

Lament for Muriel

This poem was inspired by my long-awaited visit to Muriel's grave at Pornic CWGC cemetery in Brittany in July 2001, when with the Society's St. Nazaire tour. The short life of Muriel Tamara Byck, Mentioned in Despatches, Jewish SOE agent, had never been researched until I wrote about her and Denise Bloch (the other Jewish girl killed with SOE French Section – thirteen SOE girls died overall). My deep thanks goes to Ian Alexander for the piper's lament which I felt he played for her as well as all those others who never returned, at Escoublac cemetery on that lovely July day.

With such courage she flew,
O'er green fields and dark waters,
For the land that she knew,
Oh! Judean daughter!

By moonlight she came,
Oh! The piper's refrain!

With codes and with stealth
She took up the fight,
With cycles and cars in the green fields of France.
By day and by night, this Hebrew Yael,
By moonlight she'd flown,
Oh! The piper's refrain!

The enemy closed again and again,
And her allies and friends hid her here, hid her there.
But not once did she flinch, nor her messages fail,
By moonlight she'd come,
This Hebrew Yael.

The work of her hands, her spirit and skills,
Were to save many lives in France's green fields.

But cyanide and silk and revolver to hand,
Were her constant companions and soon wore her down.

So long life was not hers,
She was taken too soon,
To the shade of His wings,
This Hebrew Yael.

Now in Brittany's fields,
'neath her six pointed Star,
The piper's refrain is heard evermore.

Martin Sugarman