

## BILLETEES IN OBAN IN WORLD WAR II

by Nancy Black

Some time before the Second World War began the Government started organising Emergency Services and my mother received the following letter from the Municipal Buildings, Oban dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 1939.

*Dear Sir/Madam,*

*With reference to yesterday's Meeting, I now enclose herewith, signed by the Provost, your Authorisation Card as a Billeting Officer under the Scheme. You should sign the card at the front thereof.*

*I have received Government instructions today that the evacuation is to start as from to-morrow and as the matter is one of pressing urgency, I will be glad if you will call here to-morrow, Friday, between the hours of 10 am and 12.30 pm to receive the billeting list of the District assigned to you and the appropriate Billeting Forms.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*J.W.N. Black, Town Clerk*

My mother, on the Committee of the Townswomen's Guild, was allocated the Esplanade and proceeded to visit every house and hotel along the waterfront to find out what accommodation they had in excess of their needs and arrange for the reception of evacuees. These turned out to consist, in her area, of around one hundred children mostly with mothers or friends from a Catholic Parish in Glasgow.

As occupants of a four bedroomed house with six in the family, we were allocated a mother and baby from Govan, who arrived on 4th September 1939, but after three weeks country life palled and my mother gave her the train fare to take them home again. With no bombings so far on the cities most of the other evacuees soon followed.

By July 1940 the air raids were building up and a young cousin from Edinburgh was the next evacuee to arrive and he remained with us for ten weeks. Later, I remember my father arriving home the day after the Clydebank bombing with a Mr & Mrs Moffat from Knightswood who had lost their home and walked on to the train at Glasgow with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They were fortunate as their relations, Camerons at Benvoullin, Lochaline, were able to give them accommodation.

By this time beds were scarce in the town for all the members of His Majesty's Services who were posted to Oban. The Maritime Regiment, being a latecomer to the scene, found it difficult to find billets and my mother was asked if she could help. These men had been posted from various Regiments – the

Argylls, Gordons, Royal Fusiliers, London Scottish etc. to act as gunners on the few Merchant Ships which had been supplied with guns by this stage of the war.

In those days there were no single beds so everyone had to double up and there were no exceptions. However, they were so thankful to be in a home instead of barracks that no complaints ensued. They were supplied with supper, along with all the other RAF boys who came to the house, even though it did not always appear on their billeting allowance. My eldest sister and I decided to stop taking sugar in our tea as, otherwise, there would not be enough for baking. Having six in the family made it easier for rations to go round and eggs were not rationed in Argyll so coupons were usually used to buy flour.

The boys, for they were all in their late teens or early twenties, stayed with us for a few nights while waiting for their ship to join a convoy in the Firth of Lorn. There were repeat visits from those who were on short voyages to West Africa or to Iceland and The Faroes. Some were conveyed by the Loch Garry (ex David MacBrayne) to Iceland and the Faroes. They reported back to us that the Icelandic girls were the most beautiful they had ever seen. We never heard of the hazards and foul weather they had endured.

None of them had cash to spare, so evenings were spent in our sitting room playing cards but my mother would not allow us to play for money and, as they were in short supply, we were pleased to win matches instead. If the soldiers' keep fit route marches were passing our house, our boarders would make sure they were in the rear of the column and slip in at the gate for a cup of tea.

One evening, a knock came at the door and my mother was asked if she would take in two young sailors. Six of us were just sitting down to a meal of roast pheasant and, on the boys admitting that they had not eaten, they were asked to join us at the table. How the pheasant went round eight of us I cannot now imagine but one of the sailors, on clearing his plate, said "just wait till I get back home and tell them I had *chook*".

Our soldiers took badly to this invasion of their digs and eventually Charlie Potter from Glasgow, who was on the office staff, managed to wangle a billet with us on his own and stayed for some time. Later he was posted to Australia where he remained on demobilisation as an accountant. Ian Forbes was another Scot who was the most handsome, and smartest, soldier I have ever seen in his heather coloured London Scottish kilt. He emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand. After sixty years, we are still in correspondence with both of them and a few years ago we were sent a message via an old Obanite living near Newcastle. Apparently one Herbert Storey, who often helped my father in the garden, and polished both of our soldiers' boots every day with a knap bone, was Steward at her golf club and sent his best wishes as he had never forgotten his time with us.

The following billets were allocated by my mother, Barbara Black in September 1939:

Miss Ellard, "Loyola"; Mrs Kennedy, "Rhudnacloich"; Miss McArthur, "Kilchrenan"; Mrs McKinnon, "Broompark"; Mrs Moore, "Glencairn"; Mrs Steedman, "Braelecainn"; Mrs Wilkie, "Glenburnie"; Alexandra Hotel; Mrs MacKinnon, "?"; Columba Hall; Miss McInnes, "Atholl Villa"; Great Western Hotel.

Non military billetees came from Nethan Street, Robert St., Golspie St., Govan Rd., Elder St., Greenwell Place, Water Row, Fairfield St., Garmouth St., Harmony Row and Water Row.

Those billeted *with* my mother at "Portlea" were soldiers from various regiments seconded to man anti-aircraft guns on board Merchant Ships, gathering in the Firth of Lorne and waiting there to join convoys setting off for West Africa, America, Russia etc.:

#### 1940

Oct 28	Storey & Robson	Argylls	6 nts	Paid 9/-
Nov 16	Forbes & Ferguson	Gordons	2 nts	Paid 3/-
Nov 28	Nicolls & Hamilton	Duke of Wellingtons Regt.	2 nts	Paid 4/4d
Nov 30	Batty & Morrelle	"?"	1 nt	Paid 2/2d
Nov	Sailors - Robson & Rae		4 nts	Paid £1.1.4d
	(full board no supper)			
Dec 7	Hollicks & Rennett	Royal Fusiliers	6 nts	Paid 9/-

#### 1941

Jan 3	Carrick & Carroll	Argylls	4 nts	Paid 8/10d
Jan 6	Lothian & Leslie	Black Watch	6 nts	Paid ?
Jan 12	Carrick	Argylls	2 nts	Paid 11/10d
Jan 19	Pigeon & Freeman	King's Own	7 nts	Paid 3/-?
Jan 19	Forbes & Ferguson	Gordons & London Scottish	? nts	Paid £1.2. 6d
Feb 26	Storey & Manning	Argylls	17 nts	Paid ?
Mar 17	Mr & Mrs Moffat,	Knightswood, Glasgow and Morvern	2 nts	Paid ?
	(Bombed out and going to Cameron, Benvoullin, Lochaline.)			
Mar 30	Storey & Manning	Argylls	14 nts	Paid £3. 7. 6d
	(Tea & Supper 8d, Breakfast 9d, Dinner 1/2d)			
May 6	Forties & Duncan	London Scottish	1 nt	Paid 6/-
May 24	Potter-on staff Jun 17, July 5, July 19			Paid 11/8d
	(Also various nights to 25th Dec)			

The following letter was sent to my mother at one point:

*Dear Sir/Madam,            Payment for Billets    H.M. Naval Base, Oban*

*Herewith are forwarded accounts in triplicate for billeting allowances due to you together with the appropriate remittance. Will you please receipt and return the original and duplicate copies, a two-penny stamp being affixed to the original if the account exceeds two pounds.*

*H.M. Home  
PAYMASTER COMMANDER  
BASE ACCOUNTANT OFFICER*

*Editors note: Names of evacuees billeted in Oban and allocated by Mrs Barbara Black may be obtained from the Editor.*

## **A SAD STORY**

by Michael Davis

Our forebears were often unswerving and terrible in their laws. The following account of a trial (transcribed and edited by John Cameron in his *Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles*) is told in the official language of the contemporary trial records. It is a sad story by any standards, but perhaps doubly sad in its inevitable, unswerving "doom".

On 10th April 1705 the Court at Inveraray met before Sir Colin Campbell of Ardkinglas. The assize (or jury) were all drawn from the neighbourhood of Inveraray. Jury service was clearly a residential hazard around the Duke's capital. The surnames of the good citizens summoned to sit in judgement - Walker, Murray, Brown, McNokaird, McOnlea, McNachtan, Campbell, two McNiccolls, two Clerks, two McDugalds and two McKellars - are almost all still familiar to local people today.

The accused was one Margaret Campbell alias Guinich, "persued at the instance of William Inglis procurator fiscal .. for the cryme of murder." She was "naturall daughter to the deceist Angus Campbell alias Guinich sometymes living in Kilberry". Before the jury, and before the modern reader, the story unfolds. The previous year, Margaret Campbell had:-

"fallen in fornication -with James Montgomry son to John Montgomrie of Ballimeanoch she then serving in the said John his house finding her self with