

**Bernard O'Connor, *Women of Tempsford: Churchill's Agents of Wartime Resistance***

Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011. £18.99, 978 1 4456 0434 3 (paperback), pp. 280

Better is O'Conner's history of the *Women of Tempsford: Churchill's Agents of Wartime Resistance*. This book provides an overview of the WAAF, FANYs and life at RAF Tempsford, home to the special duties squadrons who delivered agents and supplies to Europe during WWII, as well as brief biographical sketches of over seventy-two women who served as agents.

What is fascinating here is to learn not only about the roles undertaken by the FANYs and WAAFs, but also how little was known about them by the general public at the time. O'Connor quotes a wonderful 1945 article from the *Sunday Express* that aimed to set the record straight by explaining that, 'the interesting thing about these girls is that they are not hearty and horsey young women with masculine chins ... but pretty young girls who look demure and sweet' [p.43]. It was clearly stories like this that helped pave the way for biographies like Minney's of Violette Szabo. There is also an interesting section on life, romances and general entertainment at Tempsford, which has been less covered elsewhere.

The women whose stories are at the heart of this book are, by necessity, each touched on only briefly, but there is much that is poignant in their courage, determination and, often, their sad fate. The section on Violette Szabo paints a more colourful picture of the woman than Minney's entire biography, including a wonderful quote from the lady who supplied her clothes for operations in France, remembering 'making black underwear for her' on request. Sadly however the information on Krystyna Skarbek, aka Christine Granville, is full of inaccuracies from her age to the various details of her operations, which does not inspire confidence in the rest of the entries. Nevertheless it is good to see Skarbek included. As a Pole, and the only female agent dropped to France from Algiers, rather than from England, she is often overlooked.

If sometimes reading rather like a digest of other published books and material, O'Connor's bibliography does reveal good use of a range of sources, including a thorough trawl of the rich material now available online. It is therefore a shame that sources are referenced wordily in the text rather than with endnotes, that the long quotes used throughout, such as the accounts from Maurice Buckmaster, Head of SOE's 'F' Section, do not receive the critical attention that they demand and, above all, that there is again no index. A better editor might have helped shape this book into both a more user-friendly, and a more accurate, history.

All in all, this is a useful first stop for those interested in finding out more about the women who were in different ways connected to RAF Tempsford, as well as some of their colleagues who were flown or dropped to missions from elsewhere, and life at the base itself. However those with a serious interest will want both more accurate information, and deeper analysis. I am delighted that new biographies of several female agents from WWII were published in 2013, as well as the previously untold story of Noreen Riols, the last surviving female member of SOE's 'F' Section. O'Connor's is a helpful addition to the literature here, but should not be read in isolation.