CPR manager and his wife and didn't know about this incident. Coming on board, I went straight to my cabin and when a face I had danced with at the USO stuck its head round the door and said "Have a drink", I rashly said "You bet." When the face returned with a bottle of whisky I realised what a colossal mistake I had made because the man attached to it was very drunk and, in a natural way, an awful nuisance. The best thing to do seemed to go on deck for a bit of air, politely suggesting that it might be a good thing if he was gone by the time I returned. The MP on duty at the top of the stairs made some low crack to which I cracked back and it was only when he followed full of apologies that I realised that he was in the same happy condition. He kept saying that, as he was of Scottish stock, he must be respectable. I agreed with him and headed back for the cabin, hoping that the other guy would have gone by now. But no, there he was staggering up the stairs, trailing my only pair of pyjamas behind him, blissfully oblivious to everything. This was serious. Whacking the policeman on the back to restore him to semi-sobriety, I said "Look, that man's got my lingerie." After a few moments the idea penetrated and the two of them went into a fight all over the deck - one of those lovely loose-limbed fights where the drunks hit everything except each other, and with me skipping round like a referee trying to retrieve the pyjamas which were getting too dirty to be worn anyway. Just then I looked up and there were all the ship's officers watching, stone cold sober. What would you have done? What would Emily Post have done for that matter? Claimed the pyjamas of left them?

Chapter 9

The voyage from Alaska to Vancouver via the inner passage is noted for its beautiful scenery. Mighty snow-capped mountains reach way up to the sky. Cold blue glaciers move slowly down and huge waterfalls pour into the sea - so they say. I dunno. I never saw any of it, never saw anything but rain and mist. People would say "There is a very fine glacier there if only you could see it"; "We must be passing such and such a mountain now if only you could see it" and all there was to be seen was the rocks and trees on the immediate shore, grey clouds, the falling rain and wheeling sea-gulls. Still it was impressive enough to think that this was water from the Pacific, right round the other side of the world, from nearly where the map joined.

The passengers on the 'Princess Norah' were mainly civilian workers returning from their various projects, having earned large sums of money which they got rid of principally by playing poker and shooting craps. There was also a fair sprinkling of 'Terminites', these being individuals who sign up for work in the North, stay just long enough to grow a fierce crop of whiskers, have their photos taken to send to their girl-friends, then chuck the whole thing up!

The nicest part of the whole four days voyage was meeting Johnny from Minneapolis who was going home to enlist after spending some time as a welder on the pipe-line up in the Arctic. He was one of the nicest men I have ever met, and for his age one of the most interesting. At 26 he had already tried flying both as a crop-duster and as an instructor; made quite a bit of money in various commercial ventures and lost it again. He had got married and got no kids, though unfortunately his wife had recently run off with some-one else. And he had an old yacht in which he meant to go round the world after the War. Things don't happen to young men so quickly in England - at least they didn't before the War. It is harder to make money in a country that is not still developing and many boys go into their fathers' business which means that they are nearer 30 than 20 before they can afford to marry.

It was Johnny who promised to 'bring me back alive' when the authorities weren't going to let me ashore at Juneau (presumably they thought I was going to stow away again). He knew a barber who shot enormous bears on Kodiak Island and we went and talked bears to the barber while he shaved customers. Then we went to the Bubble Bar at the Baronoff and thawed out in the traditional manner. Juneau is noted for gold, liquor and tarts and Johnny seemed to be quite well informed about all three. The 'Norah' was meant to be a dry ship but the coast guard just gave a broad wink when we came back with our pockets bulging with 150 proof rum. Disgruntled by the lack of scenery, we retired to Johnny's cabin where a kindly steward kept us plied with lime, coke and ice - the basis of many successful Cuba-Libras; also with oranges and grapes in true Garboesque tradition. Probably people thought we were having a hell of an affair and even the two other men sharing the cabin always knocked on the door before they came in. Though for a while it did look as though we were heading for a big romance, falling

in love is something that either happens or it doesn't; and this time it didn't quite. We did consider running off together but Johnny was so well informed that he was far more fun talking about atoms than making love. Lots of men are but they don't realise it. Maybe I didn't give him a real break. Anyway we said goodbye on the dock at Prince Rupert at 1am while sinking the last of the rum. Johnny departed with a terrific glint in his eye, the determination to sort out his domestic problems and add to his family, which was probably what he wanted anyway. On second thoughts I am just a bit sorry I didn't run away with that man.

When I arrived at Pat Bay I phoned the RAF to find out if the new CO had arrived yet and they said no. As a matter of fact he had, but then one end of a station never knows what the other is doing. There was no room in the village hotel. Besides after travelling so far I had very little money left. I was busy phoning from the village store, trying to find accommodation, when a lady who was doing her shopping overheard me and asked me to come and stay for a few days until my friends arrived. It was one of the kindest invitations imaginable, just inviting a complete stranger who was stranded.

Mrs Todd's husband worked permanent nights in a shipyard in Victoria. They lived in a little wooden house with no running water or indoor sanitation and had two children, a dog and a cat. They preferred to live in this little summer house by the shore rather than in the town because it was grand for the children having miles of beach and woods to play in. Mr Todd told stories of the Russian ships that came into the port and of the girl sailors, even of ships with all women crews. One woman skipper had been given a bouquet by the mayor of a local town but had remarked, practically, "Why didn't you give the money to the Red Cross?" Another Russian ship had salvaged a Liberty ship which had cracked in icy Alaskan waters. The engineer on the Russian ship was a woman and Mr Todd said he had never seen such a clean engine-room in his life. Then there was a girl sailor who had a pet bear. A press-man had thought he had a way with bears, but he hadn't and the bear had socked him one, leaving him off work for some time. It all sounded exciting - real adventure.

It was fun seeing the Maxwells again and I obtained my passport quite easily. However I made one big mistake. Look, never introduce small Limey kids to chewing gum! A soldier in Skagway had given me an enormous box of it as he couldn't get any candy. Ducks are allergic to water compared to the way those children took to gum. There were frequent raids on the box and their jaws seemed to be constantly working. Every evening at bed-time I had to fish gum from small mouths before their father came to say good-night to them, as he thought it was a vulgar habit. As if that wasn't bad enough, we were billeted in a tastefully and expensively furnished house and the furnishings took an awful beating. There was gum on the rugs, gum trodden into the stair carpet, sticky wads of gum on door handles, on antique table legs and on the underneath of pillow cases. It must have been heart-breaking for the children when they went home and couldn't get any more supplies.

Just then something terrific happened. We heard a broadcast from Seattle advertising flying training for civilians. I had already written to several flying magazines to find out if there was anywhere I could learn in war-time but they all seemed very vague and it appeared as though all civilian flying had been closed down for the duration, as in Canada. This broadcast altered the situation completely. Now it seemed that all I would have to do would be to go to Seattle and learn. I would be in the game at last. But then came the rub, and again in the form of immigration and currency restrictions. To counter-balance war-time expenditure Canadians were not allowed to take more than \$5 to the States. Financially they were prisoners in their own country (as too were English people). I found that I would be allowed to take just \$5 to Seattle to pay for my flying and, as officially one is not allowed to work on a visitor's visa, it would have to pay for my keep too. We reckoned it would take about 6 weeks to put in the necessary flying hours and the only way I could manage it was to get a US citizen to give me a sworn affidavit of support. This was awkward as I didn't really know any US citizens other than soldiers up North, Biff who was supposed to be in Murmansk and Johnny. I had telegraphed Johnny discreetly as soon as I got my passport and had received a long reply - "Just completed delicious second honeymoon. Everything working out as planned. Irene and I would be very pleased if you would come and stay. Wire time of arrival. Try arrive day as working nights."

I began to wonder if it would not be easier if I tried for a 28 day border crossing card. I didn't seem to be making much headway in Victoria, so I thought I would try at the office in Vancouver and this time not mention anything about flying. This seemed to be working fine and we had nearly got things fixed when they asked to see my Canadian Immigration Card which had 'Stowaway' typed across it in large letters. The official shied like a horse and dropped the whole matter. There was nothing for it but to write to Johnny and in the meantime get a job in Vancouver, as the Maxwells were getting a proper nursery governess. My landlady suggested I try a certain fruit-juice shop and soon I was selling such delectable mixtures as carrot and orange, carrot and ice-cream and carrot and parsley. Hats off to anyone who can get juice out of parsley. On the walls hung lists of the vitamins contained in the different juices and their uses, together with pictures of poor little rats suffering from various deficiencies. One rat was only a skeleton and facetious customers were always asking "What happens if this fellow takes his Vitamin A?" The motto of the firm was 'Drink your way to health' and we were frequently visited by sailors who had taken this a little too seriously on other premises. They used to stagger in looking utterly miserable and ask us what was good for a hangover. Unfortunately nature has provided no lightning cure.

The proprietor and his wife were a kindly old Australian couple who asked me to stay with them. They were keen spiritualists and took me to several meetings. To be honest, I am a cynic about this and hoped that there would be ghostly hands floating about and materialisations, but there was nothing of the kind. Everybody was very sincere and devout and just saw people standing behind each other. Apparently the spirits said I was going to go somewhere else

before going home and it was going to make me very happy. I was going to get three letters, one of which would bring good news. My hosts also believed the end of the world was coming soon; that Hitler had cloven hooves; and that a hostile Army of Russians was going to come marching down the Alaska Highway because it said so in the Bible if one knew how to interpret it. Unfortunately I said the wrong thing about one of these beliefs and brought the combined wrath of the prophets down on my head. So I moved out. I hate quarrelling with people (as apart from baiting officials) but really it was rather a relief to be on my own again. My take home pay of \$12 a week didn't go far and, vitamins or no, you can't live on fruit juice - I know, I've tried. We used to work all evening without a break and the last straw was when I got caught eating fish and chips under the counter - well, maybe it is not quite the thing to do in a health shop.

In the meantime a letter arrived from Johnny but it had crossed with mine in the post and he was off to sea in the Navy. He said he had been given an old aircraft if he was willing to repair it and he had hoped to teach me himself. It sounded a terrific set-up and lots of fun. Now I was in a sad position, not knowing any more Americans except soldiers in Yukon Territory and Alaska. Here was my chance to fly after nearly four years trying. It was torture listening to those broadcasts. I made friends with an American girl who was obliged to stay in Canada in order to get a divorce from her American husband whom she had married on the wrong side of the border. Now what good does that do to morality or international relations? She was passing the time getting a new set of teeth. It seemed very bad luck to be getting rid of a husband and all her teeth at the ripe old age of 22. Ricki had an aunt somewhere who she thought would help but nothing came of it.

Someone then gave me an introduction to a local paper almost begging for aid and which wanted to write up my story. On my behalf they ran an ad in the Information Wanted column saying "Will any American interested in a war-winning idea, probably expensive, possibly amusing, apply box such and such". I had only one reply and he wasn't a US citizen but he was good company.

Looking through the ad columns (what a lot of people claiming to tell the future), I came upon one saying "Wonderful new source of mechanical power. Too large for one to handle. Inventor would welcome partner." Obviously partner meant capital and, not having any, I felt safe going to see what it was all about. Well, believe it or not, that guy claimed to have solved the whole business of perpetual motion. 'Nae bother at all'. He said it was all a question of hydraulics and all you had to do was keep the thing topped up. Would I care to invest? When asked to display the machine, he said it wasn't quite finished yet but, as proof, he showed me a bit of what looked very like the casing of an aircraft engine supercharger - 'there is one born every minute.' I said that anything as wonderful as this new source of power must be utilised at once for the war effort. As I knew a lot of high up officers in the RAF, I would be only too pleased to put it straight into their hands. Then of course his fortune would be made. At this

the poor inventor began to look a bit green and said that, at this stage of development, it would be better not to force things. In the meantime, if I hadn't any money, what about doing a bit of typing for him? At that I left, still saying I would make a special point of seeing that his wonderful invention was used by the Allies. The poor man was getting steadily greener.

Another girl working at the fruit juice shop had told me that to make better money I should try working in a Chinese Restaurant, even though some waitresses thought this was a social come-down. Now why should anyone think it undignified to work for the Chinese? On the farm where we stayed with the Maxwells we had a Chinese cow-man who had taught young Tessa, aged 4, to milk the cow. She was very proud of herself. Anyone with enough patience to teach a four-year old to milk must have a lot more patience than most of us and a fundamentally friendly nature. As a nanny Hong was wonderful and we could leave the children playing happily in the yard for hours. They soon had a wonderful flow of pidgin English. Apart from this I was a great admirer of Chinese poetry and Lin Yutang, and had a charming Pekinese. Working in a Chinese restaurant sounded a good idea.

The restaurant was called the 'Liberty'. It said 'Liberty' and 'Chop Suey' in red lights outside. It was definitely a cheap eating place though not in China Town. The patrons were all white and we had few orders for Chinese dishes. What a lot of people seem to want hamburgers and 'Ave Maria' on the telephone juke box. I had never really been a waitress before but the two Chinese boys behind the counter were very helpful. Only one customer got really ratty and said that he might as well have stayed at home. When I remarked, very politely, that this was at least a practical suggestion, he opened and shut his mouth silently like a goldfish, finished his meal quickly, paid the bill and left with never another word. On Saturday evenings we had a lot of drunks. At first it was difficult to know what to do when they went to sleep all over the counter but the procedure is really quite simple. You just serve up the meal as neatly as if your customer was sober, gently remove any arms that may have got involved in his neighbour's dish, and place the bill beside him. In due course when he sobers up enough to leave, someone will usually fish the money out of his pocket. It was reassuring to see how kind and humorously tolerant everyone was to the drunks.

Though there were several other white girls waiting at table, the kitchen staff were all Orientals of very varied sizes and shapes. One could go to the door and yell an order of, say, ham and eggs and the order would be repeated from cook to cook apparently in a dozen or more different languages or dialects until it was completely unrecognisable. Five minutes later out would come, surprisingly, ham and eggs. Sometimes I got the orders mixed up and yelled "Veal Hash" when I meant "Veal Heart". This always led to a lot of explosive language and I wondered if it was just sounds of annoyance or real ancient Chinese oaths. The proprietor was about 4 feet high and it was a constant source of worry that one day while carrying a load of dishes I would trip over him. The place was neither cleaner nor dirtier than any similar cheap white restaurant would have been.

Many people in British Columbia believe that Orientals underpay their help and for this reason some Orientals still have no vote. This firm paid us the full part-time rate which amounts to far more than the weekly rate. They never made any deduction for food and always gave us two good meals even if we only worked a few hours. Unfortunately the job was only part-time for Saturdays and Sundays. I couldn't afford to remain unemployed all week; so I worked there two days and then got a job in a nice orthodox cafe for the rest of my stay in Vancouver.

At last three letters arrived all together. One was from the proprietor of a flying school whom we had approached for particulars. It sounded so friendly that on the spur of the moment I phoned to Seattle and by that night the affidavit was in the post. The especial kindness of this was that not only was Mr Johnstone willing to be responsible for me all the time I was in the States, but if I had had a crash he would also have been responsible for hospitalising the debris. As to the financial side of things, if I could earn anything towards my training well and good; if not, don't worry. Coming from a complete stranger, such kindness was overwhelming. That should have been the end of my troubles but it wasn't. Having obtained a visa from the consul in Victoria, I then had to go and fix things up with the US Immigration (why have two agencies to do the same thing - what a waste of manpower). They kept me hanging around for an hour or more, then said come again when they were less busy. So I returned and after another long wait they decided they couldn't possibly admit me. I had no visible means of support and I had been brought to Canada by a line not registered to carry immigrants - in other words no other immigrant had been lucky enough to fly out to the New World yet. If the Indians had organised their Immigration Department on the same lines, the Pilgrim Fathers would have turned back at Plymouth Rock. I have still got my exclusion order from the USA. I seem to collect that sort of thing. I am going to have it framed along with my original deportation order from Canada. When I heard the decision, I could have howled - I nearly did in fact. Instead I appealed officially to the Attorney General, then went out, bought some note-paper and a pen nib, retired to the Post Office and wrote to Mrs Roosevelt.

As the reply from Washington would probably take at least 6 weeks, this meant getting another job, in Victoria this time. Having been turned down by a firm which wanted a girl to wrap butter permanently for \$15 a week (what a future) I was taken on by a restaurant that was supposedly 'English'. It was all table work and during the rush hour we did terrific juggling acts with white table cloths and unnecessary silver. We had to wear stockings and find our own black dresses. It was the end of the super slinky one - it wore through at the elbows. Our meals were deducted from our wages. The proprietress was anxious to be considered a lady and there was no ice-cream. Oh England, the completely unrepresentative things that are done in your name!

Our pay was \$15 a week but after deductions for food and insurance we had only \$11 clear. We were frequently told how lucky we were to be allowed a cup of coffee in the morning and

a cup of tea in the after-noon. A room cost \$5 and meals on Sunday \$1 at least. By scrounging my breakfast of bread and butter and never going anywhere or spending anything, it was possible to save \$5 a week. The kind Chinese cook used to save me bits of pie. Poor man, I think he must have worked nights somewhere else. At quiet moments he could usually be found curled up asleep in some corner rather like a little cat. Tips amounted to about \$5 a week at that time. People either like a bad waitress a lot or not at all - and I was a shocking one. During the rush hour we ran around like dogs with tin cans on our tails. I tried to rush twice as fast as anyone else as I still wasn't much good at carrying a lot of plates at once and many were the spills that occurred going through swing doors the wrong way. Once I upset soup in a customer's lap. It happened like this : I was hurrying along with a bowl of soup on a plate. I stopped suddenly; the plate stopped but the soup went on - right onto the knee of a very smartly dressed, severe looking, elderly lady. Well, she was magnificent about it. It was a very nice dress and I didn't even offer to pay to have it cleaned, not having enough money at the time anyway. I just fetched a rag from the kitchen and mopped up quickly and quietly, hoping that the manageress wouldn't see. It wasn't funny really but I couldn't help thinking how much Mummy and Daddy would laugh if they knew and I had to tuck the corners of my mouth into my teeth to stop them going up.

Altogether I made about \$25 in tips in 6 weeks, enough to remodel my wardrobe. It was getting very hot in skiing underwear in May. It was fun betting with myself how much customers would leave. "Now is that old fellow good for a pair of panties (25 cents, homemade)?"

At last a letter arrived from the Central Immigration Office in Washington saying that my letter to Mrs Roosevelt had been forwarded to them (how nice of her not to put it in the waste paper basket) and they would take it all into consideration. Two weeks later, and 4 months after I started trying, I got a telegram saying I could come as a visitor for 3 months - and I had only asked for 6 weeks.

Life was good; life was grand; life was wonderful. I was going to the USA and at last I was going to fly.

Chapter 10

Undoubtedly the time spent learning to fly was the most enjoyable part of the whole adventure. Only it went far too quickly.

Even the journey to Seattle was fun. It was a lovely fine summer's day with just enough breeze to put little white caps on the waves. Just the sort of day you should set out to a new land. The SS Iroquois was a funny little tub and we took all day to get there, calling at several small places on Puget Sound. It all looked lovely.

It was decided that I should concentrate on ground school first. The standard of both technical knowledge and flying required to get a private licence in the USA is higher than in Britain, where no written exam is required and it is not necessary to take an inspector up on the test flight. Doubtless this will be amended as soon as civilian flying is resumed. I was glad to be doing things the thorough way.

Through a friend at the YWCA (the whole dormitory were friends after one evening!) I got a job in the cafeteria of the Pacific Telephone Company just two blocks away from where our classes were held. This was very handy as I could work from 7 to 10.30 am getting breakfast in the meantime, go to school from 10.30 to lunch time, work from lunch until 5 pm and then catch up on notes until evening classes at 7 pm. It took just 3 weeks. By that time I had made a lot of new acquaintances both at school and at the YWCA where most of the girls had come from other states, often from cities thousands of miles away. This does not happen so much in England. Some girls go to London to seek careers but seldom elsewhere and few working class girls (i.e. non-office workers) leave their home towns.

One Seattle paper came and took some photos. I always thought it was a joke in movies when press photographers said "Lift your skirt higher please" but they really do. The picture eventually used (one without knee-appeal when printed) was taken with us looking soulfully out of a window at an empty sky which turned out to be full of aircraft.

Owing to war-time restrictions at that time, there was no civilian flying near Seattle and the school operated from the excellent little airfield at Yakima 150 miles away East of the mountains. Yakima was a very friendly town, and friendly in the most practical manner. After a write-up in the local paper which mentioned that I had come across from Scotland a dear old Scots couple phoned out to the airport and asked me to stay with them for the rest of my visit. Mr and Mrs Ross were darlings. They had come out from Fife where they had been sheep farmers. I think in their heart of hearts they had always been rather homesick. Mrs Ross often used to talk about the man at home who used to come round selling hot pies, the neat white doorsteps and all the old friends they would never see again. Probably only a small percentage of immigrants can ever afford to see their old homes again. Isn't it terrible that even nowadays

when we can say that nowhere in the world is more than 60 hours flying time away we still expect people to make a complete break with all their old associations. Mrs Ross was the jolliest, kindest and most motherly person you can imagine. She had a son fighting with the US Army in the South Pacific and two daughters who were married and living in the district. She said it was lonely without them and she liked having someone young in the house again. She hated Immigration officials as much as I did. When she came out, they had made her pay all her head tax twice out of very scanty savings - once in Glasgow and again when crossing the border from Canada. Though she was later told that this was illegal, she could not afford to go back and identify the parties concerned. They had also threatened to send back one of her children alone, because he had had a gland operation on his neck several years before.

Mrs Ross made wonderful home-made beer and after a scorching day it was grand to bicycle home, bring up a bottle and, settled comfortably on the porch, to uncork it. Sometimes it was excellent but sometimes there would just be a terrific bang, a little foam left in the bottle and some more way up around the top of the window curtains. The habit of sitting in the porch in the evenings is a good idea. You are just far enough away from the neighbours to talk to them if you want to but not so near that you have to. And somehow it looks more friendly not having any fences between the houses.

It was terrific to be flying at last. Mr Johnstone arranged for me to have all my lessons with the chief instructor - a great honour which I probably didn't deserve. The Instructor had recently left the Army Air Force and had trained hundreds of cadets. I chose to fly the Taylorcraft rather than the Piper Cub because to learn quickly it was necessary to concentrate on either a wheel or a stick ship. The school then had several Taylorcraft but only one Cub which would have made it difficult to arrange lessons. Please don't think I was an especially brilliant student - probably about average. If I managed to learn in slightly less time than the other students, it was probably because I had been wanting to learn so long that, when at last I got the chance, I went at it for all I was worth. It took 7 weeks altogether, probably about 6 weeks of flying weather, and I had 43 hours solo and 30 hours dual when I got my licence. It took me 11.5 hours to solo which wasn't very bright and you should have seen my 3 point landings - there, there and there. As the instructor said "You got rabbits in your family?"

When I applied for a student pilot's licence (without which it is illegal to fly solo) I found that as I was an alien I would have to get a letter of introduction from the nearest British Consul. This meant a trip back to Seattle and I was lucky enough to get a ride - and what a ride - on the pillion of a 40 hp motor-bike driven by a veteran dirt track racer and parachute jumper. The after-noon before we went to Toppenish Rodeo and as this friend was also an old rodeo rider he pointed out all the tricks of the trade. Toppenish is in a reservation and there were real Indians there - not round-faced ones like the ones up North who look rather like Eskimos - but dignified big-nosed people, the men with pig-tails and ten gallon hats and the women wearing coloured petticoats rather like the gypsy women at home. Rodeos are banned in England as

being cruel to animals but, all things considered, the livestock seemed to come off much better than the human beings who got knocked out right and left. Many a horse seemed to have a gleam of professional pride in its eye after a particularly successful bucking bout.

I had never seen a 40 hp motorbike in Britain. With taxation based on horse power most motorbikes are from 1.5 to 2.5 hp and are used by workmen as a cheap way of getting to work. We were bowling happily home when suddenly the back tyre burst. Fortunately we were going round a corner and not travelling as fast as previously. As we skidded broadside towards a steep embankment over a stream full of bullrushes, I found myself thinking "You have come half way round the world to fly and now you are going to finish up in a ditch." Fortunately the dirt track racing friend handled the machine magnificently and we finished the right way up with about two feet to spare.

The ride over the Cascades next day was lovely but the business about the consul was worrying. Possibly he would take the position that I had left Britain illegally and refuse to touch the matter. As it turned out he was really handsome about it. Not only did he say I was a loyal subject of His Majesty but added that he could see no reason why I shouldn't have a pilot's licence anyhow.

On the way back we went over the Natches Pass which is over 5000 feet above sea level and with a breath-taking view of Mount Rainier. There were patches of snow by the road-side even in July and lovely white flowers as cool and clean as the snow itself.

After 3 days away from flying my landings seemed to have got even worse and it took another couple of hours before I was allowed to solo. That felt like getting somewhere, though for some time after that getting back to earth was a bit of a problem. It wasn't the actual getting down that was so hard but what happened when I got there. Ground loops were my speciality. You get down all right and are just mopping your brow and saying "Aha, made it again" when you notice you are not going straight down the runway. Then you start trying to think whether the thing steers like a bicycle or a toboggan. The you give it rudder both ways in turn to find out and nothing seems to happen. So you do it again and everything seems to happen. Your thoughts don't get to your feet in time and the next thing you know, there you are with the prop making hay in the long grass all hidden behind a big cloud of dust while everybody over at the school buildings says "Now what has she done?" The worst of it is that, if traffic is heavy, you have to sit there for ages looking silly before you get the light to taxi back. All in all, flying was neither easier nor harder than I had expected; it was like driving a car in that it was easy enough to do badly but you have got to concentrate to cultivate good habits.

The first solo wasn't really so exciting. I had wanted to so much and grappled so hard with those landings that it was really rather a relief when the instructor stepped out and said "Now you take her round three times." "Done it once - Phew - twice - three times - and is life good,

very good?" The first solo spin was a real thrill. I had been told to go up to 3000 feet and try one. So I went up to 4000 feet just to be on the safe side (and in a Taylorcraft that takes ages). I had gone way out over the valley to be all on my own and selected a nice patch over some orchards where, with luck, it wouldn't be bumpy. Of course nothing would really happen if you met a bump in the middle of a spin but until you think it out it is an awe-inspiring thought, and there were some big bumps around Yakima especially in the middle of the day. Well, taking a deep breath and a couple of clearing turns I tried to do a careful spin. It was careful, far too careful. I didn't wait long enough to stall properly and the result was the sort of tight turn that seems to put your stomach through the seat. So I tried the other way and the same thing happened. This went on for about a quarter of an hour, skidding around the sky, getting more and more aggressive until eventually I got her spinning and I'll bet you no-one ever got out of a spin quicker in their lives.

One of the joys and hazards of the airport were the Navy cadets flying aircraft twice as powerful as ours, which must have made us seem very much in the way in the traffic pattern. One of their instructors was a woman. Can you imagine the outcry this would cause in Britain? Hearts of Oak would cease to tick. "A woman teaching the Navy, begad, and a damned attractive woman too." She was the wife of the commander of an aircraft carrier and wisely thought that teaching cadets was better than just waiting. And she was a very competent instructor. Of course she had both an Instructor's and a Commercial rating and several thousand hours flying time but she had only been flying 4 years - just as long as I had been trying to. It makes an awful difference which side of the Atlantic you are born on.

Trying to fly twice a day and hold down a job was difficult. At first I tried working night shift (the only one then available) at the airport cafeteria, flying at 8 am, sleeping all day and then flying again at 6 pm. This didn't work very well as something always seemed to happen during the day. Also I could eat as much as I liked at work. Now for ages I had wondered what fried oysters tasted like because at home we always eat them raw (at 2 am with champagne at the Hunt Ball). At the cafe in Victoria the staff were rigorously limited to the 35 cent lunch. So although I had served plenty of fried oysters, I had never eaten any. Well they were good and so was the chicken fried steak and the fudge sundae.

On the 8 am flight we did spins for the first time and something, probably those oysters, just milled around gently. The next job was in a Triple X, curb hopping. Serving root beer was a heart-breaking business because it looks just like the beer at home and by the end of a hot after-noon I used to work up such a thirst for as pint of bitter. Owing to the irregular flying hours - weather, planes unserviceable, etc - it was impossible to keep that job.

Next I tried working in a cannery, sorting cherries as they came along on a rubber belt; passing the good ones, throwing out the really bad ones and eating the rest. After a while when you shut your eyes, you just see cherries going along on a rubber belt. It was a tiring job as we

were compelled to stand up all the time and for no apparent reason as the job could have been done just as well, if not better, sitting on a packing case. They let me work such hours as I could manage but often when I got there, there was nothing to do and they knocked off so much for a cap, apron and gloves which I never wore that the only pay cheques I ever got were for \$1.32 and \$1.52 each.

Then I got a job thinning apples in an orchard next door to the airport. This paid handsomely - 75 cents an hour - but was it hot. I hit the hottest days of the year and hot weather in Yakima is hot. Round and round those trees I went, lugging the beastly ladder and with my tongue almost hanging out with thirst. Every 5 minutes I had to climb down to have a drink of water from the big bottle in the shade. Unfortunately on an hourly basis I wasn't much of a bargain, and at \$2 a tree the job wasn't a bargain; so that was that. For the next 2 weeks I ate a big breakfast with Mrs Ross every morning, had hamburgers for all other meals and got on with the flying. It was a lovely life just flying. Then funds got very low again and I was lucky enough to get an afternoon shift at the cafeteria, which meant doing both flights in the morning. This didn't matter very much as flying was often stopped in the evenings by winds which blow down from the mountains and are caused by the heat. These winds blow several hundred feet up for some time before they hit the earth and it was odd lying on the ground in a dead calm watching the little aircraft struggling upwind, then scooting back like toboggans on a slide.

It was fun meeting Katie again, a girl from Yakima whom I had met up at Whitehorse when she was working in the offices of one of the construction companies. She was giving talks about the North at various businessmen's lunches. I went to three and spoke also. They were very convivial gatherings. I also wrote to Mrs Roosevelt to thank her for sending on my letter to the Immigration Office and said what a big hit she made last time she came to England. She did too. 'My Day' appeared in some of the English papers and you really felt here was a visitor who took a genuine interest in things, and not just a diplomatic one. She would be just as capable of criticising if necessary as of handing out bouquets. I wish some of our female big shots or big shots' wives were as outspoken and as enterprising as Mrs R. She's great and probably people will remember her and the good she does long after they have forgotten most of the politics of the times. I got a reply too from her secretary (it looks good on White House note-paper) thanking me for my kindness in writing and wishing me luck.

Going cross country solo for the first time was a big event. You climb to the desired height, trim the ship and sit back taking life easy, eating chocolate, watching the hills and valleys go by underneath and feeling as though you own the earth - and if you can fly over it, to a certain extent you do. I had what is probably a similar experience to many others at this stage. Someone had ground-looped the aircraft the day before and though the prop had been straightened out and passed by inspection there was a little doubt as to whether the engine was drumming or not. Each instructor took it in turns to find out if it was OK. One would say "Oh it's all right". The next would say "Well, I'm not so sure." And the next "OK, send it off." And

the next "Possibly but ..." So off I went and no sooner did I get over those bleak brown hills which reach up to the sky like fingers divided by dead, dried up ravines and all covered with bumps, when I found myself listening to the engine and thinking "Well - maybe - possibly." The engine, needless to say, behaved perfectly. Crossing the hills I flew higher than I had ever been before, having previously spent most of my time working hard at rectangles and 8s and the series of turns at 2000 feet required for the test. The big snow-capped mountains, which formerly had snuggled down on the horizon as part of the scenery, suddenly seemed to stand up and look at me. Coming into Cle Elum one flies over a shoulder and through a fairly wide gorge. I came into this at the same height as I had with the instructor but met a strong sinker - down 500 feet and there was one of those unexpected winds blowing from the mountains. I went through the gorge at full throttle crabbing hard while rocks, trees and the irrigation canal all seemed to be within pea-shooter distance. Landing on strange fields, usually very rough, makes you realise the importance of good landings, although they sometimes seem an unnecessary bother on a smooth concrete runway. Oh, how important one feels sauntering in and signing the visitors' book - to think that you have really got somewhere without going along the road or through any of the places in between. From Cle Elum the route turned back to Prosser nearly 100 miles away down the river and by the time I arrived there I felt I could go anywhere in the world. I refuelled, strode in nonchalantly, bought a coke and talked to the students (yes, yes, and what about dropping in to have tea with the Llama of Tibet one day?) From there home in time to have a late lunch. A nice little round trip of 200 miles or so - no hurry, no bother; that's the life.

This sounds a bit like a life devoted to a cause, doesn't it? Well, the same thing struck me one day while lying in the sun studying meteorology. I like met, mind you, but - well, it was just a thought - but there hadn't been a man in my life for quite a time. And just at that moment a handsome lump of manhood came and flopped down at my side. He was a sailor, the second mate on a Liberty ship, who had calculated that it was cheaper to spend a month's leave learning to fly than having the usual sailor's good time in port. He was very handsome too with green eyes and a melting Swedish accent ("Ay, ay, ay - is dat so?") and smooth gold-brown ripply muscles like Tarzan. The sort of thing that looks wonderful at the wheel of a square rigger in the movies but knocks hell out of a poor little Taylorcraft. Possibly women learn to handle light aircraft quicker than men for the same reason that they tend to have lighter hands on a horse. They develop a sense of feel quicker through not being handicapped by superfluous strength. Though Handsome John's nerve was excellent in every way, flying was difficult for him as it is so very easy to overcontrol anything as light as a Taylorcraft.

Handsome John thought he was shy but he was an awful wolf really. Do you know that if that man saw a good pair of legs going down the street, even if the rest of the girl was awful, you would see the green eyes following the legs. Part of his pre-solo troubles he attributed to flying with a girl instructor after spending several months in Alaskan waters. This wolf ran after all the girl students very prettily and he had earned a good time too, having been shot up by the

Japs twice. He was going down to San Francisco to take a course before going to sea again and that sounded like the end of things. I had still to do my flying test and was awaiting the result of the written one. I got 100% for Civil Air Regulations, 97% for Navigation, 87% for Met and 90% for general servicing of aircraft. If they had given me and a lot of other girls the chance to try the regular RAF and Air Corps courses, we would have made it, wouldn't we?

We had heard that the Chinese were recruiting pilots in Frisco. Also the Free French and I wanted to go there anyway. Various people had tried to help me financially before but I had always turned them down using the excuse that I wanted to keep my amateur status. John had an aunt in Frisco who he thought might know people who could help with the flying. Besides we had had fun and it was sad to see him go. So when he said "Look, honey child, I don't know what we are going to do about your amateur status but please, for your fare to Frisco ...", I just pocketed the \$20 and felt very happy. Two weeks later I did my test - the hours I had spent trying to get my spins finishing on the same heading and then the examiner had said it didn't matter. I collected my licence, said goodbye to all my friends in Yakima and got out on the bus. I was a real pilot at last with a private licence only but that would be enough to get me into the ATA. I was going after an exciting job, going to meet an exciting boyfriend - he was a baron, penniless, who had run away to sea when he was a boy of 18 seven years ago - ay, ay, ay - and to an exciting city.

California, here I come.

Chapter 11

Thirty-six hours seemed a very long time to travel by bus. The long distance buses in Britain were all suspended for the duration of the War to save petrol but before that the longest routine run from London to Edinburgh took no more than 12 hours. If it had been possible to travel direct from Land's End to John O'Groats it would not have taken longer than one day and night. Oregon looked especially lovely; lovely name too. Who was the rogue who had the river named after him? And was he an attractive rogue? At the California border we stopped at a barrier and we all had to get out of the bus. I had an awful thought - "Immigration again" - and had a nasty sinking feeling but it turned out they only wanted to check fruit and flowers for insects which might infect the Californian crops.

During the journey I got pally with a cheerful sailor back on leave and as the bus arrived in San Francisco at 1.20 am he suggested that we went on to see some of the night life. Believe it or not, I didn't go. I thought I would see it all with John. Well, as Napoleon said "Never neglect an opportunity." For one thing I hadn't wired when I was arriving. I couldn't phone John care of his aunt at that hour and it was just impossible to get a room anywhere. After hours of searching I finished up on the sofa in a hotel lounge.

Next day I was unable to contact John anyhow as he was away for the weekend. So I set out to explore the city for myself. Undoubtedly San Francisco is one of the loveliest cities in the world. Most Europeans think that a city must be old to be lovely but, though there are a few old buildings in Frisco, it seems to have everything a city should have - a harbour where you can see the ships coming in; lovely shops; squares with statues of people no-one knows or cares very much about anyway; a fascinating Chinatown with theatres and music-halls all in Chinese; and shops displaying real Chinese antiques alongside Mickey Mouse; odd but pleasant cable cars to ride on; a pleasant air not of bustle but of romantic coming and going; and a church on top of a hill with bells that play a tune - what more could you want? To us most North American towns are too new and the idea behind them hasn't got decently covered yet. There is something very empty about living in a town that you feel never really mattered to any but our generation and possibly the two just before it. You need the hopes and memories of at least 100 years and, if possible, several national cultures all saying the same thing in different ways to make a place really live. The big white buildings on the Nob Hill looked like I had always imagined New York. Only they were sitting in the middle of the Killarney Lakes, as they appear on post cards, with several editions of the Forth Bridge thrown in. If there are places in the world that make you want to come back to them, San Francisco is one of them.

Carefully not noticing the 'No Pedestrian Traffic' notices, I started to walk across the Bay Bridge. One of the nicest features of a bridge is that you can stand on it and look at things going underneath. I had got nearly to the middle when a cop came racing out on a motor-bike

with siren screaming. He wanted to know if I was psycho-neurotic as psycho-neurotic women so often jumped in and it was a nuisance having to fish them out. Satisfied that I was OK, he pointed out all the landmarks. He was a very nice cop.

The course that John was doing was at Sperry's Marine Gyro-Compass School. I had worked with their equipment on aircraft and was naturally interested. So he got me enrolled as the first and only woman pupil, and very interesting it was too. I could follow the information about the compass all right but many of the nautical terms in connection with the automatic pilot went over my head. Many people seemed surprised to see a woman there and several asked if I was from a Russian ship. Certainly everybody was very kind and helpful about explaining things and they gave me a very good time. Worthy old skippers took me out to lunch and naval ratings took me out in the evening to movies and steak dinners. If I had been a girl in their home town, they couldn't have been nicer. Among my best friends were three officers from the Dutch Java-China-Japan Line. One had just come out from England. He was a big, kindly, stolid, reliable man (there are probably more reliable family men in Holland than anywhere in the world!) and wore a look of utter happiness rather like a little boy who has just seen the Christmas tree. Obviously something wonderful had just happened and the news was too good to keep. We had only been acquainted half an hour before the secret was out - he had married an English girl and on arriving in Frisco had been met with a telegram saying that they were going to have a baby next spring. I promised to go and see her when I got home. Dutchmen wear wedding rings, which shows how very honest they are. He had bought both rings overseas as they were very hard to get in England in war-time but unfortunately his wife's had been too big. In Holland it is considered unlucky to take off a wedding ring once it has been put on. So with considerable difficulty they managed to fit a spring inside while it was still on her finger. The Dutchmen said that if they had been carrying stewardesses on their boat they would have gladly given me a job but, as it was a troop-ship, not much could be done.

Meanwhile my romance seemed to have gone on the rocks, to pieces, a flop, utterly washed out, principally because John thought I was treating him coldly. It had been his idea that we should not be too obviously together at Sperry's as I would have more fun if we weren't and from then on things sort of fizzled out. Well, there is something to be said for a man who, when he ditches you, sees to it that you have 40 others to choose from. But it did seem a bit sad and I didn't want to get landed with that \$20 debt. I had meant to do a bit of earning anyway.

All the way from British Columbia down we had heard how dance-hostesses in San Francisco made \$10 a night. This sounded fine as I had taught ballroom dancing before the War. Our style is of course completely different and some English girls were scared stiff to dance with Yanks - you never knew what they were going to do next. The advert looked OK - Oakland Broadway 8 pm to 1 am - \$10. There were just 4 days left before I had to start back to Seattle to see about my immigration permit. That looked like \$20 to spare. Going across the bridge in

the train I got talking to a woman who said that she had once worked in a dance hall to support her family and it was all right if you didn't 'slip off'. This sounded odd because in England a dance hall is quite as respectable as anywhere else. Well, I have never seen a less inviting place to 'slip off' in my life. Dancing was continuous in a gloomy sort of artificial twilight. They couldn't have turned up the lights or else it would have shown up how badly the place needed a coat of paint. No admission fee was charged; so the place was patronised by all the riffraff who would otherwise have been standing out in the street. The band alternated non-stop between a waltz and a quick-step, showing not the slightest enthusiasm for either. I was told that before I started work I would have to see the police matron. This sounded ominous. Two notices hung on the back of the door in our very shabby dressing-room. One, printed, said "If you are irregular from colds or any other cause, take" naming a mixture which in a crisis would have probably jettisoned most of one's innards. The other, hand written, said "Don't let anyone spike your drinks." The police matron, generally known as Maybelle, turned out to be quite a character. She was nearly as wide as high, wore what might once have been a navy-blue uniform with a bumpy hand-knitted mauve sweater with an enormous diamante clip, and had a face so monumentally ugly that one felt that it must cover either a really evil nature or a heart of gold. When I gave my address as the YWCA, she looked me over from head to toe and said "You might as well give the correct one. We check up on them." Then I discovered the real snag. We were only paid a nickel a dance so you had to do 200 dances in one evening before you got \$10. At this I very nearly left this uninviting dump, but somehow I would have felt a sap if I had. There were no other women there except the other professional partners. In English halls people bring their own partners and the few professionals have to be very good dancers. Some of the other girls were nice but some were gloomy and obvious tarts and for sheer dirt the dressing-room conversation struck an all time low. Please don't think I'm being purist but I do like a little humour with my dirt. And one of the dirtiest personalities was Maybelle.

The first evening I wore a street length printed silk dress, all very discreet and in good taste because in most places people don't wear long dresses in war-time. Business was rotten. Then an old hand by the name of Clover took me on one side and gave me a little lecture. "These sailor boys are just back after months in the Pacific, see? They want something to look at. So put on everything you've got, see?" Clover was a dear; thoroughly hard-bitten but very kind-hearted. She had a perpetual smile which she painted on at the beginning of the evening and wore a very low cut satin evening dress, numerous strings of pearls, two wristfuls of bracelets, a tiara and flowers both in her hair and on her bosom. The result looked like a mixture between a hula girl and a stage grand duchess. I resurrected the flowered cotton evening skirt that I had made for a dance in the officers mess at Pat Bay and cut the top so low that it had to be stitched to my brassiere to keep it on at all. I bought the cheapest head ornament I could find at Woolworth's, a 10 cent concoction of yellow feathers that looked like a strangled chicken. Business improved over 200%.

Once on the floor we stood behind a painted black line facing our potential partners who were held back by a rail. No-one comes to a dime-a-dance hall unless they are very hard up and they stand and watch for a very long time before they part with their money. Many were the ruses we employed to persuade them to hand over their dimes. Some girls would try to talk over the racket of the band (usually “Hiya sailor, where you from?”). One sang in a very husky voice. Just by luck I hit on a definitely business-promoting idea. It is unnatural to stand still behind a line when music is playing, however bad it is. I found that I was somehow moving about - rhythm will out - and apparently I hit on some native US art form known as ‘grinds and bumps’. Many of the sailors were just back from Hawaii and wanted to show me how to hula.

The only alternative to dancing was drinking very watery beer which I never touched and coke, though we were not meant to be at the bar for more than 10 minutes together. If a partner was rash enough to put a hand on your waist, Maybelle came and told you both off loudly, though no-one minded the terribly involved clinches some couples got into on the dance floor and which would have got them thrown out of any hall at home. It was funny to see how the girls stopped the most hectic acrobatics every time the music stopped and would not go on until they had another ticket. Customers would also throw dice. Three throws for 25 cents and they might win a dollar’s worth of dance tickets but most of them seemed more interested in playing dice for its own sake than in the possibilities of dancing. In spite of (or maybe because of) the tough looking cop on duty all the time, nothing much happened. Once a man came vowing to ‘get’ the girl with the husky voice and she said with great regret that someone had ‘taken her knife’ (if ever she had one) but Maybelle told him off and he slunk off like a dog with its tail between its legs.

Clover had been working at the dance hall for 5 or 6 years and had built up quite a clientele. She was probably the only girl who really made \$10 a night though this, she explained, was mainly due to cheating and she showed me how it was done. She used to take more than one ticket at a time from partners, particularly when they were drunk, and that accounted for most of them. This sounds a low trick but if you didn’t take the tickets yourself, someone else would, and anyhow the drunks would never remember how many dances they had had. They cheated us too if they could. Sailors never take their hats off in these sort of places as they are afraid of losing them. Still, they are not allowed to wear them on the dance floor. When a partner approaches, you take his ticket with one hand and remove his hat with the other, holding it throughout the dance. Unless he gives you another ticket when the music stops, you put it back on his head and find another partner. This means that you dance with a fistful of tickets which are counted at the end of the evening and your pay is calculated at a nickel each. If those sailors could wriggle a ticket out of your hand, they did, or else two of them would buy one, halve it and try to get a dance each. The sailors were fun. Every evening there seemed to be one shy one who wouldn’t dance. So his buddies would buy him a ticket and forcibly shove him onto the floor. This hall was limited to white men only and I only saw one coloured man enter, probably by mistake. He was a Navy man and with some white friends. Poor man, it

was so mean and embarrassing for him and he looked far cleaner and more respectable than many of the white locals. Furthermore he might really have been able to dance.

The locals were a sinister crowd and interested in nothing but finding out if each new girl was a tart or not. When you turned them down they didn't usually bother any more. Finally my interest in the cost of living got the better of me and I ran one up as to price, being curious to know how much these things fetched. The best offer was \$25 - it must have been the black market. To be quite honest, I didn't like working in the dance hall much. It was a sordid dump but I'd work in a dance hall for sailors only any day. It isn't that sailors don't make improper and commercial suggestions but at least they are very cheerful about it.

On the last evening I really did enjoy myself. I met a somewhat inebriated ex-newspaper man who had had a row with his wife at breakfast and was drowning his sorrows in the watery beer because he daren't go home. This wasn't going to help much. We got talking about England and one thing and another. As he didn't like dancing, he bought me several dollars' worth of tickets just to talk. Then he bought some more and gave them to some hard up looking sailors with the instructions "There's a Limey girl here who wants to learn to jitter-bug. Teach her." From there on the evening was lots of fun.

At the end of the four days I reckoned I should have earned about \$25 but was told I could only get paid up to Friday - 2 days - as the rest would have to go through the office for income tax deduction. I had earned well over twice the amount on the last 2 days but had to leave to get to Seattle. Maybelle said that if I left her a stamped addressed envelope, she would send it on. Yes, you've guessed it, I never got it.

Meantime I hadn't had much luck with the flying. I tried China first as the war in Europe seemed to be nearly over. I honestly believe that women could do a great deal of transport and ambulance work all over the world, especially when you consider the enormous technical improvement in modern aircraft when compared to those the pioneer routes were flown in. The telephone directory listed an outfit called China Aircraft which sounded promising. It turned out that they only manufactured aircraft and though they seemed very pleased that I wanted to fly for them, they didn't know anything about the flying side of things. Later an article in Readers Digest explained all about China Aircraft which is a remarkable venture started by a Chinese student who believed that the Chinese in the US could build the planes for their brothers to fly at home. With this idea he started from scratch, got an engineering degree and organised the whole project to run satisfactorily. The Chinese consul told me to write to the Air Council in Washington.

The French General Agency sounded more hopeful. There were several American girls ferrying aircraft in North Africa. They said that I would have to pay my way there and get a letter from the British consul to say that I was free to fly for them. Unfortunately our man in

Frisco was not at all like the one in Seattle. In fact if he had been in Seattle, I would never have got my licence at all. The minor official I saw was a horrid little twerp with a bogus Oxford accent. He said that as I had left England illegally he was not going to touch the matter. I tried to talk him into it every way I could but with no luck. Why do we send such bogus people abroad? That was just the sort of accent Yanks love imitating. Only very few and very second rate people speak in that nasty affected manner, which is usually assumed to cover a far more natural and humble dialect. There was nothing for it but to go back to Seattle and try there.

One of the sailors from Sperry's motored me out to see the Golden Gate Bridge but, like the Rockies, it was hidden in fog. We listened to the mail plane leaving for Hawaii. I wished I could go too.

I got hold of Handsome John to give him back his 20 bucks. Now John was a very nice guy really and would never have left anyone stranded for cash anywhere. He was suitably shocked about the dance hall job and said that if he had had more funds it would never have happened. By now he had only \$35 though he had landed a job and was busy loading ship. He refused to take the money and I tried to slip it into his pocket as we stood waiting for a street car. Unfortunately in the excitement of the moment I tried to get into the street car on the wrong side (as in England) and got caught with both man and cash. Later we were both riding in a tram and that \$20 was burning a hole in my pocket. So I shoved it into his hand before I got out at the bus depot and you can't fight in the street, can you? He looked sympathetic and said "Write and let me know where you get to." I said "I don't know where to write to" but I could find out. By this time the car was ready to go; so that was that. Perhaps I was rather upstage about my amateur status but if we had really had a lot of fun he could have paid for it.

After sending my suitcase off by railway express I had only \$9 left. So I caught the bus to Sacramento, a very attractive town, spent the night at the YWCA, then started to hitch-hike. In many ways it was much better than going on the bus as you didn't have to wait around for 24 hours for your number to be called. And by travelling days only you see much more of the country. I won't hitch-hike by night as for a woman that seems to be asking for trouble. Perhaps people can get fresh in daylight too but I had done plenty of this sort of travelling at home since we were forced to take all the cars off the road. Anyway there was no alternative. A good scheme (not tried personally) if anyone looks like being a nuisance is to say that you feel sick and would like to get out and walk for a bit. If this doesn't work, make a few convincing retching noises. What man is going to try and kiss a girl who may be sick all over his coat any second? This time I was lucky and covered the whole distance in four hitches - a short one on a lorry; then a ride as far as Weed with a very interesting Lieutenant Commander (Yale or Harvard - sorry I can't remember which) who wanted to know about Wales. As he was going to Britain, I gave him Meese's address. He stood me a wonderful dinner; straight to the point "Steak or chicken?" From Weed to Medford, Oregon I got a ride with a young

married couple; and the rest of the way with a Red Cross worker and his wife who were taking their son to a boarding school in Canada. It was awkward when they stopped for the night at a hotel outside Tacoma because I hadn't enough to pay \$2 for a room. Guessing the situation, they insisted on lending me \$1 and another when we arrived at Seattle.

Going down to San Francisco everything had seemed to be 'going up - going up'. Although it had all been very interesting, it was sad not having had fun with Handsome John and on the way back things felt very 'coming down - coming down'. I was sad for about a fortnight. Then it didn't matter at all. I haven't written to him yet but I will some day.

Chapter 12

The first thing to be done in Seattle was to see about the immigration permit. Staying in the US seemed to be a much simpler business than getting in and they readily granted me an extension, in fact three more. "Financial means?" "Oh, ample." 75 cents was ample for lunch anyway. I never made any secret of the fact that I had worked and later was working again. Though it wasn't allowed, no-one ever quibbled about it. At that time many war plants as well as restaurants were advertising for employees; so I wasn't doing anyone out of work. I got my old job back at the cafeteria but it wasn't the same somehow with no flying to look forward to, and I have never been so tired in my life as I was after that trip to California. I was getting more choosy about pay too, so I changed to a more profitable position at the lunch counter out at Boeing Field. It brought in \$6 a shift and meals, with a wonderful view of Superforts taking off and landing all the time. I'd have given anything to go up and every time one came in I got all excited and gave someone wrong change.

Rooming with a fellow flying student out in West Seattle (where I later worked in a drug store) I was able to save \$25 a week. Imagine an English waitress getting 5 Pounds a week, let alone saving it. Usually they get around \$10. I was able to pay back something towards my flying training, about half of it. It was fun watching the airliners come and go and listening to the announcements of planes leaving for romantic places. It always seemed so silly to think that if you had enough money you could go thousands of miles east or south to places where there were things like cactuses and cotton which I had never seen, but if you wanted to go a few miles north to Vancouver you had to go through all that silly business of permits again. The powers that be in the US certainly are nice about giving rides to servicemen and women going home on leave. We often served ordinary soldiers and sailors waiting for planes. The British Services aren't nearly so considerate about this sort of thing. In fact to this day it is compulsory for officers to travel first class while an enlisted man is only allowed third, no matter how crowded the train may be. Among other things this is bad luck on officers' wives who don't receive free travel permits. They either have to pay twice as much for a first class ticket out of a very small (non-compulsory) allowance or go third class alone.

Working in the drug store was fun too. In the US no-one minds how much you eat (super-sundaes and all) or, when things are quiet, if you sit down and talk to the customers. I answered all sorts of questions about England. Can the King have anybody's head cut off nowadays? - No, he can't. Do the English still have fights with the Scots? - No, they have football matches instead. Was there ever a King Arthur and the Round Table? - You bet there was and Bala Lake is the one they threw the sword Excalibur into when Arthur lay dying.

An English accent is apparently a great asset to a waitress and someone once tipped me \$1 and a drink of whisky because of it. It is a pity that the conventional accent as spoken by the minority is always regarded as the only one. You seldom hear the other typical variations -

Cockney, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Devon, etc - because the people who speak them can hardly ever afford to travel. It is good of Americans to be so nice about English accents, as apparently we are written up as the villains in all their history books. There aren't any nations written up as villains in English history books. We have had wars with nearly everyone and pulled fast ones on most people at some time or other. A lot of people have done the same to us and those who didn't probably would have done so if they had had the chance; so we let the matter rest. Individual people seem to be much nicer, kinder and more trustful than nations. I bet you the majority of English people at the time didn't know that we sacked Washington in 1812 - most people think that the event of the year was the retreat from Moscow. Anyway the Washington business only got a few lines of write up in the history books. This shows you how silly national history books are because after all the event must have had some meaning to the world at large. I had never heard of all this until I got practically accused of it while in Seattle. I felt rather guilty about the matter and also about the great aunts (bless them) who wrote and said "Don't come home with an American accent." Now please don't get the wrong idea about the great aunts who are all very good sports. Their letters of congratulation sounded just as though they would have liked to have stowed away across the Atlantic themselves. Unfortunately they got their ideas of how Americans talk by seeing too many gangster movies. Singers with dance bands also often sing in American instead of their native Birmingham or whatever it is - they have to make the lyrics rhyme. Please note the word 'accent' used in reference to both English and American. The facts of the matter recently appeared in a Glasgow Sunday paper. In the first place the language was of course Scots like all other good things but we Sassenachs stole it and, if you don't burr your 'r's, "Mon, yourre a furriner."

There was again no luck with the flying. The nice consul in Seattle magnanimously gave me written permission to fly for any allied nation (after all in any well conducted war there should be only two sides and, so long as you are on the right one, does it matter what label you fly under?) He gave me the permit in triplicate. So I applied to the Free French, the Chinese and, as someone had introduced me to the head of the Soviet Purchasing Commission in Seattle, I also wrote to the Russian Commodore in Washington, whom he advised me to try. The only reply was from a charming Chinese Colonel regretting that they did not employ women pilots. I had also tried via the British Air Council in Washington to go home and fly for ATA but was told that they no longer wanted pilots. This was a real blow. I could have got a free passage home by volunteering for any war work as they said mobile women were still wanted but I had heard that one before and was still feeling rather cynical.

Someone sent me a Canadian press cutting about a squadron of 20 Russian girls who had come to Edmonton to ferry planes home. There were plenty of American and English women who could do that sort of thing before the war and there are plenty who could do it now. That was the sort of job I wanted, or to fly an ambulance or anything that they did. It seemed very rude of that Russian Commodore not to reply to my letter with the enclosure from our consul (ditto the Free French) and well, the best thing seemed to be to go to Russia and find out for myself.

Apparently the best way to go to a place is to go straight there; and so it should be too. There were Russian ships sailing from Seattle, but far more from Vancouver. I had got across the Atlantic, and what is the Pacific but another stretch of water?

Before leaving the States I went back to Yakima to see if I had forgotten how to fly and to say goodbye to Mr and Mrs Ross. Yakima in November was wet and cold and seemed somehow sad without the heat and bright sunlight. I had forgotten how to fly - alarmingly so after nine weeks off but it came back in an hour or so. If you get an instructor to check you out by letting you go up and do a few stalls and spins just to get the feel back, it is much better than worrying because your eights are not as accurate as before. It all comes back.

During the two weeks stay I earned a bit by sorting apples at 64 cents an hour. They were less tiring than cherries as they are bigger and we could sit down. Good apple packers made up to \$16 a day at 7 cents a box but it takes time to work at speed.

It was grand seeing the Rosses again and we had an impromptu send off party. There are many Scots sheep-farming families around Yakima and they sang more native songs, Scots and Gaelic, than I had ever heard before in Scotland. Then I departed for Canada complete with two small turtles for the Maxwell children. One had forget-me-nots painted on its back and the other had stars and stripes.

Now perhaps I had better introduce you to Miss Hamilton Baker whom I met when I was in Vancouver before and who was kind enough to provide the necessary invitation for immigration purposes in order to get back to Canada. She is a lady of the old school who hates personal publicity but here goes. Miss Baker has definitely led a life of adventure. Brought up in the early days of the Canadian Pacific Railway, she can remember riding around in a private family train. In World War I she was one of the first women ambulance drivers in France - a pretty tough job in the days before self-starters and when a flat tyre meant changing it all by hand and possibly in the dark. The girls were so keen and so anxious not to be considered soft and sent home that they used to lie under the trucks pushing the grease in by hand rather than set up the necessary agitation for grease-guns. Probably being a ferry pilot in this war is not half so tough as being an ambulance driver in the last. Not the least of the hardships was the embarrassment of walking into the Savoy Hotel in London when on leave in the regulation Red Cross uniform, with a skirt a whole 15 inches off the ground! Since then Miss Baker has worked her way to China and back several times and met a great many celebrities but perhaps her most exciting adventure happened in early 1914 when she went up in an aeroplane. It was one of those early affairs in which wings and engine were attached to a flimsy framework in which the hapless passenger sat looking straight through to the ground. For the big event she was wearing a cartwheel hat with two big green feathers, the whole thing tied on with a motoring veil.

Miss Baker was very kind indeed and got me a job for the Christmas holidays looking after the small son of a wealthy family in Shaughnessy, the posh part of Vancouver. They treated me as one of themselves and gave me a wonderful time. Feeding at the Hotel Vancouver, going to shows and symphony concerts, it was all very different from fruit juice and Chinese restaurant days.

Next, to find a Russian ship. I tried Mr Todd for more information but his most recent encounter with the Russians had been merely alcoholic. While at work a huge Russian sailor had given him a hearty pat on the back and said "Drink to the 27th anniversary of the Glorious Revolution." Mr Todd, only half his size, had downed a whole tumbler full of vodka and then, just to cement Canadian-Soviet friendship, another. Then he went to do some work at the top of the mast where the ship's roll was magnified considerably. There followed an exciting half hour.

Locating a ship wasn't easy but sometimes when you want a thing very much it suddenly seems to come in a most surprising manner. A friend in the WDs (Air WACs) had a friend who owned a grain elevator where the Russian ships loaded. Just for a joke she said "You ought to get a job there." So I did.

As a typical feature of Canadian life, a grain elevator should not be missed but I do not recommend the job as the dust plays havoc with one's skin. As a budding feminist never let it be said that I believe your face is your fortune but all the same there is no getting away from the fact that it is still a very important bit of equipment! There were six other girls working there as a wartime measure. Some of them had worked previously in the shipyard and told with great sorrow how they were never allowed on board at a launching, no matter how much work they had done on the job, as it was considered unlucky. Now what about a sporting crew to sail in a ship launched by females? All things considered and wars included, we certainly don't start even half the trouble in the world, yet we have got a lot of not very complimentary superstition to clear up, haven't we?

The elevator was a super mechanised affair which whisked the grain from the trucks, cleaned it and stored it in the correct bins. If they got it in the wrong bins, it all had to be fished out in a bucket by hand which was rather a come down. When there was no ship in, we spent most of the time sweeping up the heavy yellow-grey dust. It was rather like sand and a hopeless task as we really only circulated it around. A vacuum cleaner would have been more to the point. I made the criminal mistake of working too hard (it was cold and one had to keep warm) and I rubbed a blister on my hand, of which more later. Then the millwright (another flying enthusiast) let me go round greasing the machinery which was better. As soon as a ship arrived we started sacking grain - either handing on sacks, working the machine which weighed and filled them, or the machine which sewed them up, or tipping them off onto the chute. It was not at all heavy work as all the moving was done on a belt but that part of the building was by

far the dustiest. It settled on your head like a powdered wig and after a while it clung to your eyelashes so that you could see the white every time you blinked. We breathed it and swallowed it all the time and if you had a cold it was impossible to get rid of it.

All the ships coming in at that time were Russian and they always took their cargo in sacks as they had no facilities for unloading it in bulk at the other end. It was fun watching the ship tie up at the wharf, with the longshoremen sitting playing poker on top of the hatches. Another girl and I used to stand at one of the loft openings to get a good view. On board we could see several sailors, apparently Regular Navy and probably Gunners, wearing uniforms rather like British tars but with long ribbons hanging down from their caps, some apparently very young boys scrubbing the deck and several women all wearing skirts inches too long by our standards and terrible thick stockings but when they came ashore they wore silk ones and looked very nice. Some were dark and buxom as one imagines them but there were all types including one very pretty, fair, slight little girl. We tried to talk to some of them as they passed but they couldn't speak English and just grinned back. Just then someone said "Look, here comes the Captain" and there was a resplendent being all got up with gold epaulettes coming towards us. Just as he passed below, the other girl said "Isn't he cute?" She must have spoken louder than she meant to, for he looked up and flashed us a smile that nearly knocked us over. We reeled, recovered and shook hands with each other. Later we were told that the Captain spoke perfect English.

Chapter 13

Now stowing away isn't always easy but this time I really had luck - at first. It took a few days to scout things out and by that time the first ship had come and gone and the next was tied up at the elevator wharf. It was comparatively small - I don't know how many tons - but smaller than a Liberty Ship. Even if I had been able to get a permit to go on board, which sometimes happened when the hospitable Russians invited people, it would have been no good hiding then as I should have been missed. Neither was it possible to just walk up the gangway as there was a tough looking Russian sailor on sentry duty with a rifle. There remained the net which was fastened from the ship to the dock to catch any of the sacks which might fall when they were loading. Sometimes this was tied close to the rail and sometimes there was a long stretch of sheer rope down the side of the ship. Fortunately as this was a small ship and the net was tied tightly, it should be possible to climb right up to the deck without any trouble. Once on board the obvious place to hide was in a lifeboat - after all it is traditional.

I carefully noted the route from the net beside the forward hold to the two lifeboats at the aft end of the boat deck. The next thing to do was to choose a suitable time. The night shift at the elevator worked until 6 am and the day shift came on at 8 am. Presumably the longshoremen worked the same hours. Obviously 7 am was the time and if anybody asked why I was around, I could always say I had arrived early for work. Ships did not put straight out to sea from our elevator which was a pity but went across the harbour to pick up more important cargo from the big pier on the other side. This might take several days, though I hoped not, but it couldn't be helped. It was therefore necessary to take provisions. I can't say my rations were exactly scientific but everything happened in rather a hurry. The ship might leave at any time and there was nothing much in the shops. I finished up with 3 loaves, a pound of wieners, quarter of a pound of cheese and a dozen jam pies. Some fresh fruit would have been a good idea but it was impossible at that time of year. I also had a vinegar bottle of water - not nearly enough - and for sanitary arrangements a screw top jar that could be emptied overboard every night after dark. I carried the whole lot in a haversack. It seemed rash to carry more in case the weight made it difficult to climb up the net.

When the big morning arrived, everything seemed to be in my favour. It was very dark and the rain was coming down in sheets. I slipped across the railway tracks and down an alleyway to avoid going through the elevator where someone might be around. There was no-one on the wharf. I've never risked anything in my life beyond looking silly, and that happens pretty frequently even under normal circumstances, but isn't it funny that at times such as this you suddenly find yourself wishing you were someone else a long way away, doing something nice and peaceful like having tea? I crept to the edge of the pier. The night shift had left the floodlights on but that would make it easier to climb. The side of the ship was in a bright pool of light and I couldn't tell if there was anybody standing in the darkness watching - still anybody would literally be a drip to stand out in that downpour. I heard later that in addition to

the Russian sentry there were two American Marines on board, though I never saw them. My guess is that they were all inside throwing dice. Suddenly whoever it is that does adventures for you took over and there I was floundering in that net like a fish but feeling quite happy again. It was much easier to get up than I expected - only about 10 feet - and in a few minutes there I was on deck. Without waiting to get my breath I crept towards the steps going up to the next deck. This meant going past a lighted doorway which was standing ajar with sounds of someone moving inside. The quicker past that, the better - whoever it was might come out. From there to the next deck it was necessary to climb up a ladder. There were two of these but one had a tarpaulin tied across the top - I had noticed it the day before. The ladder I planned to climb went over a porthole and, worst luck, there was a light in the cabin inside and there, less than 2 feet away, I could see a man brushing his hair. Here was a nice how d'you do - he would probably see my reflection in the mirror. If I went back the person might come out of the lighted doorway - besides I didn't want to go back anyway. The other alternative was to go through the inside of the ship but, not knowing its geography, that was too risky. Just then the man bent down for something. Trusting to luck and hoping that the rain would drown the sound of my rubber soled shoes on the rungs, I shinned up the ladder. All was well. Quick, across the boat deck. It took only a few moments to climb up, undo the tarpaulin cover on the lifeboat, heave the haversack in, scramble in myself and find a comfy nook at the far side of the boat, which seemed to be full of all sorts of junk. Now there was nothing to do but wait until she sailed. So I did for 5 days.

The time seemed to go surprisingly fast. The older you get, the easier it is to be alone with one's thoughts, which is one consolation. After a while I began to feel that I knew the crew quite well. Most of the time they spoke Russian which I couldn't understand. But every now and then they talked in English to visitors or officials. Often people came and stood quite close to my lifeboat which incidentally was hanging at an awful angle so that it was impossible to lie anywhere but the bottom corner. Once an authoritative voice yelled something in Russian so close that I nearly jumped out of my skin before realising that someone was giving orders through a megaphone as we cast off to go to the other wharf. Well at least I was getting a ride across the harbour.

On the other side they didn't run a night shift which was bad luck as it meant all the longer to wait before we put to sea. It was cold at night too. Under my overalls I had what is apparently called a 'union suit' which is a sort of men's super long woolly combinations (somewhat scratchy). I had bought them to keep out the cold at work and because they were cheap and warm. But Daddy's leather jacket had been left behind as it might have made my coveralls too tight for climbing aboard. Now I could have done with it and an extra pair of slacks too. My feet were wet through with stepping in puddles before coming on board. So I took my shoes off and pulled the two pairs of stockings down so that the dry part came over my toes. Later I got wise to putting them in the haversack with the bread which may not be good manners but was cosy. The hood on my jumper dried out too which was a comfort. It was January and I

think it froze one night. Though my ears and my toes were warm, everything in between shivered 'like a blancmange in a blizzard'. Still I could always catch up on sleep during the day when the sun came out, and anyhow it is possible to shiver and sleep at the same time if you relax.

Food proved to be ample but the water didn't seem to be going to last long. It was only after having let a flood down my neck while pushing back the canvas to have a look out at night that I realised it would be possible to catch rain water. I collected about half a bottle but it didn't rain again. One drinks much more than one realises, though thirst is largely a question of thinking about it and fortunately it wasn't hot weather. This isn't a hardship story. I had got in the blinking lifeboat voluntarily anyway but please realise that I had been trying to fly for getting on 5 years by now - ever since I was 21 - and that before doing anything so desperate I had tried everything, even including hard work, and written enough letters to run a private salvage campaign. As hiding places go this wasn't bad because it was wind and water proof. Furthermore most people who go around in lifeboats don't have the big advantage of having a ship attached. The crew at least were very cheerful. In fact they sounded the most cheerful people I had ever met. They were forever whistling and singing and 'Black Eyes' seemed to be very popular. I could hear the girls trilling away first thing every morning while apparently raking the ashes out of the stove before cooking breakfast. A dinner gong was sounded before meals four times a day - like us, good idea. I wished so much that I could come out and have a hot drink and talk to someone.

Two days later we moved again and when I looked out after dark there we were back at our grain elevator. Well, I'll be ... Then back to the other side we went again, this time only for a few hours before moving to the customs wharf. On this move we nearly lost one of the girls called Bettina who shot ashore at the last moment to buy souvenirs. This all happened in English; so I could understand. Bettina sounded fun.

At the customs wharf everything had to be unloaded and checked. What a funny procedure for a ship belonging to an allied government. It took 15 hours or so and apparently the captain was anxious to sail with the 2 am tide. At midnight the longshoremen announced that it was their lunch hour and they were going to have it because the Union said so. I wonder if the Russian unions are so independent. The captain grumbled a lot - in English - but nothing could be done so he missed his tide. Previously the immigration officials had checked to see whether he had any unregistered passengers on board (Ha Ha). It seemed strange when we did not put out as soon as it got light but from the fog horns it soon became apparent that there was one of those low-lying mists that frequently covers Vancouver harbour in the mornings. It could not have been very thick because the sun was shining and making pretty patches of pearly colour tinted light on the inside of the lifeboat. After some deliberations we tried to go. That skipper seemed to have a lot of dash and we had certainly slipped from wharf to wharf with the minimum of

commotion. This time we ploughed around in the fog for about an hour while the fog horns sounded in different keys - some like sheep, some like cows, cheerful ones, mournful ones.

By the movements of the patches of sunlight I could tell approximately which way we were facing and when I thought we should be passing under the Lion's Gate Bridge I swigged the last of the water to celebrate. But apparently we couldn't find the opening for we turned back to wait until visibility improved.

Next things began to get tough because they started to overhaul the lifeboats. The other boat got their attention first. It had been down on the deck with the cover half off and obviously due for some repairs which was why I had avoided it. This was fixed up and, judging by the shouts, hoisted into position. Then from the surrounding commotion it seemed that my boat was going to be lowered onto the deck. I knew that if they took the tarpaulin off I was sunk but having put my feet back in the bag and pulled the jumper right around my face I hid under a seat, pretending to be three parcels. It was not very comfortable but, having been a mechanic and a ballet dancer, I was used to holding uncomfortable positions. If only it hadn't been for the fog, we should have been out at sea and all this would never have happened. After much heaving and shouting it became apparent that the boat could not be lowered. Suspecting that the cross beam was broken, a sailor climbed up and bounced into the far end. From where I was lying I could see his legs. The suspense was awful. It was the cable that had snapped and that accounted for the angle at which we were hanging.

Just then another crisis occurred which possibly saved the situation. From the conversation in English it became clear that the immigration officials had come back and were looking for me. Oh, that wretched fog! I hadn't mentioned stowing away to anyone at the grain elevator but somebody must have told them and after I had been off work for several days they must have guessed what had happened. The captain said no, he had not seen anyone on board and because of the sentry on the gangway he didn't think it was possible for anybody to come on board without being spotted. The official was disbelieving and insisted on questioning the crew. They blew several short blasts on the whistle to bring all of them on deck. It was easy to imagine all those little boys coming tumbling out. The description of me was all in Russian and probably not very complimentary. Next they insisted on searching the ship. At this the captain got rather angry and not without cause either. He was polite enough to the officials - rather icily polite - but said exactly what he thought about it in English while standing just beside the lifeboat. "Doubts my word - Couldn't possibly have got on board - Just another one moved on - This is the sort of thing that creates international bad feeling - Ought to be shot (was he referring to me or the officials?)" Well those immigration johnnies looked everywhere except in the lifeboat. Apparently they took the covers off the hatches and removed some of the cargo, though it had only recently been reloaded. Anyway how did they imagine I was going to manage all that on my own, silently in the dead of night? Next they spent a long time walking round tapping the deck with wooden poles. Presumably they were looking for secret

passages or did they think I was dead and buried? The captain said flippantly “How old is she?” “Twenty-five, the same as you.” “Oh, that’s no use to me.” Perhaps the reason they didn’t look in the lifeboat was partly because the crew had been working on it when they arrived and partly because immigration officials (excuse me, some of them are nice) are usually rather pompous sorts of people and would hate to be seen doing anything as undignified as climbing up a pole. The search went on for at least an hour, especially the deck tapping business - tapping away like death watch beetles! It was getting uncomfortable pretending to be three parcels but I carried on just to be on the safe side and it was really very funny. When departing they said “If you find her, just push her overboard” and the captain said “All right, we’ll push her overboard.” Then the crew all went down to tea and there was a long pause. We had got up a strong head of steam and the old ship was panting away as though she was going to have apoplexy. Three times she let off steam and I wondered what we were waiting for. It seemed bad luck on the engineer. It was getting dark by now and someone was playing about with the little donkey motor used for loading cargo. And then suddenly I realised. We were moving.

We had slipped quietly out of the harbour and after all I was going to get to the USSR where even if you are only a woman you can still get on with a self-respecting job. I lay for some time relishing the situation and feeling a bit odd too, because I had got some grain dust into that blister. Although it had healed up and looked quite normal, it was hurting a bit before I left but you can’t postpone an event like going to Russia just because of a blister. During the five days in the lifeboat the infection must have spread quite a bit (grain dust presumably fomenting) though my hands had developed that protective sort of swelling that they get if you are in the cold for a long time. I had only just started to feel it.

An hour or so later I crawled up to the far end of the boat where, though the cover had been tied down, I could look out through a hole designed for the anchor. It was bright moonlight and there was a beautiful mountain with snow on it and a lighthouse at the foot winking cheerfully. Just at that moment one of the girls came running across the deck. She looked very young and even had a reasonable length skirt on. How I looked forward to the next day when I could come out and meet them all.

About two hours later we stopped somewhere and waited for such a long time that I began to think that the mountain and the lighthouse and the girl must have been a dream. They seemed improbable. Perhaps we were still in Vancouver harbour. I crawled again to the far end of the boat and looked out. We were tied up alongside a little low pier - for what purpose I couldn’t guess. Just then a very American voice said “Well I’ll be damned.” We stopped once again during the night, apparently at some British outpost, possibly Canadian, because there was a great deal of “Yes Sir”ing and “No Sir”ing. When I went to sleep that night the air smelt salty and good. The lifeboat was even more full of corners than usual and anyone who has slept in a lifeboat will tell you it is all corners! I dreamt that this adventure was all happening in a book

and couldn't think why I couldn't turn over the page and get on with the next chapter which was where I came out and had breakfast with the crew. I kept trying to tell myself that this was real life and that I would have to wait for it to get light and for tomorrow to come. Just then I woke up, sat up with a start and conked my head on a seat - What a life!

Next morning as soon as it was light I crawled up to that opening. We were coming out of the straits into the Pacific. The sun was just striking a line of small mountains which tapered out into the ocean making them look all pink and gold, as though they were floating in the sky. The sea was still dark and the great slippery black-green waves looked like patent leather with white cracks on top. The air was clear and lovely. The lights of a small boat travelling beside us kept disappearing and reappearing again. A great big wave of happiness came up inside me. What saps people are who live in cities. And what a lot some women miss out on.

I stayed watching the waves for quite a long time. If I had been really wise, I would have waited for another 12 hours at least before coming out. But as it happened, it probably wouldn't have made much difference. Someone who should have known better said that once past Victoria I would be all set for Vladivostok as, for financial reasons, the ship would not turn back. Principally I wanted to talk to someone. I shouted to a sailor who passed on the other side of the deck but he didn't hear. I shouted again to another with no luck. Eventually by shouting hard and waving my hand through the hole I attracted someone's attention. At first he didn't know where the sound came from. Then he saw my hand and came over and said something in Russian through the hole in the tarpaulin. So I said something in English. This went on for some time and was a mutual waste of breath. Another sailor arrived and they took the cover off. I sat on the edge of the boat and said "Hello." Lots more sailors arrived looking surprised but friendly and said a lot more in Russian. Then they signalled that I should follow them. Now I had been wondering if any of these gents were going to give me a hand down - not really necessary as I was only about 4 feet above the deck - but apparently not. So I jumped. The ship came up as I came down and I landed on my backside but not very hard. Immediately everybody shot forward to pick me up. Now that's a sensible attitude towards women. Don't treat them like permanent invalids, thus doing them out of the fun of trying things for themselves, but do pick them up when they land on their backsides. After all we would do as much for most men.

We went up onto the bridge. The captain could speak very good English. He was decidedly good looking in a Russian way but (perhaps this is just a guess) probably rather conceited. The chief mate looked nice, rather like Cossacks in pictures, with red hair, high cheek bones, a pointed chin and a nice friendly grin. He was the man who had been brushing his hair when I climbed over his porthole but I couldn't tell him about this as he couldn't speak English. Both were wearing little astrakhan caps.

I explained what I wanted and showed my passport, pilot's licence and log book. The captain seemed to think that I had quite a lot of flying time though I don't think 70 hours is much. Guessing that I was hungry they sent down for some breakfast. I would much rather have had it along with everyone else. Rather surprisingly the meal consisted of a sausage sitting in the middle of about a quarter of a pound of butter, some thick chunks of brown bread and several cups of sweet milky coffee. I couldn't eat more than a bit of the sausage as I was still very thirsty but the coffee was good, very good. There was a big pile of American magazines in the cabin and I asked what was the point of taking them back, as most of the crew couldn't speak English but I was told that they liked looking at the pictures. The captain seemed very concerned that I had no shoes or stockings on, though with all the excitement I was quite warm. He sent the canvas shoes down to be dried, rooted in a bag or war relief clothing and fished out a pair of socks which, according to the label, had been knitted by some good lady in Nelson BC. Tentatively I asked if I might have a bath. Really it was very necessary and after much talking and sending of messages I was taken downstairs by the stewardess - a motherly but tough looking woman of about 45. I'll never forget that bath. Most of the ships that have been recently fitted out for the Russians in Vancouver are really up to date - frigidaires and all, so they say; and none of that 'you ought to like being uncomfortable because Nelson was' business. But this was a very small ship and old and not much had been done to it. We pumped the cold water into a tin basin while the hot came steaming out apparently straight from the boiler. My companion kept jumping around as excitedly as a little sparrow, pointing first at my neck and then at the walls; meantime jabbering non-stop in Russian. Though I explained that I didn't understand, she still went on and looked more excited and animated than anyone I had ever seen before. The ship kept rolling and my head was doing odd things too. Finally she grabbed a rag and a big bar of yellow soap and scrubbed me all over, as apparently the dye had run out of my coveralls and I was battleship grey in patches. Next she set about washing my hair with the yellow soap. Only we didn't rinse it out properly and it stuck like glue for the next two weeks. Finally she threw two buckets of hot water right over me. I hadn't thought I was cold but it was a lovely feeling thawing out. Just then the other girl arrived (I think there were two more on board but can't be sure as I may have been seeing the same ones twice). She was a pretty little thing, apparently only about 17 or 18, with laughing hazel eyes. Perhaps this was Bettina. Perhaps she was the daughter of the other woman as often Russian husbands and wives, sometimes whole families, sail together. Think what fun it would be to take the 'little woman' back to sea with you next time instead of leaving her at home to be bored or get into mischief. And think how much better company she would be for having seen a bit of the world along with you before settling down to the serious business of having a family. This girl could speak a little English and obviously wanted to talk but we hadn't any time as I was wanted up on the bridge again.

It had been such a lovely feeling that I had got away on the Russian ship and it seemed such fun that I was going to get to know them all. And I was quite sure that I had got away with it too. When I had explained to the captain how hard it was for a woman to fly in Britain he had

nodded his head sympathetically and said yes, that was so. When I had said that anyhow he might as well take me on as I would probably get into awful trouble if I was sent back, he didn't look at all sympathetic and just said "Probably." The biggest rub was that they were not going straight across the Pacific but were putting in at their base at Astoria USA. Well at least it was good to know that they were not going across with that dud lifeboat. From there they were going to somewhere in Kamchatka and not arriving in Vladivostok for another three months - just a nice trip! Probably if I had stayed in hiding for a bit longer I should have got a ride to Astoria but there was just one thing I had overlooked - the US Coastguards.

Coastguards in Britain are old men with telescopes. In response to a radio message the US Coastguards came out with a little launch. I left a written statement as to my objectives as requested and off we went. Incidentally Russian hospitality is wonderful but those coastguards all got a swig of whisky and I didn't. Don't Russian women drink hard liquor or what? It wasn't so much that I wanted the booze which would have probably knocked me out at that time anyway but it is the spirit involved. Perhaps the most striking thing about the Russians was how young they all were and how competent. What happens to their middle-aged and elderly people - the sort we normally have in administrative positions and less exacting service jobs? It looked the sort of set up where if you were young you could get on by your own ability. And if you were a woman it wouldn't be necessary to use the 'little girl' line which usually seems to be expected by our old men. Surely they must guess that we've got our tongues in our cheeks most of the time?

After the very equal treatment given to me by the Russians it was most noticeable the way the Yanks handed me in and out of that launch - as though I was Royalty eight months gone. They were young and nice. Several times we throttled back the motor just to make the launch bounce over the waves which was fun. The Russian ship looked infinitely exciting with the sunlight striking the big letters USSR painted on her side as she turned and headed out to the ocean. I would seriously have given 5 years of my life (preferably at the far dull end) to be going with them and working along with those other women.

Chapter 14

Well, there are plenty of far worse places to find yourself than in the USA. In an emergency it is probably one of the best. Last time it had taken me 4 months to get there. Now here I was, just dumped ashore and amongst the best fed body of men in the world, the US Services. Within half an hour I was eating an enormous dish of mauve ice cream.

Neah Bay coastguard station is the last post westwards in the country and according to the men there the last place on earth. Probably it is very beautiful. I have a dim recollection that there were pine trees coming right down to the sea but things were beginning to feel altogether a bit odd. I told the CO (or whoever he was) all about what a lousy deal women got in flying nowadays and especially what a rotten deal the USA was giving the WASPs (it was a rotten deal too. Many of those girls have come over and helped us out at the beginning of the war. Though we thought we should be trained too, there is no getting away from the fact that they came over voluntarily and had been flying against Fascism far longer than the Army who later took over their jobs. They had an excellent record, had bought all their own training. Yet they were just put out of their jobs without any veterans' rights whatsoever). Having got all that off my chest - just to give them a brief idea of what it was all about - off we went to the sick bay to get the hand fixed. We had not got round to doing anything about it onboard ship as with the cold swelling it did not look bad. The captain had said something about getting the doctor to fix it as apparently all Russian ships carry doctors who are very often women. Now that the circulation was really going again it started to hurt. The coastguard doctor fixed it with sulphur drugs. It was impossible to go back to Canada until next morning. So a kindly medical orderly allowed me to sleep in his bunk, complete with funny papers and later with some sleeping tablets.

Next morning, the 23rd January 1945, there was a small clutch of reporters at the boat at Port Angeles. I had my arm in a sling and because of the sleeping tablets could hardly keep my eyes open. My compact and lipstick had fallen out of my pocket in the lifeboat along with a picture of Handsome John with his cap pushed on the back of his head and a twinkle in his eye. I hope those Russian girls appreciated it! The net result was the sort of photo looking like no self-respecting grandmother would look nowadays. They were so awful that when one appeared in an English Sunday paper Biff phoned up from the back of beyond to ask Mum whatever had happened to me. Now if that had been an Englishman, I would have been really impressed but I know how Yanks like putting through long distance calls.

The immigration officials on both sides were very nice. The fat jolly American one was very coy when the photographers insisted on taking us both with hands on my passport looking like an old-fashioned love tryst. He wanted to know what his wife would say about it. Nothing if she knew how awful I was feeling. The Canadian at Victoria just said "You've got thin" and

asked me if I wanted to come back to Canada or be deported from the USA. We decided that even if the US paid my way home it would mean being locked up for too long.

On the boat I met Mrs Pullen from Skagway. She was wearing all her son's medals, about 40 of them, and looking very dignified - more regal than Queen Mary and yet more human than Marie Dressler all at once.

Next day in Vancouver I went to get the hand dressed and to my surprise got wafted away to have it cut open. Net result of my attempted trip to Russia : 12 days in Vancouver General Hospital and financial position of about minus \$50.

Epilogue

There the manuscript ends, with ambition thwarted and the story unfinished. It was nevertheless the end of Betty's wartime adventure and it is only from snippets of newspaper cuttings that her later life can be pieced together.

One undated cutting from later in 1945 records her embarking on the Duchess of Richmond for her trip home to England with the war over and all remaining prospects of operational flying at an end. Back in Canada at the end of January 1945 it reports that she spent months studying the Russian language, contacting a Russian border official on VE Day in order to obtain a visa to enter the Soviet Union. This more legitimate means of emigration also failed. She thereupon returned to the United States to save money and buy a passage home. She worked in many places including a hot dog stand, eventually reaching New York from where she planned to travel back to England. In New York she saw the VJ Day celebrations and her only regret was that she could not see London on the first day of world peace. "I just can't imagine London with the lights on" she said. When asked whether her parents feared for her safety in so many adventures she replied "Mum was very envious and all Dad's people were great travellers." She was asked if she had ever been lonely and answered "I cannot once remember being lonely. Everywhere, both in Canada and the United States, people were kind to me. I will never be cynical of human nature." She regretted being unable to visit Quebec but hoped to return there with her own plane and visit the ancient capital of which she had heard so much. Finally she was disappointed that she had not been able to complete the circuit of the world after having gone so far.

She returned to London and pursued her dancing career from her home in Chelsea but clearly could not get flying out of her system. Another cutting from 1947 records an incident where an ex-Battle of Britain pilot, Captain 'Baron' Broomhill and his companion Miss Betty Drewry had a narrow escape when their plane ran into a rainstorm over Baldock Hertfordshire. They were forced to make an emergency landing and neither of them was hurt. Betty was piloting the Taylorcraft Model D from Cambridge to Luton Airport when they got into difficulties. Captain Broomhill seized the controls and landed safely, narrowly missing a farmhouse and a number of trees. They spent the night in Baldock and when they went to recover the plane the following morning it could not be found until the police had searched the county! Captain Broomhill was a champion ice skater and racing motorist and the only Briton at the time to hold a full American transport licence. He was the captain of a Skymaster belonging to the International Aircraft Corporation USA and was said to be coaching Betty to qualify for a British Commercial Licence. There was no reference indicating whether he was another 'Handsome John' or whether they were in the throes of a storming romance but the paper did note that they were flying again the following day.

The story of Betty's illicit journey across the Atlantic in November 1943 appeared again in a full page article in the Sunday Express of 8th February 1959 by the aviation reporter Ralph Barker and the same author devoted a chapter of his book 'Survival in the Sky' to the tale in 1976.

Thereafter the trail goes cold. One is left wondering what she would have made of developments in the intervening half century since her epic adventure. She would no doubt approve of the changes that have occurred in the attitude of society on both sides of the Atlantic to the employment conditions and prospects for women. She would endorse the Equal Opportunities legislation which has outlawed much of the discrimination against which she was struggling in the 1940s. She would heartily approve of the fact that women pilots have made inroads into both commercial and even military flying with the first bomber and fighter pilots recruited in the 1990s. She would find it astonishing that it had taken so long for such developments to occur and, as an ardent feminist, she would not be surprised by the continuing allegations of harassment and covert discrimination which still bring stories of female pilots to front page headlines.

With world-wide air travel now commonplace and well within the means of most, she would welcome the freedom to travel and explore which was denied to all but the most adventurous and wealthy of her generation but I wonder whether she would record any difference in her opinion of officialdom and the bureaucracy surrounding international travel restrictions, visas and employment permits. One wonders too what her view would be of the desirability and practicality of a 24 year old girl embarking on such an odyssey today. Would she feel as uninhibited by crime, insecurity and potential violence? Would she expect the same unquestioning help, hospitality and welcome from complete strangers in far-flung parts of the world?

Above all one is left to question what might have happened if she had succeeded in her ambitions in January 1945. If she had reached Russia before the end of the war, how would they have received her? Might she have been pressed into service ferrying Russian aircraft forward for the final onslaught on Berlin? Might she have taken Russian citizenship and become a much heralded heroine of the Soviet Union, feted as a conspicuous success story of international Communism? The first female Russian space pilot? Or might she instead have been arrested as an illegal immigrant or spy, disappearing without trace into a Gulag prisoner of war camp?

There are no answers to these questions. We can only speculate. Nor, as far as I know, did anyone have the chance to ask her. She died of natural causes in London in 1954 at the premature age of 35 and unmarried. Rebellious and unconventional to the end, her will contained the following final clause : "I wish to have absolutely no funeral ceremony whatsoever as they are a barbaric custom, humbug and cause unhappiness, and if anyone is

rash enough to give me a funeral which my relatives could have prevented, I wish this will to be considered void and everything I have to go to any non-religious charity of which my mother may approve, after she has taken anything she may require.”