

# HE 'COLONEL BARKER' STORY ENDS

She was a wife and mother,  
but she 'married' as a man

by  
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"Colonel Barker": S

**T**HE incredible career of Valerie Arkell Smith, alias Colonel Barker, is ended. In her 64 years of life she was a wife, a mother and a "husband."

Her death in the tiny village of Kessingland, near Lowestoft, was revealed yesterday. Right to the end she posed as a man.

Her gay adventures as a debonaire man-about-town were a sensation in the '20s. But she died a lonely recluse, and her story is really a tragedy.

When she was born into a well-off home in Jersey both her parents were disappointed. They wanted a boy.

Her father taught her cricket, fencing and boxing. And though she went to a convent school in Brussels for two years, she was pining to go off and fight with the men by the time World War I came.

## TWO SOLDIERS

In 1918 she married an Australian soldier, Lieut. Harold Arkell Smith. But they parted within six months.

Then she went to live with another soldier and had two children—a son and a daughter.

Soon the yearning to live as a man became irresistible.

In 1923 she ran away to Brighton with a chemist's daughter. They booked at an hotel as "Sir Victor and Lady Barker."

Later they got "married" and went to Andover, Hants, to run an antique shop.

"Colonel Barker" joined the local cricket club and rode to hounds. No-one guessed she was a woman.

Later she became an actor—once playing male

lead to Mrs. Patrick Campbell—and a farm manager. She joined Mosley's Fascists, and wore military medals on her black shirt.

The law caught up with her in 1929. She was jailed for nine months for making a false statement about her sex in the marriage register.

After that the "colonel" went downhill. She worked—always as a man—as a cafe proprietor, reception clerk, salesman, kennelman, chef and servant.

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The people of Kessingland knew nothing of her story. She lived as a recluse in a small cottage on the London road, and was known as Geoffrey Norton.

In the last few months of her life she was crippled by illness. She spent most of her time in an armchair—looking at the picture of her son, an RAF pilot

there must be no publicity—not even an announcement.

On the death certificate she was described as "Geoffrey Norton, otherwise Lillias Irma Valerie Arkell Smith."

Said a villager yesterday: "We never suspected Geoffrey Norton was a woman."

## 'MARVELLOUS'

"On the few occasions she left her cottage she wore men's clothes."

In fact, she had worn men's clothes for 37 years.

An Army officer who knew her as Colonel Barker said: "It was the most marvellous impersonation of a man by a woman ever seen."

Marvellous indeed. For "Colonel Barker"—who craved military glory and took part in fist-fights as a Blackshirt—was physically 100 per cent. woman.

the sweet you can eat  
between meals

