The Girl Guides Preparing for Peace at the end of World War Two

A timeline of how the Guide International Service was mobilised.

I94I

Rose Kerr, International Commissioner, wrote a letter printed in 'The Guider' asking for "an army of peace"… whatever happens, Europe will be left weak and exhausted and will need an army of peace - an army mostly composed of women… If we can begin now to collect our Army of Goodwill, what could they not do to bring healing and comfort to a stricken world."

I942

May I942 - Guide Emergency Committee met in London and applied to the War Office - no reply received! So, joined with the Quakers, Red Cross and Salvation Army in planning for peace.

Name of 'Guide International Service' decided as simple,easily translated and understood in any language. Other suggestions included 'The Guide Venturers', 'The Paths of Peace' and 'The Speedwell Patrols'.

Badge of gold trefoil (from the Word Flag) with the letters GIS chosen as easily recognisable abroad.

December - I53 gathered for the first weekend training at Guide HQ.

I943

GIS fund launched with a target of £I00,000. By end of year approx. 80 volunteers ready for service.

GIS training.

I944

20th January I944 the first team (6 Guiders and 2 Scouters) assembled and given instructions to depart London at 6.30pm on 2nd May - cancelled at 2.30pm that day.

Ready for departure.

During D Day landings, GIS team helped at a hush-hush army camp being prepared to as an emergency reception and staging point for refugees from Normandy, in case French civilians were needed to be evacuated. GIS team sent, via boat, for training at Maadi, near Cairo. By August I944 there were I00 trained GIS volunteers. 'The Guide' magazine contained a 'Journey to Europe' scheme to raise awareness of GIS fund.

Distributing relief parcels.

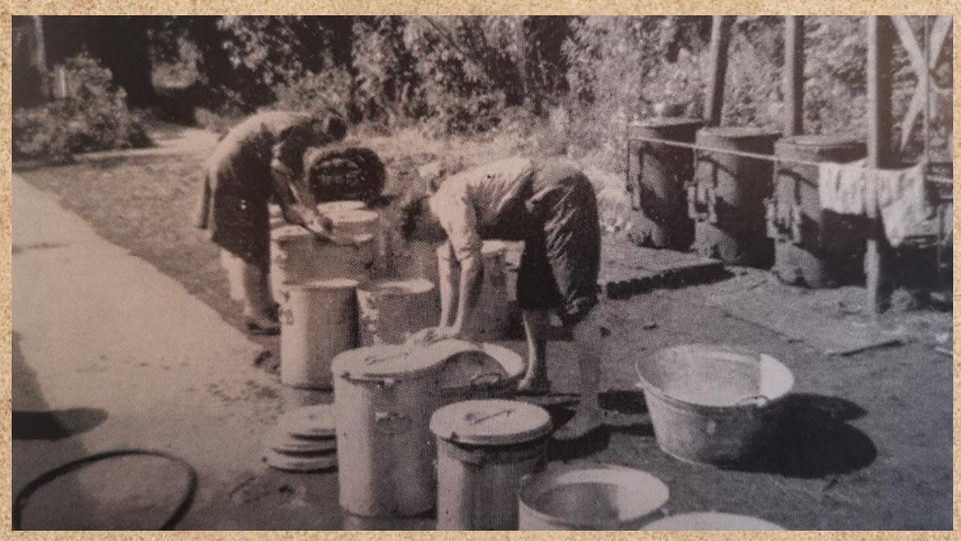
I945

IIth January I945 - the GIS team arrived in Athens. The armistice between the Greek and Allied troops had been signed that morning.

February - team sent into the Netherlands to set up a hospital at Tilburg to receive sick displaced persons. Moved into Arnhem, cooking for refugees.

By April I945 £I20,820 had been raised for GIS fund - first time international relief work had been funded almost entirely by children from 39 countries. Australia and New Zealand started their own Funds.

Day after VE day, GIS entered Amersfoort Concentration Camp and their jobs included cleaning, setting up kitchens and preparing a delousing unit ready for the influx of displaced persons.



Rotterdam open air kitchen.

GIS were among the first to enter Belsen in Germany. They helped in the camp clinic, 'human laundry (delousing, washing down and dressing), children's hospital, shoe repair shop, took English classes and worked out suitable rates of pay for the displaced persons. A team also helped repatriating Polish displaced persons at Gebhardshagen.

Malaya.

Christmas - celebrations arranged for the displaced persons by the GIS.

3Ist December - New Zealand GIS team arrive in Singapore and work with Red Cross contained a 'Journey to Europe' scheme to raise awareness of GIS fund.

I946

August - German children taken out of bombed cities into the country for remedial holidays, organised by GIS volunteers and British Guiders. By December I946 there were I08 GIS volunteers in the field and Girl Guides from 39 countries had raised £I77,000.

I950

GIS work stopped at midnight 30th June I950.

I952

April I952 the last three volunteers went home (one being Sue Ryder).

Facts and Figures

I98 GUIDERS AND 60 SCOUTERS FROM BRITAIN, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, CANADA, EIRE AND KENYA IN GIS TEAMS WORKING WITH REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS IN EUROPE, EGYPT AND MALAYA.

GIS training fitted in around wartime jobs.

Members of the GIS paid IOs per week pocket money (later increased to £I and then 30s as essential expenses in Germany increased).

Army to provide billets, board, transport and uniform.

GIS badge recognised as a sign of peace.

During 9 months of placement, the GIS became godparents to 25 babies and attended weddings as bridesmaids.

Volunteers aged 2Iyrs+

In 9 months of I945 GIS vehicles covered 4I,993 miles with only 3 accidents.

I3,058 vaccinations given in the first month spent at Kota Bhura in Malaya.

"want to help these people, not as Germans, good or bad, but as individual human beings who are suffering severely"
[How Girl Guides Won the War]

Qualities of GIS members

Specialise in the impossible

Self confidence

Initiative

Dogged determination

Close cooperation

Guides and Rangers 2Iyrs+

Adaptable to different cultures

Prepared for unexpected responsibilities

Able to cope with long periods of frustration

Living in each others' pockets under difficult physical conditions

No glamour of about work to be undertaken

Sufficient steadfastness of purpose to carry on through day-to-day hardship, strain and monotony

Suggested training requirements

Encouraged I6yrs+ to train

Sleep on the floor, inside and outside, for 7 consecutive nights, regardless of weather

Put up a bed

Dress in the dark

Walking at night over rough unknown ground without using a torch

Light 3 consecutive fires in the open using I match for each

Cook 3 good two course meals in wet weather without using artificial shelter

Learn at least I extra language

Gain practical experience in de-lousing heads

Learn how to treat fear, loss of self-confidence and mental breakdown

Train when tired, hungry and thirsty or short of sleep - all three at once!

Practice trek cart trips