

Extracts from Mary Morris, *A Very Private Diary: A Nurse in Wartime*, edited by Carol Acton (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014):

12 June 1940: Went on duty at 7 a.m. The ward was much quieter than usual, none of the loud cheery greetings which I usually received. Pierre was sitting on his bed crying, the tears rolling down his cheeks. I was appalled. Pierre is slim and dark, with beautiful brown eyes and masses of Gallic charm. I checked that Staff Nurse was not around, pulled the curtains round his bed and asked what was wrong. He took my hand and said in French, 'The honour of my country is at stake. Parish has fallen to the Boche'. He told me that he would remain in England and become a member of the Free French Army. He is being discharged from hospital tomorrow and invited me to have dinner with him tomorrow evening. We are not allowed to go out with patients, or even speak to them on matters other than their treatment, Pierre is charming. I shall go out with him. No one need know about it.

14 June 1940. Went to dinner with Pierre last night. His fractured English is delightful ... Pierre poured out his heart to me about all the sorrows of his La Belle France as he held my hand in the candlelight ... It was at this moment that I saw Staff Nurse and one of the seniors sitting at a table in the corner glaring at me.

15 June: Staff Nurse and her awful friend had a malignantly triumphant look about them at breakfast this morning. I was soon to discover what they had been up to! Sister called me into her office ... She looked very severe and said that I was to remove my elbow frills and put on my starched cuffs and wait outside Matron's office until I was called ... Matron was sitting behind her large desk as I entered and she left me standing there for nearly fifteen minutes while she carried on writing. She looked as if she was going to don the black cap at any moment, and said that a responsible senior nurse was 'horrified' at seeing me dining in a public restaurant with a male patient.

17 June: Slept very little last night. Am worried about my annual leave which is due on the 20th. Will I be sacked and sent home in disgrace? Will they understand in Ireland ... Matron said, 'Nurse, you are to go on holiday on the 20th as arranged and when you return we shall review the situation'. She added, 'Your work report states that you spend too much time talking to the patients. We do not allow such behaviour in this hospital. You are here to work and train. You are far too flighty'.

20 June: Travelled up to London this morning, the beginning of my annual holiday ... Met Pierre in the West End ... He seems happier now that he is a part of the Free French Army. Was amazed at the number of noisy Australian soldiers in the West End. They are our allies, over here to train I suppose, but I dislike their uncouth manners and their atrocious voices'.

28 July, Kent and Sussex Hospital: Telephoned Pierre after breakfast. He was delighted to see me, rather gratifying, and we mingled with the multi-national crowd in the West End for a couple of hours. There are many Polish and Czech soldiers here at present, and the raucous voices of the Aussies are still recognisable.

16 September 1940: There is a marvellous feeling of international camaraderie in London—everybody pulling together—and there is great friendliness. We talked with a young Polish airman on the bus. His English was very limited but we gathered that he and many other of his compatriots are training to fly Spitfires and Hurricanes'.

3 March 1941: Pierre is staying down here for a few days. We heard on the BBC News that the RAF had bombed the Renault works in Paris. The loss of this factory will be a serious blow to the Germans. We went out to dinner at a hotel nearby ... and it was as we walked back along the dark streets that Pierre told me that he would be returning to France in a few weeks. I did not ask the obvious questions, of how and why and where—but I have known for a long time that he was anxious to join his compatriots within the underground movement.

We said 'Au Revoir' but I wonder if I shall ever see him again.

23 June 1944 [Mary is now a member of the British army's nursing branch and working in Normandy]: There was a great deal of bustle everywhere this morning. The word has got round that 101 British General Hospital is in business, and we are expecting our first casualties today. Two of our first patients are Germans, picked up by a Canadian officer in a jeep ... Hans is quite unlike the jack-booted Hun whom we had anticipated. He is polite and timid and makes me feel that he is one of the many pawns in this game of war. Propaganda is a big word in wartime. We deduce that good propaganda is whatever makes us hate the enemy or 'Narzis' as Winston Churchill calls them.

24 June, Normandy: Hans brings me a cup of tea as I sit at my desk to read the night report. My mind wanders for a while as I think of this ward and my charges. This multi-national microcosm of a Europe at war is interesting and sad. A badly wounded cockney says 'thanks mate' to Hans as he gives him his tea and fixes his pillow. Why are they all so tolerant of each other inside this canvas tent, and killing each other outside?