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GLADYS ARNOLD

CORRESPONDENCE WITH COMMANDANT GABRIEL BONNEAU

By ELIZABETH SEITZ

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Biographical Sketch:

Gabriel (Lucien) Bonneau (1904-1988)

In February 1943, Commandant Gabriel Bonneau official took up his position as the representative in Canada of Charles de Gaulle's Free French (later Fighting French) resistance movement. He served in that position until January 1945 when he returned to France. Working in very delicate political circumstances, Bonneau proved himself to be an able diplomat. He was instrumental in uniting the Free French committees in Canada and in winning the support of both the Canadian government and the Canadian people for the Gaullist movement and, later, for the new French provisional government. After his return to France, Bonneau had a distinguished diplomatic career, serving first as Director for Middle-East affairs and then as French ambassador to Mexico, Sweden, Uruguay, and Switzerland.

Commandant Bonneau did not have the typical background for a diplomat of the period. Born in 1904 into a modest provincial French family, Bonneau had—as his son Michel has testified—a difficult childhood. He took refuge in his studies and through his own efforts and determination became a schoolteacher in a suburb of Paris. Later he taught in Turkey and Persia. He became so fascinated with the Middle East that he returned to Paris and graduated from the prestigious *Ecole des Langues Orientales*. He joined the French diplomatic service and was posted as a translator to Tabriz and later to Teheran. In 1934 he was appointed as attaché to the French Legation in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Bonneau, his wife, and young family were still in Kabul when France fell to the German armies in June of 1940. When he heard from a British colleague on June 18, 1940 that there was a French general in London who wanted to continue the fight, Bonneau immediately sent a telegram to de Gaulle volunteering his services. However, he had to wait until a diplomat was appointed to replace him in Kabul before he could travel to the Middle East to join the Free French forces. He served as a lieutenant in the Free French unit fighting the Italians in Eritrea. He joined the diplomatic service of the Free French movement in May 1942.

Meanwhile, in April 1941, his wife, Sylvie, brought their two sons to safety in Vancouver. Madame Bonneau, a former ballerina, built a successful career in Vancouver as a teacher of dance, specializing in training ballet students in the Cecchetti method. She and the children joined her husband in Ottawa in late April 1943.

Together Commandant and Madame Bonneau not only convinced politicians and government officials in Ottawa of the importance of the Gaullist cause but they travelled across Canada, gaining the support of Canadians from Halifax to Vancouver. With her warmth and experience, Sylvie Bonneau contributed greatly to the success of the Gaullist cause in Canada.

NOTE: The archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the archives of the Institut Charles de Gaulle in Paris are the primary source for the career of Gabriel Bonneau.

Written by Professor Patricia Prestwich
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Gladys Maria Marguerite Arnold (1905-2002) was born in Macoun Saskatchewan on 2 October 1905. Her father worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway and the family was constantly on the move. She attended 17 different schools in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba, graduating from Weyburn Collegiate and Normal School.

Arnold taught in various rural schools and briefly at Success Business College in Winnipeg. She joined the Regina *Leader-Post* in April 1930 becoming an editorial assistant to D.B. MacRae, the Editor-in-Chief. Constantly asking for the chance to write, she convinced MacRae to let her do editorial work. Soon Arnold was writing editorials, feature articles, news stories, and doing interviews which, on occasion, were picked up by other newspapers.

Seeking adventure in Europe, Arnold left her job in 1935 and traveled from the port at Churchill to the United Kingdom aboard a grain cargo ship. Soon she found herself in Paris where she intended to study the major “-isms” of the modern age -- socialism, communism, and fascism. Still needing to make a living, Arnold began submitting freelance pieces to the Canadian Press (CP). When her money began to run out, Arnold gave notice that she could no longer continue as a freelancer and would soon stop submitting material. The Canadian Press hired her as their full-time Paris correspondent. In the next four years she reported for CP from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy and from the Spanish border during the Spanish civil war.

Gladys Arnold was the sole Canadian correspondent in France at the outbreak of the Second World War and she covered the early days of the conflict, the so-called “phony war”, until the German occupation of Paris in June 1940. Returning to Canada, Arnold served with the CP Bureau in Ottawa and wrote communiques and other items for the Free French on a volunteer basis. She left CP in 1941 setting up the Free French Information Service in Canada with Elizabeth de Miribel. After the war this service was attached to the French Embassy in Ottawa and Arnold served as its Director until her retirement in 1971. Gladys Arnold passed away in 2002.

Scope and Content: This small accession is comprised of correspondence between Gladys Arnold and Commandant Gabriel Bonneau. The correspondence was written between 1982 and 1988 with the majority of the letters being from 1987 and 1988. This collection was brought to the Archives and Special Collections by Professor Patricia Prestwich from Paris, France, where she carried out research into the life, and times, of Gladys Arnold and the Free French Information Services.

There are no access restrictions on the records in this collection.

Related material may be found in 89-61, 98-54, 2005-12, 2007-42, 2009-71, 2010-21, 2011-34 and 2012-11.

File 1

Correspondence

Gladys Arnold and Commandant Gabriel Bonneau 1982-1988