

POST EARLY
FOR
NOVEMBER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER

POST EARLY
CHRISTMAS

Old Comrades



Association

GAZETTE

GENERAL SECRETARY: Mrs. Johnston, Q.M.A.A.C., O.C.A., 5 Chesham Place, London, S.W.4.

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HEADQUARTERS REPORT FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1940

The H.Q. Report for these months will have much to interest members. First and foremost, will they please read, mark and learn that the new address of the O.C.A. and also of the Service Women's Benevolent Fund is 82 Lancaster Gate, London, W.2.

No Council Meeting has been held since the 26th of September, the report of which duly appeared in the August-September Gazette, with a notice that the date of the next Meeting is Saturday, 14th December at 2.30 p.m.

The month of October was a quiet one, the benevolent applications were very few and correspondence on O.C.A. matters very small. In consequence there was time for a thorough investigation of the contents of some of the cupboards which were filled with a vast accumulation of quite useless files and papers of years long past. The result was an appreciable amount of waste paper for the Salvage Campaign!

November has been anything but quiet! The General Secretary returned on the 11th from a very peaceful weekend at Winchester, to find that the unspeakable Hun had bombed the office at Chesham Place. Actually the house next door received a direct hit which demolished it completely, carrying with it the front facade and partition walls of the four upper floors of No. 5. This happened during the night, so none of the staff or the United Services Fund were there, but, sad to say, there were fatal casualties in the house next door, though six of the residents were rescued. It was very startling to see a huge gap where a fine house had stood only a few days before; somehow one lives in hope that one's own place will escape! At first glance it was impossible to tell whether it was No. 5, which had been hit, as the whole frontage of the two houses is practically down, one completely. However, the staircase of No. 5, was intact, though not considered very safe, so the General Secretary was able to retrieve the Minute and cheque books and other important things to take home with her. The clerks of the United Services Fund were exceedingly good and most helpful; working amidst dust, soot, glass and rubble, they salvaged from the cupboards and drawers all the O.C.A. Records, files and stationery etc., carrying everything down to the ground floor and packing them up. Owing to the great demand on removal contractors, it was not possible to find a firm to move everything until Sunday, the 17th. The Secretary of the United Services Fund had found new offices at 11 Grosvenor Crescent, where a small room had been allotted to the Service Women's Benevolent Fund. Unfortunately when all the furniture was placed in No. 11, it was found that there was neither room for all the Staff nor all the stuff! In consequence Mrs. Johnston was asked if she could find an office for herself elsewhere. This has now been arranged through the kindness of the Directors of the Helena Residential Hostel at 82 Lancaster Gate. A fine room has been let at a nominal rent, for the office of the Service Women's Benevolent Fund. The cost for heating and lighting and the rent are

being met by the Council of Management of the United Services Fund who, it will be remembered, kindly offered a free office to Mrs. Johnston when she undertook the post of Hon. Secretary of the S.W.B.F. in June, 1937.

It will be 10 years on the 1st December since she became General Secretary of the O.C.A. and there is no doubt that they have been years of much interest, including the death of a great King, the accession and abdication of his son, and Coronation of our present King, which events brought their wonderful parades and gatherings of ex-Service folk in which the O.C.A. had its share. They have also been years in which the O.C.A. office has had many homes. This present move is the seventh since Mrs. Johnston took over on 1st December 1930. There were two moves at the Duke of York's Headquarters, from a large second floor office to a smaller one at the very top of the building, with a descent later to a very small one on the ground floor. Next, in October 1936, when the Anti-aircraft Batteries were being increased in number, away went the O.C.A. to a great height at 29 Cromwell Road, no exaggeration this, there were 90 stairs! This move was followed by another in June 1937, (when the General Secretary became Hon. Secretary of the Service Women's Benevolent Fund,) to 5 Chesham Place. After this, on 29th August, 1939, (with only four hours notice in which to pack up) the whole staff of the United Services Fund and S.W.B.F. moved to a communal life at Byng House, Southport, for five (low be it spoken) very boring months. Then happily in February 1940, all returned to London, preferring the blitzkrieg to boredom! Certainly life became increasingly uncertain. Each day showed new ruins around the district until, on the 8th November, the "bolt from the blue" made the seventh move inevitable. Fortunately the General Secretary has been a "soldier" since babyhood's days and has packed up more than troubles in her old kit-bag as she has wandered over India, Bermuda, Natal and the Orange Free State, not to mention places in the Old Country. This seventh move of the O.C.A. is surely a lucky one; at the Hostel one can get an excellent and cheap lunch and tea. Even "Elevenes" materialized on the day that the move was made which was most grateful and comforting for surely there NEVER was quite such a distressing job, the dirtiest imaginable. Those who have seen a bombed and demolished house will have some idea of the state of the furniture etc., which has been salvaged. Everything belonging to the O.C.A. was saved, with the exception of a cupboard which stood against a dangerous wall. A matter for real congratulation, the thanks being due to the Staff of the U.S.F. and the Demolition squad.

Old Comrades will be very welcome at 82 Lancaster Gate, when they may have time to visit the General Secretary.

PARCELS. -We have to thank Miss Sanderson (London Branch) for another of her wonderful parcels, also Mrs. Jones of Coleraine Road, Blackheath, who, though she is not an Old Comrade, sent a splendid collection of clothing for boys. We are most grateful to these kind

friends. Unfortunately at present in the new office there is no place to keep clothing so please Old Comrades do not send anything until you see a notice asking for parcels. At the moment we have not even room for a cupboard, even if we possessed one in which to place the contents of parcels sent.

LONDON BRANCH REPORT

London Branch Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, the 18th January, 1941, at 2.30 p.m., at 5 Buckingham Gate, S.W.1. It is hoped that as many members as possible will be present. Please note that no notices will be sent out this year to members individually.

There have been no re-unions since the end of August, but it is hoped that a re-union may be arranged one Saturday afternoon a month in the coming year, as many members are desirous of not losing touch and also are in need of this little bit of comradeship during these times.

The Comforts Fund

Miss L. Saunders writes us as follows:

Dear Fellow Members,—I am sure you are wondering what has happened to our comforts club arrangements so I am asking the secretary to include this letter in the next "Gazette" report.

As you know until the "air blitz" descended on us, we were a very flourishing concern with expert enthusiastic knitters filling our cupboard with all kinds of 'comforts' for the 10th Middlesex (our adopted regiment). Those who could not knit, generously gave their money to buy wool. Others collected books and tennis balls, etc., asked for by the troops and everyone felt we were a 'going' concern.

London Branch Committee have voted us two sums of money for the purchase of wool but alas! garments eat it up quickly and still more money is needed to keep busy fingers always on the move.

Our plans included many enjoyments for the making of money but this necessitated our meeting at the club and with Undergrounds closed and trains and buses running anyhow, a journey up to town is a difficult proposition.

We hope to arrange a day-time meeting, so if anyone has any bright ideas as to how to make money, we can get in a supply of wool and distribute it when next we meet. (Benny has a collecting box in her shop and has collected £1 8s. already for us).

As I am unable to get up to London so often, Miss Ireland has kindly offered to keep an eye on the cupboard and to pack up and send off parcels when ready. I am very grateful to her, also to the following members who have so splendidly helped. Herewith list of names,:

Subscriptions: The Misses Porter, Haines, Saunders, Warrior, Thompson, Thornhill, Davis, Longman, Smith.

Knitters: The Misses Burnett, Strang, Rose, Douglas, Lawson, Pitt, Haines, Rogers, Saunders, Hayward, Brand, Smith, Courage, Billington, Benson, Jerrett, Coddington, Bryers, Sharpe, Fyles, Warrior, Eager, Leeming, Vince, Dodd, Sanderson, Williamson, Robinson, Gerrett, Phippen.

Books: Bilbrough, Haines, Saunders, also tennis balls. Amount spent to date: £13 14s. 2d.

Yours sincerely, L. Saunders.

Christmas Greetings to all and a Happy New Year.

S. HAINES, (Hon. Secretary).

"SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN"

The call came and we answered
to work in unity
While Lovers and Brothers are fighting
the War for Liberty,
In Camp, Cookhouse and Office
the A.T.S. are seen
Women of England "Soldiers of the Queen."

Working hard like the girls of the Old Brigade
The Legion and the Q.M.A.A.C.
Ready and willing to do our bit
for the Land that made us free
So when the War is over please say that
we have been
True women of England "Soldiers of the Queen."

EDITORIAL

With delightful optimism, the General Secretary writes, when sending the Headquarters Report, that it "would be great if you could manage a full Gazette this time as it will be a Christmas number." It would be more than great, it would be a miracle! Members write how glad they are that the Gazette is to carry on, but it never seems to occur to any to do anything about supplying copy as without that it is not possible to keep the Gazette going. I know that I will be told how busy members are, but, so am I! This is being written during a Blitz and I am standing by ready to go out on duty. But that's by the way and in the advancing course of A.R.P. events. The thing is that if the Gazette IS to go on, it's up to all members to do something to supply news with which to fill the pages. There is no time these days to searching the highways and byways for news, when one is giving twenty four hours duty every third day and twelve each other that sounds somewhat involved, but anyway there is no spare time now. I hope members will take this as a hint to make New Year resolutions early and stick to them.

CORRESPONDENCE

From Mrs. C. Jones, (Hon. Secretary,) Imperial Ex-Service Women's Association, 33 Georgina Road, Ponsonby, nr. Auckland, New Zealand.

I have been intending to write to you for some considerable time, and really these days, I have, shall I say to feel talkative. First I would like, on behalf of the president and members of the Association, to send greetings to all the members of the O.C.A., also to the active units who are serving in the present war. We are proud of the women of Great Britain who are doing such wonderful work, and only wish we women over here could do something more active. We have to be content to get funds together for war purposes. Our members work for different organisations, such as Red Cross, St. Johns, and patriotic societies, etc., then we all rally round and do our best for the aeroplane fund and distressed fund for the stricken areas of Britain. Our hearts go out to the sufferings that are being inflicted on the people at home, and we should be more than thankful for our safety but we old WAACS, etc., and thousands of women here would welcome more activity we feel so helpless as if we were nearer we could do such a lot more.

Well, a letter about our club. We have a membership of 76, Waacs, Wrens, Wrafs, Nurses, Vads, and some women who were attached to the forces at home during last war. We have meetings every month, and we look forward to them as we have quite a lot in common being so far from home, and especially at a time like this. We relax at these evenings for the majority of our members work hard at their different war efforts and we usually have a very jolly evening. We worked very hard for six weeks at a carnival we held in aid of funds for the sick and wounded for Red Cross and St. Johns. Our club was able to hand in £5 5s. and £21 for ticket selling besides working on the streets selling tickets and manning stalls, and Queen's soldiers voted over £8,000, and there were seven Queens in the Auckland district alone, and our Queen was 2nd from bottom so you can imagine the amount collected. We had a very hectic time and our house work used to get a lick and a promise. We held our re-union dinner in August. We felt a bit guilty having such a lovely time, but again its no use going around like a wet week; being miserable never won a war yet. We had at the dinner over 44 members. Our four guests, representatives from the Returned Army Sisters.

We had a social and dance after members brought friends along and we had a very enjoyable time. We listen into the war news from home and our hearts ache when we hear of the bombing, then we are up in the air again when we hear of the wonderful work of the R.A.F. The wonderful work of the forces evacuating France and Norway, their courage in face of the odds, makes one mighty proud we are British when we have such men as these, and best of all such a wonderful King and Queen, we are more than proud of the British people now.

I have let myself chatter on, but as a kind of relief to let someone at home, know what we home people think of the courage and fortitude of the British women.

Nottingham BRANCH REPORTS

The Annual General Meeting of the East Midlands United Services Club was held at the club room in Heathcote Street on Sunday, October 9th. Fifteen of our members attended. It had previously been decided not to follow the meeting with a dinner, but to have a high tea instead, owing to the blitzkrieg and black-out, and the fact that so many of our members live on the outskirts of the Nottingham County, and some live in an adjoining county.

We proceeded to the George Hotel, where a very happy evening was spent. The chairman read a letter from the President, Mrs. Lloyd, who sent her best wishes and apologies for non-attendance, which, of course, was due to the prevailing war conditions. We are hoping to hold a Christmas Party on **December 17th** commencing at 3 p.m. We shall be very pleased to welcome all ex-Service women, especially would we welcome any members in Nottingham who may be evacuated from vulnerable areas.

There is an air-raid shelter adjoining the club room, so we would not have far to go should we need shelter.

N. OSLER, Hon. Secretary.

Q.M.A.A.C. Section.

Norfolk

Although our members are rather scattered just at present owing to the war we had quite a nice evening on November 14th at 26 Branksome Close, Norwich, the Misses Newberry and Prothero being our hostesses. All arrived in quite good time and enjoyed a most delightful meal, in spite of being war-time. We certainly did full justice to all the good things as they came before us, and even the "Alert" and machine-gun fire did not unduly worry us.

Later we repaired to the drawing room to chat and discuss business matters and read correspondence, which included a very interesting letter from our representative on the council, Miss Balby. At the close of the evening we were served with a glass of sherry and toasted the O.C.A. and our hostesses in good old fashioned style. We appreciated their kind thoughtfulness, as this was our only third meeting—well in advance owing to the uncertain times we live in—and certainly much enjoyed by all. We arranged our next meeting for Wednesday, January 15th, at 32 Grove Road, Norwich, and hope that war-time duties will not prevent some members from being able to be present.

We should like to send best wishes for the New Year to all old comrades at home and abroad, especially Norfolk Branch members and all those serving in the Services.

L. W. CHILVERS.

Manchester

There are several items to interest many of our members who still retain enthusiasm for the meetings still held by the Manchester "die-hards." Shall I begin by expressing our pleasure in the knowledge that Miss Stephenson, our President, is recovering as well as may be expected from a recent operation.

The chairman and a member visited her while she was in hospital, taking a sheaf of carnations from the United Ex-Service Women's Club members and O.C.A. to cheer her during convalescence, also at a later date a book was sent to help pass the tedious hours. An acknowledgment was received in due course.

Meetings have been taking place but fewer members have attended. This is understandable in view of the fact that so many are occupied in one branch or another of war-work. Mrs. Rogers does A.R.P. work, Mrs. Bates is a warden, Mrs. Cornes drives an auxiliary ambulance and Mrs. Partington is in the W.V.R., to mention only a few. Mrs. Bishop has many and varied interests apart from the task of obtaining lecturers to visit the club, such as collecting clothes for the women and children of Manchester, who have been rendered homeless by bombing raids. Also collecting for comforts for our soldiers, woollies and yarn for knitting, in fact our chairman is an extremely busy person, always giving generously both of her time and thought for those who are in need. The club, indeed, owes a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Bishop for her unsparing and devoted work in their interests.

In token of this, at a small dinner given at the Ex-Service Women's Club by the O.C.A. for their guests from the active Services, a presentation was made to her in the form of a piece of carved ivory.

At the same time a utility handbag was presented to Mrs. Hearn for her very generous services as the club treasurer, work that she has undertaken for a great many years. This work was often done at much inconvenience and under trying circumstances.

Our guests of the evening joined heartily in all our toasts of loyalty. His Majesty the King was proposed by the Chairman, her Majesty Queen Mary and the Forces by the O.C.A. Secretary. The United Ex-Service Women by Mrs. Dixon and the O.C.A. by Mrs. Hearn, with the request that Mrs. Bishop would continue to hold office as chairman of the club. This was acclaimed with clapping and many "Hear, Hears." There followed special toasts to the Merchant Service and the Air Force.

O.C.A. Secretary.

Oxford

The Annual General Meeting of this Branch was held on September 30th at Green's Cafe, St. Giles, Oxford. Owing to the present times we were a very small gathering but local members were well represented. Mrs. D. Payne, our Vice-chairman, presided at the meeting (which was really a chat around the tea table) the minutes were read and signed and a few letters from absent members telling of war work in various capacities—of houses full of evacuees and so on.

One committee member thought the Branch should relieve Mrs. Grundy of the job of Hon. Treasurer, which must add to her responsibilities in these days of upheaval—Mrs. Grundy is a Company Commander as most readers know in the A.T.S. Southern Command and stationed far from Oxford and therefore unable to attend meetings, etc. Mrs. D. Payne, our Vice-chairman, was elected as Treasurer and very kindly consented to carry on as long as needed. Mrs. Grundy re-elected as Chairman in which capacity she has done so much for Oxford Branch for so many years. Committee members were re-elected as at present serving. The Branch will meet from time to time as circumstances permit, but no social activities are to be considered at present. It was decided that a wreath of Haig poppies be laid as usual on the War Memorial on November 11th.

Members present at the meeting all expressed their admiration of the way in which people in much bombed areas are keeping their chins up—it is so difficult to visualise what has been done to London when one lives down here in peace and quiet very little changed from pre-war days, but we sympathise with and admire them all the same. As Miss Billington says "Life after the black-out is one terrific gunfire but we keep smiling. Hitler will not get us down that way."

G. M. JACKMAN.

Bristol and West of England Branch

In the early part of June we had a picnic at the Redcliffe Bay Bungalow, and were favoured with one of the loveliest Saturdays of our glorious summer. How we hated leaving the sea! In fact so much so that two of our members missed buses at Bristol, and had to get home by devious routes, with much walking and pedalling.

On the 7th September we met at Bath, for tea, at the invitation of our president and secretary. It was a memorable gathering. We had the great pleasure of welcoming Miss R. A. Batty (Council representative of Norfolk Branch), who is staying in the district, also Mrs. Rumbold (of Norfolk) who is staying at Bath. We also gained a new member, Miss Robinson (of London Branch) who is engaged on war work here. Mrs. Skidmore came right from Winterbourne, and Miss Cole gave up part of her holiday to come. To our great regret Miss Smith was down with quinsy and we missed her very much. How the time rushed by, what tales were told—and then a rush for the train, and one more happy memory to add to one's store.

As a Branch we have only met twice this summer. In June we met at my family's bungalow at Redcliffe Bay, but since then I am afraid we have felt it not safe to ask visitors there, as it is only just opposite the S. Wales

coast. In September we had a tea-party of 15 here, when we had the pleasure of meeting two members of Norfolk Branch; Mrs. Rumbold is staying here with a sister, and Miss Batty is at Bradford-on-Avon.

We are hoping to get an afternoon meeting next month, to hold our annual meeting, but I think that will have to be in Bristol as the majority of members belong there.

I don't suppose we have had a dozen quiet nights since June, but since the London 'Blitz' started we have not had so much bombing. Actually we have, personally, missed any damage, but have had incendiary bombs very close, and there has been a good bit of damage to property, but mercifully very little loss of life.

Mrs. Rumbold is very busy here, helping with the Y.M.C.A. and Toc. H. canteens. Mrs. Reed one of our Bristol members, is a warden. Several of our Bristol members are Post Office workers and therefore are barred from other work, but they have been working terrifically hard in their own job. I am Quartermaster of one of our local Red Cross detachments and, at the moment, am lecturing on first aid three times a week.

Has anything been heard from Miss Gammon lately? I have had no reply to my letters lately, and am wondering if she has left Bristol.

B. MOULD

Glasgow and West of Scotland Branch

Members continue to meet and knit at the club and discuss events past and present when they have any leisure from their "war work." Each one is endeavouring to "do her bit" in her own way, after her day's work.

The holiday season has passed without any real holiday, but most members have managed a little break to enable them to "carry on."

There has been some sickness among the members.

We are sorry to lose Mrs. Manktelow who has gone to Yorkshire. She writes very cheerily from there.

A great surprise was in store for us when Miss Duncan, a member of the Edinburgh Branch, came in with Miss Frail. It is many years since we saw Miss Duncan who has been five times round the world, since then doing clerical work on the "Franconia." To her regret she will require to work on land for the "duration" and if in Glasgow hopes to join the club and tell us more of her experiences.

During August the club members began entertaining "Service" men and women on Saturday nights. The first one took place on the 3rd of August and was a very jolly affair, whist, refreshments and a "sing-song." To us "veterans" of the last war it brought back happy memories of similar concerts held in camp. The three Services, male and female, were represented. These "sing-songs" have gone on since and are much appreciated by the boys who are glad to be entertained rather than walk about the streets. Polish officers mingle with the others and entertain us at the piano.

Our Annual Armistice Re-union took this form in the evening after a chat and tea among ourselves in the afternoon.

Great anxiety is felt for Madam Boudin (nee Nancy Gilmour, Rouen). Her home was at Esbly, 25 miles from Paris where she and her daughter, Jacqueline, were waiting with their cases packed hoping to get to England. Her husband when last heard of was at Luxembourg. Mrs. Gilmour has heard nothing of her daughter since summer.

November 11th, 1940. I had the honour of being present at the Armistice ceremony inside the municipal buildings and laying the wreath on the Cenotaph. It was a large and representative gathering including the Provost and Magistrates, representatives of the Services, of the ex-service men's and women's associations, Home Guard and Civil Defence, French and Polish officers, also Count A. de Curson, Consul representing the Vichy Government. A large crowd assembled outside to witness the procession as it emerged from the building and the laying on of the wreaths.

E. M. GILCHRIST.

From Harriet Rumney, 1456 N. Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, Ill., U.S.A.

It was so very nice of you to write me such a long

interesting letter. I was very glad to hear everything. England sure has received a pumelling since I wrote you, but we know the morale of the Englishman, and that he'll never weaken. Out here there is both optimism and pessimism as to the outcome. I am trying hard to form an ex-service women's club here in Chicago. We really have started off, but only on trial before making any expensive advances. We intend to affiliate with Michigan, and Windsor, Canada. I have had quite a few very nice letters from ex-WAACS, who has seen my letter to you in "Old Comrades Gazette." That was very nice of you to publish it! I received two from Australia, and one from Africa, that was very interesting. We are all working hard to help you all, and although my work at Red Cross is surgical war dressings, a call came last week for tags to be sewn on 300 pairs of socks for naval men leaving Canada, and we all left our kitchens and rushed down to the work rooms, because there was only 12 hours before the battleships moved out. Believe me they were tagged, crated, and on the road to the air field within 5 hours. They reached their goal in good time, and tonight there is to be a meeting on the need to defend U.S.A. by aiding Great Britain. Needless to say we will turn out in big style. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. is one of the speakers.

We had a big turn out today at Red Cross. There are two sections of us, one for dressings and one for sewing and knitting. Quite a lot of people knit and sew in their homes, and really to-day was a sight to behold, tables piled high; hundreds of beautifully knitted sweaters, socks, scarves, helmets, and bedjackets and robes, and all these are for England. This group of ladies put in from 4 to 8 hours stitching buttons on, and tags, pairing the socks and so forth, and the piles just dwindled down as they were checked into huge packing cases for shipment. It makes me eager to be up in a morning to attend to my house, so that I can put in a full 8-hour day, we close Red Cross at 4 p.m. Then we have a busy time with the British War Relief, collecting and sorting clothes, cleaning and repairing them. I am also arranging a card party in my home to raise 40 dollars for a hospital cot with all conveniences, and so we are trying our best to help as much as we can. I have also offered to take two nieces and a nephew from north-east England for duration of the war. We will drive night and day to further help from this country in any and every possible way. I shall be happy to hear from you at any time. Keep your chins up and God bless you all.

HARRIET RUMNEY.

NEWS OF OLD COMRADES

The General Secretary has been in the wars in every sense lately, not only being bombed at the office but at home, and added to that she has had a very painful and disabling accident, thanks to the black-out.

Mrs. Johnston, when returning one night from posting some Q.M.A.A.C. papers, collided so violently with a brick pillar that she was hurled into the roadway, resulting in a badly injured shoulder which rendered her left arm useless. Now, happily this injury is mending though still painful.

Miss Evelyn Archer, V.A.D. served at "Woodside," Paris-Plage, our convalescent home and must have met many W.A.A.C.'s. she still hears every Christmas, from Miss Giles.

Miss Eva Bonwell, went out to Calais in the early days with the Church Army and worked in their hut there and later at Harvelot.

V. Castell was at one time at St. Cecile Plage as musketry instructor before the days when that spot was wholly given to the G.H.Q., Machine Gun School. Miss Archer continues being an Air Raid Warden with the organising of the Y.W.C.A. Tea cars sent out by the local branch. Miss Bonwell also gives many hours work at a Church Army Hut, carrying on the work left off in 1919.

Miss Bessie Sorski, Liverpool Branch, sends a message of greeting to all Old Comrades and of sympathy to those who have suffered loss in the war. Like the rest of us she hopes for better times to come.