

The Secret Ministry of Ag. & Fish: My Life in Churchill's School for Spies

Noreen Riols

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'My mother thought I was working for the Ministry of Ag. and Fish.' So begins Noreen Riols' compelling memoir of her time as a member of Churchill's 'secret army', the Special Operations Executive. It was 1943, just before her eighteenth birthday, Noreen received her call-up papers, and was faced with either working in a munitions factory or joining the Wrens. A typically fashion-conscious young woman, even in wartime, Noreen opted for the Wrens - they had better hats. But when one of her interviewers realized she spoke fluent French, she was directed to a government building on Baker Street.

It was SOE headquarters, where she was immediately recruited into F-Section, led by Colonel Maurice Buckmaster. From then until the end of the war, Noreen worked with Buckmaster and her fellow operatives to support the French Resistance fighting for the Allied cause. Sworn to secrecy, Noreen told no one that she spent her days meeting agents returning from behind enemy lines, acting as a decoy, passing on messages in tea rooms and picking up codes in crossword puzzles.

Vivid, witty, insightful and often moving, this is the story of one young woman's secret war, offering readers an authentic and compelling insight into what really went on in Churchill's 'secret army' from one of its last surviving members.



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