

The Woman who Funded the BAA's Ochs Scholarship: A Short Account

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Maud Lilian Ochs was born in Paris on 20 December 1902 to a British father, George, and a French mother, Helen. Her parents were part of a larger Jewish diaspora originating from Hohenems, near Innsbruck (Austria). Maud was their only child. She would have enjoyed dual British and French nationality as her mother was French, but she was listed as British in the 1911 Census of England and Wales, and in official records thereafter.¹ The 1911 Census shows her family as living in Hanover Square, London, and states that George was a banker, although he became an antiques dealer in later life. By the time of his death in 1936 his home was in Paris. Maud's mother died in 1941.² There was a history of wartime adventure in her family: Maud's maternal grandfather, Frédéric Reitlinger, was a diplomat and banker who later published a memoir about his escape in a balloon from the siege of Paris, during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870.³ Frédéric's wife, Mathilde, was a member of the Cattau family, one of the most influential Egyptian Jewish families in Cairo, with wide-ranging governmental, financial and agricultural interests.

Maud thus came from an extended family with wealth and connections. What is known of her life in the 1930s suggests she mainly lived in France and would have been resident there until after the outbreak of the Second World War. A rare photograph shows her standing beside King Faisal I of Iraq (1921–33), with a dog in the background (Fig. 1). She won second prize in a golf tournament, the 'Championnat de la Boulie', Paris, in 1933. She was proud of having driven in the Monte Carlo Rally when it was still possible for amateurs to be involved; she displayed the medals to commemorate this feat on the dashboard of her car.⁴

In the early years of the Second World War Maud was an active resister to German occupation and plans for expansion, first in France and then, briefly, in Spain. Resistance included helping in the escape lines for military personnel stranded in Europe through, for example, the provision of food, shelter, clothing, blank identity papers from town halls and so on.⁵ A large number of resisters were women. Maud's Jewish heritage (though in Ministry of Defence records she was later listed as C of E) meant that she was subject to increasingly draconian anti-Semitic legislation (the 1940 Ordinances in occupied France; the 1940–41 'Statut des Juifs' in Vichy France). In the early years of the war these laws required Jews to be registered, removed them from employment in public office and professional activities, expropriated their properties, forbade them from moving, and imposed upon them a host of other regulations. As Rod Kedward has observed, 'the most ignominious scenario of the Occupation unrolled: competition between Vichy and the Germans for pride of place in the legalistic victimization of the Jews'.⁶ Mass arrests or 'rafles' of non-French (often refugee) and then French Jews took place from 1941 onwards. Of a pre-war population of



FIG. 1. Maud Ochs with Faisal I bin Hussain bin Ali al-Hashimi (date unknown), King of Syria (March–July 1920), then Iraq (1921–33)

Courtesy of Gordon Baxter and the 'Common Stream' website (www.commonstream.co.uk)

330,000 Jews, about 78,000 men, women and children were incarcerated in French concentration camps. For most of them, this led to deportation to the German death camps: only 2000 survived. The same fate awaited resisters: a total of 200,000 French men and women were killed in German concentration camps; a further 20,000 others were killed in action.⁷

Little wonder, then, that Maud decided to leave France in the summer of 1941. She later told friends years later that she had walked over the Pyrenees with a group of RAF escapees. She would almost certainly have had to help pay for the service of a guide — and guides were themselves often shot for their services to Allied refugees. Between 30,000 and 35,000 French people crossed the Pyrenees between 1941 and 1944 into Spain (compared with the 500,000 who made the journey in the other direction in 1939, escaping Franco's victorious Nationalists).⁸ Rather fewer servicemen found their way back to the United Kingdom using this route also. No one was safe from accidental discovery by, or possible betrayal to, German forces — or people sympathetic to them — until they actually managed to reach Britain.⁹

Maud stayed for another six months in the Iberian peninsula. Though 'neutral', as fascist states both Spain and Portugal were dangerous places to be and German intelligence services were active there.¹⁰ From notes of consular correspondence in 1941 and 1942, Maud is known at the very least to have provided financial assistance to 'distressed British subjects' and refugees: claims for reimbursement to her account were made by the three consulates in Madrid, Barcelona and Lisbon.¹¹ She also appears to have drawn up lists, for the Foreign Office, of people who had made their way to the United Kingdom from Gibraltar or Lisbon. At Gibraltar in late December 1941, Maud herself boarded His Majesty's Transport SS *Batory*, a Polish liner converted to carry 6000 people, which was bound for Greenock.¹²

Once in London, at the age of thirty-nine, Maud joined the Auxiliary Territory Services (ATS) in February 1942.¹³ Her army number was W/135905 and her fifteen years' experience of driving meant that she was initially appointed as a driving instructor. She transferred from the 23rd Eastern to the 21st London Motor Group in March. She had two addresses for contact: Moray Lodge in Campden Hill, and c/o a Lady Savory of Westbourne Terrace.

In August 1942 Maud was formally posted to 'Extra Regimental Employment for Special Duties without Pay and Allowances from Army Funds' and she was employed under that rubric on the 'Y List', until demobilised in August 1946. She was granted rank of Sergeant in July 1943, and then Warrant Officer Class II in August 1944. Her military conduct was noted as 'exemplary' and she was awarded the Defence Medal for her years of 'non-operational' service.

Being on the Y List can simply mean that the person has been transferred to a different regiment, so that Maud's ATS number would have been merely an administrative convenience or a cover. One possible link with 'Special Duties' was a secret radio resistance network set up in 1941.¹⁴ Maud's skills included fluent French, Italian and Spanish, and there was strong competition for recruits who were multilingual.¹⁵ There are two probable candidates for Maud's 'extra-regimental' years in the ATS: the 'Government Code and Cypher School' (GC&CS) and the 'Special Operations Executive' (SOE). Both have associations with the term 'Special Duties', unfortunately Maud's MOD record is not specific as to where she worked.

The title 'Y service' was derived from WI, standing for 'Wireless Intercept', and it was linked to the broader sphere of SIGINT, or the interception of communications for the purposes of intelligence-gathering. Those who were recruited were told to

report for 'Special Duties'.¹⁶ By the end of World War II, thousands of men and women, many of them based in Y out-stations across Britain, intercepted and monitored signals intelligence from radio and wireless communications in Germany, other Axis powers and across the world for the GC&CS, on a system of continuous shifts. The data was collected, decoded or decrypted, and analysed at certain centres (most notably, but not only, at Bletchley Park) and the results transmitted to the War Office and military commanders in the field as appropriate, under highly secret conditions. The operatives were a mix of civilian and military personnel and there were Y service units (some of them mobile) also in Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean.

The SOE was set up by Churchill in 1940, to support resistance in Nazi-occupied Europe by, for example, parachuting in agents and supplies, and developing technical means of sabotage. Five sections alone dealt with France, one of which, D/F, served to get agents out as well as in (independently of the Secret Intelligence Services' own MI9). To undertake this kind of work, SOE was allocated the use of two 'Special Duties' RAF squadrons. Initially, SOE communications were controlled by SIS/MI6, but by June 1942 SOE had set up its own, and increasingly extensive, communications systems (in which codes and ciphers were of course also involved).¹⁷ In addition to transporting agents and supplies, another role for some of the aircraft was to act as a form of airborne receiver on a 'line-of-sight basis' for the radio-telephone devices that had so greatly increased the level of communication between Western Europe and the United Kingdom. According to Flight Lieutenant Whinney, 'We were literally a flying telephone exchange handling coded traffic.'¹⁸ The transmission and reception of messages formed a complex web between different sections and organisations; the BBC was, for example, used to transmit coded messages as to when an aircraft took off and would therefore be expected to be in the vicinity of a particular circuit. MI6 continued, apparently, to monitor the messages transmitted and received — there was certainly huge potential for conflict between the different military and intelligence organisations involved in the war.¹⁹

Maud's name has not yet been found in British archives except as documented above, but this is unsurprising: most personal files have been 'weeded', many remain closed and she must have felt bound by the Official Secrets Act, as were so many.²⁰ She brushed off enquiries about her war-time experiences, saying politely that 'one does not talk of these things', though she did mention having personally buried some family valuables to protect them from being looted by the German forces. She retrieved those possessions after the war ended. We know that she was a supporter of General de Gaulle and the Free French/Fighting France movement, because she possessed a France Libre badge (Fig. 2). A plea to preserve her personal papers, made by a member of the BAA to her solicitor in 1991, was unfortunately ignored.

Some evidence of her activities in France, however, has emerged in a wartime Ministerie van Justitie box file kept in the Dutch National Archives at The Hague.²¹ It concerns a young Dutchman by the name of Hans Cramer, to whom Maud gave considerable help during his eighteen-month wartime journey of escape from the Netherlands to Britain via France, Spain, Curaçao and Canada. According to a document in that file, Maud 'helped him over the border' on 5 July 1941. A 'passeur' called Jean brought Hans from Paris to Bourges, very close to the demarcation line between occupied and Vichy France. Maud, two other French women and Hans crossed together into the southern zone: no easy task.²² In later years — for they remained firm friends — he and Maud joked about their first meeting in a field. He



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FIG. 2. Maud Ochs's France Libre badge
Gordon Baxter and Jane Hampshire

had been feeling desperately sick because he had eaten some snails he had found when he was hungry, in the belief that all snails in France would be edible.

From Hans's dossier we know that Maud had the contacts to be able to supply him with a second set of false papers in the name of 'Michel Dupuy' and a temporary safe haven with two friends of hers, a M. and Mme Decor of Belle-Rive sur Allée, near Vichy. She accompanied him to two cities, Lyon and Vichy, in order to visit the Netherlands Offices so that he could apply for documentation as to his real identity, get some support for his onward journey, and supply information about the port of Rotterdam to the American embassy in Vichy. To travel in the company of a woman was much safer for a foreigner than to travel about on one's own.²³ Later, Hans was to be thrown into prison in Toulouse and then taken to a camp, Le Résébedou, for a short while until freed by an honorary Dutch consul, a Mr Van Dobben. Eventually Hans was able to join the Commandos in Britain (InterAllied 10, Group 2).

In May 1942, Maud, now based in London, received two letters. One was from a Mrs Chinchi Metcalfe, who was said to be the daughter of the Decors of Belle-Rive sur Allée. Chinchi was apparently based in Belfast and she was probably connected to a Captain Metcalfe of MI5 who was briefly mentioned in Colonel Pinto's summary of Hans Cramer's interview at the Royal Victoria Patriotic School, Wandsworth, on his arrival in the UK.²⁴ With Chinchi's letter to Maud came an earlier letter addressed to Mrs Metcalfe (i.e. Chinchi) from Hans requesting her help for him in obtaining a visa to England, to be forwarded to the Dutch legation in Lisbon and from thence to Toulouse. Only with such a visa could Hans be permitted to leave the refugee camp in Toulouse, in which he found himself temporarily, to cross into Spain and exit immediately onto any ship destined for an Allied country (in his case, the 'Cabo de Buena Esperanza').

In her somewhat opaque letter, Chinchi gave some indication of the conditions near Moulins in Vichy France. She talked about the good spirits of the 'anaemic' Hans — named of course as Michel — assuring Maud that he would be given 'les confitures de ma tante' by Chinchi's mother. This may well have been a coded reference to the supply of a visa by the Allied authorities. Chinchi also mentioned a fracas

at St Pourçain between supporters and opponents of the regime, and the disappearance of a leading ‘engineer’ into the prison of Cherche Midi. In addition there was a fairly clear reference to people of Jewish or foreign descent, with prices upon their heads, being hunted down and sent to prison or to the concentration camps.²⁵ Chinchi lamented that it was difficult for people from small nations to survive, and that young people’s lives were being slowly and painfully extinguished. She celebrated the ‘new talent’ that Maud was showing in London: ‘*Je vous vois, arme à la main, vous exercer avec toute l’énergie que peut susciter l’imagination. Je vous souhaite d’utiliser ce nouveau talent. Si je pouvais en faire autant! [.]*’.

Maud had the confidence to contact an unnamed man, almost certainly a Colonel de Bruyne, head of one of the branches of the Dutch Intelligence Services, forwarding the letters she had just received. ‘*Cher Monsieur*’, she wrote, on 11 May 1942, in green ink, ‘*Je vous dépose ci-joint une lettre de M. Metcalfe & une de H. Cramer. Vous seriez fort aimable de me renvoyer celle de mon amie en hâte. Croyez à mes sentiments distingués*’. Colonel de Bruyne sent the letters (with a request for security clearance on both Maud and Hans) to Captain R. Derksema, head of another branch of the Dutch intelligence services, the Centrale Inlichtingendienst.²⁶ In August, Maud alerted the same ‘Monsieur’ when news reached her that Hans had landed in Curaçao on his way to Canada, so that when, in December 1942, Hans finally disembarked at Gourock from the *Queen Elizabeth* — then transformed into a troopship that carried over 10,000 soldiers — he was expected.

These documents and letters offer the briefest of insights into a woman who had the knowledge, courage and influence that enabled her to facilitate escapes from occupied and Vichy France, and to assist with the return of British refugees to the UK from Spain and Portugal. There are almost certainly other stories of which we know nothing for, without the preservation of Hans’s story in the Dutch National Archives, Maud’s role in his escape would have remained invisible. We are unlikely ever to know what she did in ‘Special Duties’ between August 1942 and August 1946, although further information would be most welcome.

Following the end of World War II, Maud worked for the British Foreign Office. She also enrolled as a part-time member of the WRAC/TA with No. 1 Special Communications Squadron between 1951 and 1954, attending numerous part-time sessions and annual camps for training. She was remembered by Cecil Farthing (director of the National Buildings Record) in the context of Conservative Party matters in Chelsea. She lived at 7 Cadogan Street, London, in a small flat until her move, in retirement, to a former oast house at 13 High Street, Foxton, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 3).

Maud participated in Foxton life with enthusiasm. She was a good cook, a keen gardener and bridge player, and loved her dog. She liked being taken occasionally to Evensong at St Johns College, Cambridge. She was very interested in local life, enthusing, for example, about Rowland Parker’s *The Common Stream*, a meticulously researched book about life in Foxton over the centuries.²⁷ Maud had no relatives in the UK. She continued to visit cousins in Paris regularly until the late 1980s. In her final years she became very dependent on a team of extremely supportive friends, who cared for her through difficult times until her death in 1991 (Fig. 4).

In addition to the legacy she bequeathed to the British Archaeological Association which funds the Ochs Scholarship, she left generous bequests to the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Trust.

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FIG. 3. Maud Ochs outside her house in Foxton
Jane Hampshire

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FIG. 4. Photograph of some of Maud's friends and helpers in Foxton
Tony Orchard

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NOTES

1. E. Stourton, *Cruel Crossing: Escaping Hitler across the Pyrenees* (London 2014), 133.
2. Some details of the Ochs family genealogy exist at www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/en/; George Ochs's date of death and Paris residency are given in his entry on the *England and Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations 1858–1966)*.
3. F. Reitlinger, *A diplomat's memoir of 1870* (London 1915).
4. See M. Frostick, *A History of the Monte Carlo Rally* (London 1963) for an idea of the early years of the Rally.
5. O. Clutton-Brock, *RAF Evaders: The Comprehensive Story of Thousands of Escapees and their Escape Lines in Western Europe, 1940–1945* (London 2009), xxvi. More generally, see A. Humbert, *Résistance: Memoirs of Occupied France*, trans. B. Mellor (London 2008).
6. R. Kedward, *La Vie en Bleu: France and the French since 1900* (London 2005), 253, 263–67; and Stourton, *Cruel Crossing* (as n. 1), 107.
7. M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France 1940–1944* (London 1966), 144, 424.
8. A. Dessing, *Tulpen voor Wilhelmina: De geschiedenis van de Engelandvaarders* (Amsterdam 2004), 17.
9. Clutton Brock, *RAF Evaders* (as n. 5), 64.
10. W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: The Special Operations Executive 1940–1945* (London 2000), 323.
11. Most of these details are provided by lists of correspondence registered 1941–42, held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: K11781/K10656/9/248; K10674/K7979/9/248; K3005/45/248; K7522/K9523/45/248. Two other files remain closed. (Crown Copyright: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/).
12. The SS *Batory's* December journey is mentioned in <http://www.conscript-heroes.com/Art18-The-Big-Party-960.htm>. A young Dutchman, Cornelis Drooglever Fortuyn, later to become a British secret agent who was dropped into the Netherlands, and who died at Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, was also on board; see <http://www.wozslachtoffers.nl/bio/52887/Drooglever-Fortuyn-Cornelis.htm>.
13. Details of Maud's wartime and post-war military service courtesy of the MOD Army Personnel Centre, Glasgow.
14. D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940–1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive, with Documents* (London and Basingstoke 1980), 57; and <http://www.coleshillhouse.com/specialdutiesbranch/special-duties-branch-overview.php>.
15. J. G. Beevor, *SOE: Recollections and Reflections 1940–1945* (London 1981), 55.
16. S. McKay, *The Secret Listeners: The Men and Women Posted Across the World to Intercept the German Codes for Bletchley Park* (London 2012), chapters 1 and 2.
17. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* (as n. 10), 238–39, 736–44.
18. Cited in K. A. Merrick, *Flights of the Forgotten: Special Duties Operations in World War Two* (London 1989), 54. Merrick uses the term 'Special Duties' for the squadrons (138 and 161) allocated to the SOE. See also Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* (as n. 10), 365–66.
19. R. Marshall, *All the King's Men* (London 1988/2012 electronic edition), 107, 329.
20. Foot, *SOE in France* (as n. 7), 46–53; and McKay, *The Secret Listeners* (as n. 16), 10.
21. A box file in GaHetNA, the Dutch National Archives, [Justitie/Londens Archief, access number 2.09.06, inventory number 12977] contains sixteen documents that deal with Hans Cramer's wartime journey and arrival in the UK.
22. J.-C. Bonnin, *Les passagers clandestins dans le Cher, particularités de Vierzon*, in Journée-débat *La ligne de démarcation (1940–1944): Histoire et témoignages* (Tours 2010), 4. archives.cg37.fr/UploadFile/GED/Colloque_ligne_demarcation/1352737445.pdf
23. Dessing, *Tulpen voor Wilhelmina* (as n. 8), 81, 121.
24. Colonel Pinto's summary, written in January 1943, is the most substantial of the sixteen documents at GaHetNA (see n. 21).
25. Foot, *SOE in France* (as n. 7), 98; and Clutton Brock, *RAF Evaders* (as n. 5), 68.
26. Dessing, *Tulpen voor Wilhelmina* (as n. 8), 302–03.
27. R. Parker, *The Common Stream* (London 1975).