



VERA ATKINS MEMORIAL SEAT DEDICATION

SATURDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2011 AT 1230 PM

THE 69TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST PARACHUTE DROP OF WOMEN AGENTS INTO FRANCE

ALICE
AMBROISE
DENISE
GABY
JACQUELINE
LOUISE
MADELEINE
MARIETTE
NADINE
PAULETTE
SIMONE
SOLANGE
TANIA
VIOLETTE



**"THEY RISKED THEIR LIVES
AND FOUGHT FOR US.
WE OWED IT TO THEIR RELATIVES
TO FIND OUT WHAT
HAD HAPPENED TO THEM."**



Squadron Leader Vera Atkins CBE - Women's Auxiliary Airforce - 1908-2000



CBE
Legion d'honneur & Croix de Guerre

Vera Atkins and the Women of S.O.E.

Vera May Atkins (nee Rosenberg) was the Intelligence Officer - French Section of the **Special Operations Executive**. S.O.E. was officially formed by Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** on 22 July 1940 to conduct warfare by means other than direct military engagement. Its mission was to encourage and facilitate espionage and sabotage behind enemy lines and to serve as the core of the **Auxiliary Units**, a British resistance movement.

As a exile from Romania Vera came to Britain before the start of the second world war. She joined S.O.E and was soon managing most of the men and women agents who were being sent into France to carry out clandestine work behind enemy lines. This memorial seat is a tribute to her courage and that of her women agents who lost their lives. Her dedication and resolve to go into Europe and find out what had happened to them after the war ended was not well recognised, except by the families of those lost.

The tree at the centre of the memorial seat was grown from a seed found in a Fir cone picked up in 2005 from inside the electric fence that bordered Natzweiler Concentration Camp, which is near the village of Moussey, in the Vosges mountains of eastern France.



Winston Churchill
Leader of
Wartime Britain

The **Natzweiler Tree** is also a special tribute to S.O.E. agents **Andree Borrel**, **Vera Leigh**, **Diana Rowden** and also to **Sonia Olschanezky**, who was a locally recruited member of Robin, a sub-circuit of the Prosper resistance network.

After capture earlier in the year the four women were taken to Natzweiler Concentration Camp on the 6th July 1944 and executed by lethal injection and their bodies burnt in the camp crematorium that very evening. Three had landed in enemy territory to work as clandestine radio operators, couriers and resistance fighters to assist the French Resistance Forces. Eight other woman S.O.E. agents had also been captured and 4 executed at Dachau and 4 at Ravensbruck. Sadly, **Muriel Byck** died of meningitis soon after landing in France 1944. **Yvonne Rudellat** died of typhus after being liberated from the extermination camp at Belsen. A mention must be made about WRNS First Officer **Madeleine Bayard**, the only woman aboard HMS Fidelity (formally known as Le Rhone/Le Rhin) on agent running operations into Vichy France from the Mediterranean. She was lost, with the rest of the crew and the men from 'T' Company, 40 Royal Marine Commando, when the ship was sunk at the end of December 1942 by German Submarine U-435.

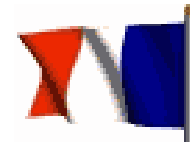
After the war ended Vera teamed up with **Major 'Bill' Barkworth** who was the intelligence officer of the 2nd. Special Air Service Regiment. Bill was sent on an unofficial mission to discover what had happened to the many SAS soldiers who did not return after the war ended. Together they discovered the men and women who had been executed and set about finding those responsible and brought them to the War Crimes Tribunal, where most were tried and convicted and received long prison sentences, or were hung.

The **Vera Atkins Memorial Seat** is our tribute to this remarkable lady and to the women agents that were lost. The Memorial is set at the beginning of the Allied Special Forces Grove in an area where there are already memorials to the S.O.E. Signals Association, one Dutch & one French S.O.E. agent and 299 Squadron RAF. Soon a memorial stone will be erected commemorating the Escape Lines Memorial Society and all those people who so ably helped thousands escape from occupied countries in order to fight again.

The Phantom Memorial Garden situated near the visitor centre also commemorates the four women agents who were executed at Natzweiler along with the SAS and Phantom Signals soldiers who were murdered in the Moussey area. The Phantom Memorial Garden was created by Sgt. Len Owens MM.



"The spirit of resistance helps free a nation's soul"



Major 'Bill'
Barkworth

NATZWEILER

FRANCE

Violette
W.A.A.F.
Died of Meningitis
23/5/1944 age 25



Muriel Byck

Wireless Operator

BELSEN

Jaqueline
F.A.N.Y.

Died of Typhus
23/4/45 age 48



Yvonne Rudellat

Courier

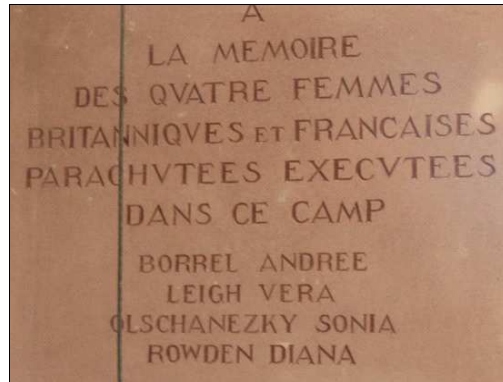
HMS FIDELITY

W.R.N.S.

Madeleine Bayard
Age 32.

Lost her life when
the ship was
torpedoed off the
Azores in 1942/3.

Served in S.O.E. as
Madeleine Barclay.



Denise
Andree Borrel (F.A.N.Y. - 6/7/1944 age 24)
Simone
Vera Leigh (F.A.N.Y. - 6/7/1944 age 41)
Tania
Sonia Olschanezky - 6/7/1944 age 20)
Paulette
Diana Rowden (W.A.A.F - 6/7/1944 age 29)



Borrel

Courier



Leigh

Courier



Olschanezky

Courier



Rowden

Courier

RAVENSBRUCK



Ambrose
Denise Bloch (F.A.N.Y. - 25/1/1945 age 29)
Nadine
Lilian Rolfe (W.A.A.F - 5/2/1945 age 30)
Louise
Violette Szabo (F.A.N.Y. - 25/1/1945 age 23)
Alice
Cecily Lefort (F.A.N.Y. - 1/2/1945 age 44)



Bloch

Wireless Operator



Rolfe

Wireless Operator



Szabo

Wireless Operator



Lefort

Courier

DACHAU



Mariette
Yolande Beekman - (W.A.A.F - 12/9/1944 age 32)
Solange
Madeleine Damerment (F.A.N.Y. - 12/9/1944 age 26)
Madeleine
Noor Inayat-Khan (W.A.A.F - 12/9/1944 age 30)
Gaby
Elaine Plewman (F.A.N.Y. - 12/9/1944 age 27)



Beekman

Wireless Operator



Damerment

Courier



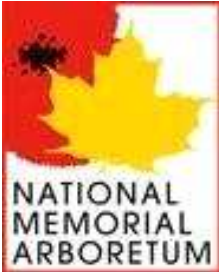
Khan

Wireless Operator



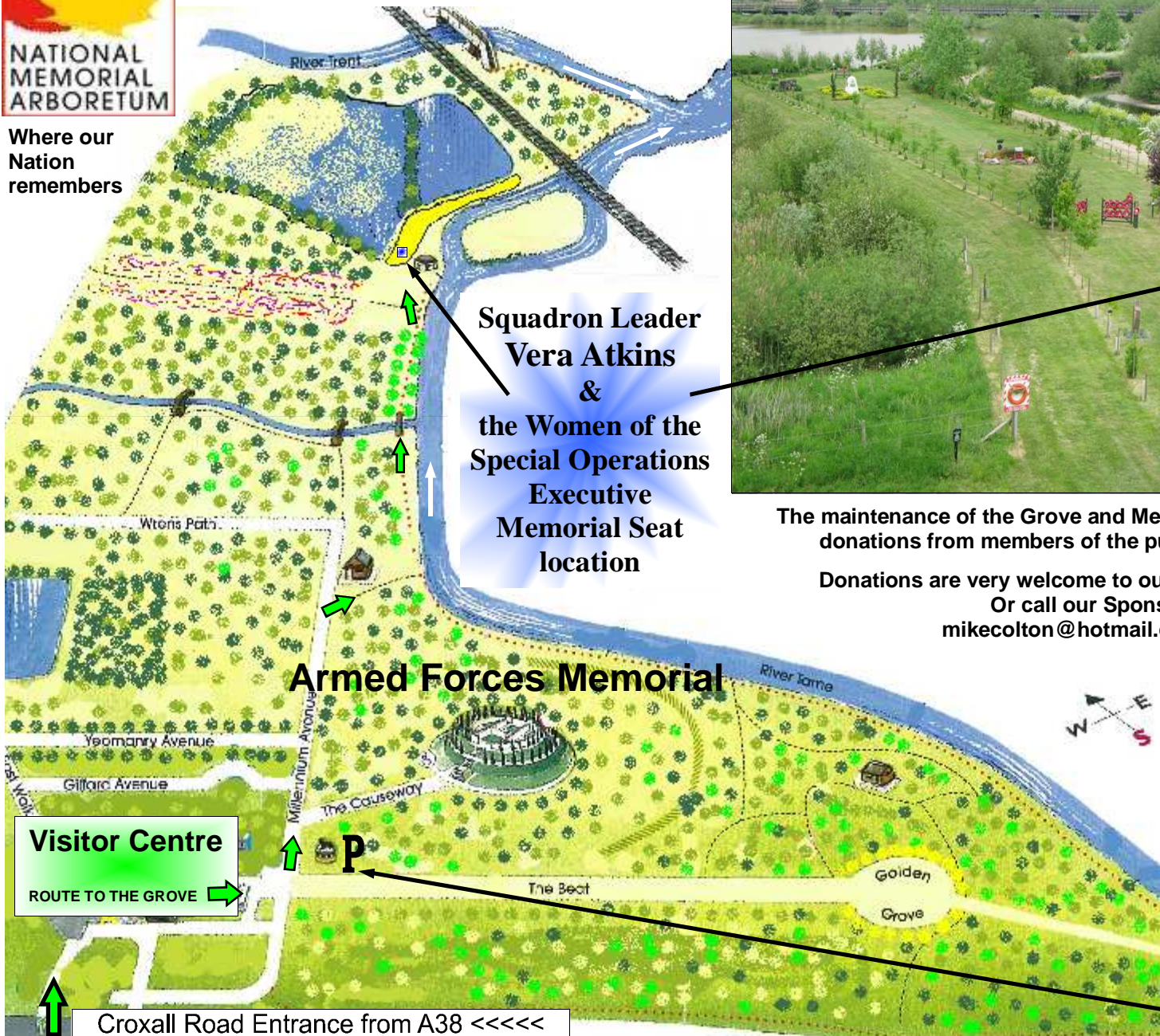
Plewman

Courier



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Allied Special Forces Grove

The maintenance of the Grove and Memorials therein is funded entirely by generous donations from members of the public and volunteers from the association.

Donations are very welcome to our address P.O. Box 32, Hereford HR1 9DF
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mikecolton@hotmail.com ~ MemorialGrove.org.uk



Created by Sgt. Len Owens MM with the Armed Forces Memorial in the background