MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE:
THE WOMEN OF THE SOE AND THE OSS DURING WORLD WAR II

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ABSTRACT

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This work’s focus is on the women who served as secret agents during World War II for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Great Britain and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in the United States. The argument presented herein states that the existing historiography featuring female agents oversexualizes and deprives the women of their agency by suggesting that the women would have been less successful in their missions if they were less attractive. The histories discussed in this work focused on the physical appearances and sexuality of their subjects, which resulted in volumes of information that detracted from the successes of the women throughout the war. This Thesis also examines the effect that society had on constructing the ideas of femininity and masculinity that encouraged the authors to depict the women and their accomplishments as abnormal for the time or as resulting from the use of their sexuality.

The Introduction informs the reader about the lives of women in Great Britain and the United States prior to WWII, their entry into the workforce, the creation of the SOE and the OSS, each agency’s selection process for potential agents, the training they received, and the historiographical issues that are found throughout the literature. By comparing the two nations and their treatment of women in the workforce, and more specifically in the secret spy organizations, this researcher found distinct differences in the ways women were discriminated against within the agencies based on how the societies in each nation viewed women in the workforce.
Chapters Two and Three serve to retell the histories of nine female agents who worked for the SOE and the OSS during the war. Both chapters exclude reference to the beauty and sexuality of the women in order to focus on the missions and the accomplishments of the agents presented in other histories. Chapter Four details the policy changes that have occurred since World War I, policies adopted before and during WWII, and the subsequent laws that have passed regarding women in the military. This chapter also argues that it was due to the female agents of the SOE and OSS that the governments in both nations allowed women more freedoms and the option to join the armed forces with full military status after WWII.

The final chapter develops the argument that the women in the existing historiography are over sexualized and their agency is diminished because the authors, as well as society in the 1940s, was socially constructed to view certain occupations as masculine or feminine. Thus, the authors wrote their histories within a gendered paradigm that has not been altered much since the first monograph about the women agents was published over thirty years ago. I suggest that, at least on some level, the authors had a responsibility to their audiences to give accurate and non-gendered histories of the female agents. It is my intention to offer another, less gender specific, approach to the historiography, one that focused on the accomplishments of the agents and not on their beauty or sexual partners. My intention is to draw attention to the flawed and biased approach taken by many of the authors, whether it was intentional or subconscious on their part.
Dedicated to Adam, Zoë and Ethan - without your support and understanding I would accomplish nothing.
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“When women take up a cause you can assume it has been won” – Italian Proverb

A relatively limited number of sources exist about the women who served in the armed forces during WWII. Histories of the women who worked as special agents in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) or the Special Operations Executive (SOE) are even more difficult to find. Only within the last several decades has the study of women in the military caught the attention of scholars in a significant way. The most common themes employed by historians—particularly an overemphasis on the beauty, sexuality, romantic relationships, and marriages of the female agents—needs to be addressed due to the fact that the authors’ gendered emphasis on the physical attractiveness of the agents as part of their analysis detracts from the success the women had throughout the war in both agencies. This confined representation of female spies distracted scholars from accurately assessing their accomplishments as secret agents during WWII.

While the social and political expectations placed on women in the 1940s cannot be ignored, the women employed by the OSS and the SOE enjoyed many freedoms previously held solely by men. As a result, the existing literature should offer readers a much more gender-neutral history of their accomplishments. This is not the case. These women have been, whether intentional or not, written into history with a great focus on their beauty and sexuality.

Prior to WWII, in both the United States and Great Britain, generally, women stayed home taking care of their families and homes. Only young and unmarried women were deemed acceptable in the work place. It was also expected that once they married they would return to their homes and live traditional lives caring for their families. Census records show that prior to
WWII, in 1940, women in the US made up 24.3% of the work force.¹ Great Britain’s records show that prior to their entrance in 1931, only 34.2 % of women worked outside of the home.²

In 1941 and 1942, Great Britain and the US respectively, began recruiting more women into the workforce in order to fill vacancies left by men who had been called up to fight in the war.

At the start of WWII, in both countries, the occupations deemed acceptable for women grew rapidly. As the war required more and more men to leave their civilian jobs and enter the armed forces, essential occupations in munitions plants and automotive factories were left with vacancies that needed to be filled, and quickly. It was at this point that American manufacturers began to recruit women to fill these positions.³ Propaganda posters began to appear in a wide variety of locations with messages aimed at women suggesting they do their patriotic part for the war effort and “Work! So they can Fight!”⁴ The British required women from 18-60 years of age to work in any capacity the government saw as essential to the war effort beginning in 1941.⁵

The one similarity these two countries had was that neither government would allow women to be employed in positions that required the use of weapons, thus excluding them from participating in front line combat for their countries.

³ Emily Yellin, Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II, Reprint (Free Press, 2005), 67–71.
⁵ Harris, Carol. "Women on the Home Front in World War Two," BBC - History - British History in Depth, accessed on March 16, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/brbritain_wwone/womenEmployment_01.shtml#three. Enacted in December 1941, by the National Service Act 2 which made conscription of women aged 20-30 legal and in 1943 it was changed to 18-60 years old.
As the war progressed, each country found an increasing need for the men who were working in non-combat positions. The US government in 1942 and earlier by Great Britain (1939) that women could join the armed forces to fill the void left by those men.  Separate, women only auxiliary branches of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps in the United States were implemented. In Britain, branches of the Navy, the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), as well as the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), and the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) began employing women. These women were still forbidden to use weapons nor were they allowed to fight on the front line.

Unknown to most citizens in either country, the United States and Great Britain also started secret organizations that hired men and women for clandestine work. The SOE hired women for covert operations from its beginnings in 1940. However, the US government never expressively authorized the use of women for covert operations. It is common knowledge among OSS historians and its enthusiasts that women, namely Virginia Hall, Amy Thorpe Pack, Maria Gulovich were utilized by the OSS, but were actually affiliated with their British counterpart, the SOE. Allowing the US to deny any association with the women in the event they were harmed or killed in action.

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7 Olga Gruhzit-Hoyt, *They Also Served: American Women in World War II*, 1St Edition (Birch Lane Pr, 1995), 61, 102, 125, 1, 150, 139, 191. In the US they created the WAC, WAVES, a women’s section of the Marines Corps, the Army Nurses Corps, WASPs, SPARs, and the OSS

8 “Women on the Home Front in World War Two.”

HISTORY OF THE SOE

When the SOE became an active part of British secret intelligence (1940-1946), the agency was responsible for “setting Europe ablaze.”\(^\text{10}\) The Prime Minister of England (Winston Churchill) declared that “a new organization shall be established forthwith to co-ordinate all action, by way of subversion and sabotage, against the enemy overseas…This organization will be known as the Special Operations Executive,” and came under the direction of Hugh Dalton.\(^\text{11}\) The SOE was, according to M.R.D. Foot, an “essentially unorthodox formation, created to wage war by unorthodox means in unorthodox places.”\(^\text{12}\) Its members, men and women, were split into sections designated by country and each section was responsible for sending agents into their respective country to start or to help emerging Nazi resistance movements.

RECRUITING AND TRAINING SOE AGENTS

Those individuals recruited into the SOE, whether by an invitation or chosen from other military agencies usually knew someone already working for the agency. While there was no specific order given defining the “type” of individual the agency should search for, potential candidates needed to be “unconventional, “secretive,” “quick, keen, accurate,” brave and adventurous whether they worked in the office as secretaries, clerks or in the field as saboteurs and spies. They oftentimes came from privileged families and attended the most elite schools of the day.\(^\text{13}\) The agents were also expected to possess a native speaker’s command of foreign languages. This allowed them to pass as citizens and to escape detection by the Gestapo and their affiliated security agencies. Men and women had to be British or US citizens (sometimes


\(^{12}\)Ibid., 12.

\(^{13}\)Foot, SOE, 1940-46, 47.
after they became affiliated with the agency) as a matter of national security to work in the offices. In the field, however, they needed to pass for a native in the country they were assigned to as this afforded them a certain amount of security from the Germans.  

As part of the SOE, women were employed both in the office and in the field. The agency’s hiring practices did not sexually discriminate and many of the women agents, behind enemy lines, worked as couriers and wireless operators. The SOE recognized early in the war that women were less likely to be stopped for questions by the Gestapo than the male agents. The “F” section of the SOE employed fifty women as clandestine agents (the largest number of any section in the agency) and offered them honorary membership as FANY or WAAF members. It was believed that membership in these organizations would spare the women from being tortured or killed if they were caught. For their part, these women agents served in many of the key missions during the war. Of the most famous female agents, Virginia Hall, Violette Szabo, Christine Granville, Nancy Wake and Noor Inayat Khan, served in France under the direction of F Section, which was led by Major Maurice Buckmaster.

The men and women of the SOE did not go blindly into the field; training for the agents was physically and mentally rigorous and served as a way of weeding out those recruits who did not possess the physical and psychological traits considered necessary to be secret agents. The training was no different for male recruits than it was for the females. Potential agents began their training like service personnel in all other military branches, with basic training for two to four weeks in secret locations along the English countryside. Followed by psychological testing to insure they would not crumple under enemy pressure (this technique was taken from the American OSS). From there, agents went through paramilitary training for 3-5 weeks where

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15Ibid., 39–47.
they trained in “silent killing” and in the use of various weapons. Some agents were also trained to use explosives, and all of them learned survival skills, and how to parachute from a plane. Those agents who showed the greatest potential underwent training to be undercover agents. There they were taught to look natural in any setting even while doing unnatural things. They were educated on how to react if captured and interrogated, along with the coding skills they would need to transmit and receive messages and counter-espionage techniques like the use of propaganda and handling explosives.16

In order to comprehend what these agents did to serve their countries there must be an understanding of who these agents were. As expected, the men in both countries served in the armed forces by the millions. Whatever their reasons for joining—escaping problems at home, searching for adventure, a desire to use weapons, pressure from family or friends, patriotism or a lack of other employment options—they fought, suffered and died for the cause of freedom. The expectations of their governments and countrymen that they would fight does not diminish their heroic deeds in any way. However, the reactions to the threats of Nazism by women were, in some cases, entirely unexpected. As was customary for the time, women worked in the home and rarely in factories or munitions plants. It was even less common for women to join the military prior to the war. The social restraints placed on women at that time limited their choices of occupations. Therefore, once women were legally permitted to join the auxiliary branches of the armed forces, many did. Although the concept of allowing women to participate in the military was imperative to freeing up the men for the frontlines, many women joined as a result of their own deep sense of patriotism and began training for noncombat positions in each of the branches of the military for both countries. Some women went far beyond what was expected of

16Ibid., 53–58.
them while in the military and worked with their fellow countrymen *behind* enemy lines as secret agents.

**HISTORY OF THE OSS**

In the months prior to its official beginnings in 1942, the concept for the OSS was being discussed in the White House. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had already appointed William “Wild Bill” Donovan to head its predecessor, the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI). Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the COI’s propaganda division became part of the Office of War Information (OWI) that later became the OSS. The job of the OSS was to plan and execute acts of “espionage, sabotage, ‘black propaganda,’ guerrilla warfare, and other ‘un-American’ subversive practices.”

This enterprise included both men and women in top-secret administrative positions and as field agents. Women, for the most part, filled the offices as secretaries, telephone operators, file clerks, and code breakers. Fewer women were employed in the sections called Special Operations (spies), Operational Group (foreign language specialists and saboteurs), and Maritime Unit (underwater explosive experts) where their duties included subversive actions but there were 38 women who served in capacities like these.

**RECRUITING AND TRAINING AGENTS OF THE OSS**

Recruiting for the OSS began in 1941 when Donovan enlisted “close friends, business clients, club members, professors from elite colleges, linguists, [and] established writers.”

Donovan would “frequently recruit daring individualists, including, bold risk-taking, rule-

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17Richard Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 1972), 1–2. Black Propaganda was a technique used during the war that supplied false information to the opposing side that appears to be coming from their own side. This was often done with radio broadcasts or by intercepting mail and rewriting it with false information or information that would lead civilians to believe the war was going much worse that their governments were telling them it was going.


19Ibid., 6.
bending or breaking journalists, adventurers, professionals, entrepreneurs or others.”

This caused many dismissive government officials who did not agree with the need for such an organization to nickname the agency “Oh So Social.” Generally, from privileged backgrounds, the recruits continued to bring in their friends to work in the new agency. The male dominated armed forces also saw no need for an organization full of untrained socialites funded by a “blank check.” Their existence and hiring practices (women in positions of administrative power) represented a gendered threat to the established structures of the American military. By 1942, the recruits were largely military trained civilians who were daring enough to accept positions they knew little about. In keeping with the prevailing sexist attitudes, admittedly typical for the time, many of the female agents and personnel were in their early twenties and met agency standards for beauty. Donovan said “the right type of office worker was a cross between a Smith College graduate, a Powers model, and a Katie Gibbs secretary” (Gibbs was Donovan’s secretary). The women recruited by the agency all came from prestigious schools. These women worked in OSS offices all over the world where their command of foreign languages became a useful tool.

Being able to speak a foreign language fluently increased the chances of these women working outside of the US and it increased their chances of being chosen to work as undercover agents in the field. While this was not a common occurrence within the OSS, the agency did make use of women in covert operations. The US, through the OSS, used women who actually worked for the SOE but had American ties (either by birth, marriage or common cause).

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22 Ibid., 14.
Virginia Hall, Maria Gulovich, Amy Thorpe Pack, Barbara Lauwers, and Elizabeth McIntosh were just a few of the women placed in operation by the OSS around the world.

Before agents were sent into the field, they were required to undergo extensive training. Before the OSS became an official active agency Donovan spent four weeks at an SOE training facility learning as much as he could about clandestine warfare tactics. He, along with a few of his new recruits, attended a training camp by the SOE in a secret location outside of Toronto called Camp X. The agents who first trained in the camp “learned the principles of special operations warfare: infiltration, field craft, and concealment, the use of various Allied or enemy weapons, hand-to-hand combat, guerrilla leadership and sabotage.”23 His men trained in “undercover work, intelligence gathering, security and reporting.” The agents that were specifically recruited for espionage were sent to an informal civilian location where they took classes for up to four weeks. They learned their cover stories, honed their skills of observation and concealment, practiced safecracking and unarmed combat, learned the art of bribery, how to recruit and handle enemy agents, as well as how to code and decode communications using ciphers. Also incorporated into their four-week course was physical strength training. The agents used ropes for climbing, football tackle dummies for jiu-jitsu instruction, a wooden platform for jumping and tumbling to simulated what it felt like to land after parachuting from a plane, and shallow open pits full of sand for close-combat exercises that involved throwing opponents down into the excavation.24

Women, however, were not sent to the OSS Special Operations training camps but to the OSS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. for their training.25 The women were trained to read maps, decipher codes, and on how to use “black propaganda.” The women did receive weapons

23Chambers,II, *OSS Training in the National Parks and Service Abroad in World War II*, 59-60.
24Ibid., 128.
25Ibid., 69–72.
training before being sent overseas. The women agents used (but not employed) by the OSS had received their training from either the SOE or the French Resistance fighters. The use of women by the OSS continued until it officially disbanded in 1945. After which many of the agents joined its successor organization, the CIA.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ISSUES

Much of the existing literature downplays the linguistic, cognitive, and creative characteristics possessed by the women employed by the OSS and the SOE, traits that made them assets to each organization. Instead, many historians have overemphasized their aesthetic attributes. The historiography has shown little change in focus since M.R.D. Foot’s 1966 *SOE in France*, about women in either agency. The authors continually direct their audience’s attention to the physical attractiveness and the sexuality of the women. The focus on physical beauty as well as their suggestion that those women used their sex appeal as weapons against men, friend and foe, negated the impressive skill sets that allowed them to successfully perform their jobs.

From the monographs that were available to the researcher, there are no existing works that included an analysis of women agents without mentioning their sexuality to one extent or another. M.R.D. Foot published his *SOE in France* in 1966, which became an “official” record of the military history of the SOE. In order to write an historical narrative, Foot had been given exclusive access to the archives of the SOE by the British government. Throughout the book, Foot argued that the SOE, for all its failures, was primarily successful in its operations in France. In his chapter titled “Strategic Balance Sheet,” Foot provided evidence that the SOE in France

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26Ibid., 82.

27Ibid., 598. It becomes clear that American women employed by the OSS were not trained in combat or covert maneuvers. Why would they not train women too? Was there a fear of political or social backlash? No information can be found to back up this theory; it is left unaddressed by the historiography. It should be noted that they do “claim” women like Virginia Hall, a decorated, American born, OSS affiliated, SOE trained agent. As long as they were successful, these women were recognized after the war for their part in the OSS.
had many failures. However, Foot concluded that the work of the agents, women included, ultimately justified their existence even when compared to the Air Force, Navy and Army forces, citing a statement by General F.E. Morgan that “a substantial contribution had been made to the victory by the resistance that had in many cases been guided and supported by SOE.” As to the effectiveness of the women directly, Foot described their work as wireless operators, couriers and operations officers, and states that they were also used “in the field…..with much success.”

According to Foot, potential agents were apprised of the “sort of risk they were taking on” and he concluded that “not many women who seemed promising enough from SOE’s point of view to be worth interview[ing] would be likely to quail at the thought of a singularly nasty death, perhaps preceded by outrageous torture, if caught; and fighting enthusiasm can be quite as strong in one sex as in the other.” It is in the above statements alone that Foot references any differences between the agents of the SOE as women or men. Early in his narrative he stated that the women agents “will receive no special treatment [below]; as they would have wished, they will be dealt with like any other agents in their circuits, according to the work they did. Because of Foot’s work, other historians and authors began to research the SOE and later the women who served as secret agents.

Foot’s arguments regarding the use of women as agents and their subsequent failures and successes during WWII were the beginning stages of the scholarship on the topic. Numerous historians and journalists in their own interpretations of women agents have cited the information contained in SOE in France. Foot refrained from any suggestions that these women used their sexuality while working as agents to escape danger or that it had anything to do with why the

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29 Foot, M.R.D., SOE in France, 47.
30 Ibid., 47.
31 Ibid., 48. Foot does however dedicate an appendix to the women agents that lists their names, operations and their status at the end of the war.
SOE recruited them. Foot’s portrayal of the men and women who risked their lives to defeat Hitler in France allowed future writers access to archival information that has since been sealed. Great Britain will not allow access to most personnel records until sometime after 2031. Even then, not all files will be declassified.32

For a comprehensive history on the OSS researchers can refer to the book by Richard Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency*, which chronicles the history of the secret agency in the United States. Smith describes OSS agents as “left-wing intellectuals” who belonged to some of the wealthiest families” and as being “idealists” with a “majority being under 30 years old…who possessed an ability to get along with other people and a freedom from disturbing prejudices.”33 This characterization also applied to women agents. In addition, he stated that information obtained by the women agents proved to be “of considerable value.” For instance, agent Therese Bonney was resourceful enough to escape the Nazis. During a mission, she made her way to “Helsinki and managed to arranged a clandestine rendezvous with Mannerheim (Finland’s military and political strongman),” where she attempted to convince him to join with the Allied forces. Even if she did not persuade him to break with the Nazis, she did “return to Washington with vital information about Finland’s military posture and the extent of Nazi influence” there.34 Another woman mentioned by Smith in *OSS*, Julia (McWilliams) Child who later became a famed television chef, also worked as office staff maintaining meticulous files.35

33Smith, *OSS*, 15, 23, 29. The quote is from the OSS psychologist John Gardner.
34Ibid., 198–9.
35Ibid., 269.
Smith’s assessment of the OSS was well researched and his arguments supported by ample secondary sources as well as personal interviews or correspondences with former OSS members and State Department employees. Smith failed however to adequately assess the effectiveness of the agents or the agency. Smith leads the reader to believe, by his word choices and the overall tone of the first few chapters, that the OSS was a failure. Yet, he cites numerous examples of the agents' successes. The failure to conclusively convince the reader of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the agency coupled with the very few and/or vague references to women agents left his narrative incomplete. In addition, it should be mentioned that of the fourteen pages that list Smith’s primary and secondary sources women produced fewer than ten of the sources. This lack of female authors suggests that Smith intentionally overlooked or possibly excluded works by women. Many historians have used information obtained from Elizabeth McIntosh, Mary Bancroft or Mary Pidgeon to supplement their historiographical research. McIntosh and Bancroft supply many historians with first-hand an account of women in the OSS, yet Smith chose to exclude them from his bibliography and does not offer an explanation to his readers.

Other sources available have integrated women into the history of the OSS and the SOE and have established a narrative framework from which female agents may be studied. However, several common gendered themes were found in which the authors diminished the importance of women agents by focusing on their beauty, sexual behaviors, and romantic relationships. The resulting histories detract from the heroic tasks preformed by the agents by placing more emphasis on attractiveness or the women’s use of their sexuality as a tool than on the results obtained by the agent. They also fail to encourage women’s equality or the need to

36Ibid., 421–35. It is not to say that only women are capable of researching women agents, however for secondary sources the female perspective could add insights to the topic where male insights might be lacking. Common experiences and/or shared perceptions by women could have given his analysis more depth.
The effects these books had on the genre of women’s military involvement resulted in an over exaggeration of female sexuality and an underrepresentation of their accomplishments. In stark contrast, these histories fail to focus attention on the appearance or sexuality (unless in direct reference to a woman) of men in the paramilitary organizations. This double standard can be seen in the latest publications as readily as it was in the 1960s.

The histories of Foot and Smith focused on the women agents and the jobs they did, the missions they were a part of and the success or failure of their missions. As stated before, Foot is the only author represented who most objectively handled the women agents. Foot’s assessment of their performance allows a researcher to cite his work with a confidence that most other authors do not offer. Smith also attempts to justify the use of American women as spies for the OSS but continually makes mention of their appearance. He discussed the “beautiful young American war correspondent,” Therese Bonney, who was sent to Finland on a mission. Later in the book he refers to her as a “vivacious American.” Another example from Smith’s work is Emmy Rado, “an attractive Swiss born OSS analyst” who offered ideas for collaborating with the Catholic and Protestant churches in order to set up a post war German government. Then there was the “vivacious” Rosamond Frame who helped expose traitors in the Chinese

37 In SOE 1940-45, also by written by Foot (1984), he mentions the women agents again. This time, however, he states that “By no means [sic] all of F section’s women agents had that ordinary, unassuming air which is so precious an asset for a clandestine; several had the stunning good looks and vibrant personality that turned men’s heads in the street.” (60) Further on in the book there are distinctions made between men and women agents and less importance on viewing them as equals as he had in SOE in France. What caused Foot to deviate from his earlier objectivity? It should also be noted here that in his chapter “Recruiting and Training,” Foot states that some of the women were recruited based on their looks. These women were placed in the field to “counterbalance” the other women agents (60). No other author makes this distinction or states that the women were hired strictly because they were attractive. Nor does any other author imply that attractiveness was part of the job description or a requirement for employment with either agency.

38 Smith, OSS, 198.
embassy. His obvious reference to the attractiveness of those women continually detracts from their effectiveness as spies. It is also important to restate that his sources lack women authors/correspondences and that he does not mention when or how women came to work for the OSS. Addressing these both establishes for the reader that Smith’s history of the OSS is incomplete and calls attention to Smith’s own gender biases which have allowed the issue to propagate. It would appear, by his virtual exclusion of them, that he purposely did not include women because Smith considered their role unimportant.

Emily Yellin and Olga Gruhzit-Hoyt both address how women entering the military at the start of the war were treated based on their gender. They both argued that women were treated unfairly if they performed jobs other than those traditionally filled by women. As long as women stayed behind the frontlines in noncombat roles, usually as nurses or secretaries and in the OSS, no one seemed to mind. However, if these women held any other position, they suffered incredible discrimination from men, their superiors, native people, and even from other women as the Charity Adams story recalled. Adams was one of the first black women accepted for the first officer candidate class of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) and was stationed overseas. Adams described being followed on the street by white people and being called names she had never heard before like “Negress.” Women also suffered from sexual discrimination by the government. The so-called “victory girls” who had sexual relations with soldiers (but were not prostitutes) became the target of propaganda that stated women, not men, spread venereal diseases. Posters and pamphlets were distributed which depicted women as

39Ibid., 223, 269.
40Gruhzit-Hoyt, They Also Served, 64–71.
worse than Hitler or Hirohito and brandishing statements like “‘she looked clean’ is the familiar lament of the victim of venereal disease.”

While sexual and racial discrimination was addressed in their books and Yellin and Gruhzit-Hoyt attempted to” right the wrongs” speaking out about it, they in fact fostered the notion of subjugating women by their own descriptions of the women. Yellin, for example, points out how men in the military would start rumors about those in the women’s corps being “prostitutes…and had gotten pregnant while ‘servicing’ male troops.” These rumors were untrue and were addressed quickly by the War Department. While Yellin attempted to dismiss rumors and restore the virtue of the women she also made constant reference to their attractiveness and their sexual practices. Amy Thorpe Pack, according to Yellin, had conceived a child out of wedlock before becoming an OSS agent and her husband forced her to give up the child in order to spare himself the humiliation when it was born only five months after they were married. Pack’s personal story really had no relevance to her job as an agent, but was included by Yellin anyway. She also described the “whirlwind romance that blossomed into true love and marriage” between Alice Marble and Joseph Crowley who both worked as secret agents. Army Intelligence officials asked Marbel to travel to Switzerland to reestablish contact with an old boyfriend who was harboring stolen Jewish goods for the Nazis. To her surprise, they reconnected and fell in love again. Marble was forced to make a choice; the war effort won and she photographed the records the Army requested and fled. Marble’s emotions were knowingly exploited by the Army when they asked her to accept the mission and then again by Yellin who could have left out the sections of the story that involved Marble’s falling for her former lover again. While the anecdote made salacious filler, it had nothing to do with Marble’s tasks. The

41 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 316–17.
42 Ibid., 131.
rest of the story is what made Marble the hero, not because she had to deceive the man she loved but because she was able to obtain enemy intelligence that was used to fight the war against the Germans.\textsuperscript{43}

Each of Olga Gruhzeit-Hoyt’s chapters in \textit{Our Mothers’ War} begins with a short biography of the woman featured. Some chapters just give a name and when they enlisted, in the particular branch to which they belonged, while others were more detailed and discussed the women’s dreams and aspirations. All of the chapters also end with a “what happened to them after the war” paragraph. It is in these short paragraphs that Gruhzeit-Hoyt reinforced the very gender stereotypes that the book purported to debunk. She includes statements along the lines of “After the war Dorothy Barnes Stephens became a ‘full-time army wife,’…She raised her four children…” As well as, “Bee Falk married Joseph Haydu in 1951 and had three children…” followed by “Bee considers her greatest contribution to the WASP was being instrumental, along with many others, in seeking military recognition for the women who had been denied it in the war.”\textsuperscript{44} That last sentence would have served as enough information for the “what happened to them after the war” as addressing their marital status just placed them in a lower position, behind their husbands, and seems to reestablish that a woman’s worth was based on marriage instead of on their war efforts.

The actual stories about these women, the ones between the biographical information, are both fascinating and heroic at times. Yet Gruhzeit-Hoyt intersperses dating and romance into them too. Only her section on the OSS agents is different. This section has two stories specifically about the agents Elizabeth Davey Velen and Charity Adams and focuses strictly on their duties and experiences as they related to the OSS. It is Gruhzeit-Hoyt’s last chapter that is

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 231, 244–5.
\textsuperscript{44}Gruhzeit-Hoyt, \textit{They Also Served}, 114, 184.
the most difficult to understand. Here she lists biographies of women in short paragraphs and all
too often used phrases equaling “she fell in love with…and they were married…” and “she was
‘date raped’ twice because she was ‘too trusting.’”\textsuperscript{45} While it can be useful to know what
happened to these women after the war, the inclusion of marital status seems irrelevant if the
focus of the book is to prove how women broke from traditional roles of wife and mother and
helped their country win a world war. To the rape reference, the use of “too trusting” places
direct blame on the victim and insinuates that it was her fault that these men forced themselves
on her. It also devalues the work women did during and after the war to promote equality of the
sexes.

Biographies and autobiographies alike discuss every aspect of the war and the part
women agents played in it. However, there exists a striking similarity to the general histories in
that the authors overemphasized the sexuality of the female agents and not that of the males. For
their part, the monographs of female agents detail their experiences behind enemy lines but also
describe the use of their own sexuality as a means to meet the demands of their positions. The
authors often undermine personal agency, with regard to their sexuality, however. For example,
Nancy Wake recounted a meeting with German soldiers and admitted to using her feminine wiles
to avoid detection. She acknowledged that she “would just look over to the officer, flutter my
eyelashes and say ‘Do you want to search moi?’ and they would laugh flirtatiously” and let her
go. All the while, she claims to have been thinking ‘I longed to break their fucking necks.’”\textsuperscript{46}
Peter Fitzsimons’ constant reference to her looks then took her agency from her. His references
feed into the sexualizing of Wake and diminish the accomplishments she made during her time
in the field.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 249–62.
\textsuperscript{46}Peter Fitzsimons, \textit{Nancy Wake: The Inspiring Story of One of the War’s Greatest Heroines} (HarperCollins
Entertainment, 2002), 239.
METHODOLOGY

This thesis will look at the existing historiography on women in the SOE and OSS as primary sources. In looking at the texts, I will focus on the way in which the authors chose to write about the female agents with an emphasis on their sexuality and physical appearances and argue that by emphasizing those characteristics the literature draws attention away from the effectiveness of the women. By using sources deemed as secondary as primary sources the focus will be on the resulting historical contributions made by the literature and not necessarily on the women. I argue that the existing histories of these women focus on the gendered binaries which existed at the time and place in which the women served as agents. The use of language that objectified women reflected the way in which women were treated by society during the 1940s. This idea holds true even though most of the monographs referenced were published within the last twenty years.

By analyzing the historiography available, as well as employing the theory of “performativity” in which Judith Butler argues that the idea of femininity is assigned by society and women perform those characteristics in such a way that others actually believe that they are feminine and thusly incapable of masculine behavior, this study contends that the women used their agency and chose when they needed to use femininity and sexuality to complete their missions. By “subverting sexual stereotypes,” as Joan Tumblety asserts, the female agents were able to use the stereotypes to fulfill their duties and escape capture by the Gestapo.

However, it was because of necessity and by their own choice that these women used their sexuality. The authors of the existing literature, in fact, take that agency from these women

48 Ibid., 133–34.
when they focus attention on their physical appearance because it distracts the reader from the true nature of the women’s actions. The idea that “sex sells” should be taken into account when evaluating their writing as well as the fact that many of the texts are published by entertainment presses. However, neither of these negates the responsibility of the authors to accurately and fairly depict the male and female agents. The emphasis on beauty extends only to those female agents who were seen as conventionally attractive but not to men or those women not seen in that way.

Chapter Four compares the two agencies and their treatment of women working for them. This chapter will explore the discrepancies in pay as well as the positions available to the women in the US and Great Britain. Based on the information found in Smith’s OSS and Foot’s SOE in France, I will argue that the US limited women to a greater extent than the British when it came to allowing women to work with weapons and in the field. There was also an element of deniability for the US in that it never explicitly used American women as clandestine workers. Due to the social acceptability of women’s employment, the US used women employed by the SOE, I suggest, that if something went wrong i.e. failed missions or death, the US would be able to deny that the women worked for the OSS.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

It was determined that the best approach to structuring this work would be to address each country individually and then compare their use of women as agents in a separate chapter. Each agency will be explored using both primary sources as well as the existing historiography. These texts, for the most part, will serve as the primary sources. Their content supports the argument of the over-sexualization of female agents. The use of monographs on each agency is twofold. First, the information obtained from each source gives details and historical insights
into the subjects and secondly, and perhaps most importantly, these sources solidify the argument that the women agents were over sexualized leading to a diminished history about their true contributions. Citing specifically from the texts will give the reader a clear understanding of just how the word choices of the authors made the women subordinate to their male counterparts in almost every existing history, biography and even autobiographies of women agents working for the OSS and SOE during WWII.

Using a separate chapter for the comparison of the OSS and SOE will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences between each agency concerning the women agents as well as identifying the language used in the current historiography that detracts from the heroic feats accomplished by the women in each agency.

In the second chapter, which examines material related to the SOE, I will present evidence to refute claims made by historians that these women agents used their sexuality and beauty as a type of weapon against men. Instead, this thesis will emphasize the mission-oriented accomplishments of these agents as opposed to highlighting their superficial physical features. Many female agents found themselves in the hands of German soldiers, tortured and imprisoned in concentration camps. These women, even under the most terrifying circumstances, refused to give their enemies information and many died as a result.

Chapter Three will highlight the OSS from its inception through 1945 when it disbanded and subsequently became the present day Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In addition, the chapter will focus on the use of women as clandestine agents in Europe and the Far East. Special attention applied to where these women agents came from (their socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels) and how and why they joined the OSS. It will also explore the missions and
specific duties of agents in the field. Several agents will be discussed specifically in order to
combat existing historiographical trends that focus on beauty instead of results.

Chapter Four will compare both organizations’ use of female agents and examine how
the existing historiography addressed their roles depending on which country employed them. I
will also address the similarities and differences between both countries’ treatment of female
workers generally and as it applied to the clandestine agents. Here I will also argue that the
OSS’s use of non-American women as agents allowed them to avoid public backlash while
exploring the reasons Great Britain was able to use women and treat them equally from the
SOE’s beginning. The loss of female agents in the field was a reality the agencies faced, but not
on an equal level. The reasons for the discrepancies, I believe, are a result of the agency’s view
on appropriate occupations for women. Finally, this chapter will discuss the advancement of
women in the armed forces because of the women who had worked with the SOE and the OSS.

The final chapter will stand as the platform for the major arguments against the literature
available on female agents. Female representation in history remains unchanged for the majority
of the last sixty years. Women have been continually portrayed as the weaker sex, frail, and of
lower intelligence than men represented in the same book. Regardless of the their focus, women
in the represented literature become routinely sexualized by authors whose intentions are often
stated as wanting to praise these female agents for all of their laudatory deeds during the war.
Bravery, brilliance and quick-mindedness are attributes overshadowed by images of silver screen
beauties flirting and using their feminine wiles to distract enemy soldiers at every turn. It is the
intention of this author to add to the existing historiography a view of the women employed by
the OSS and the SOE that accentuates their exceptionally cunning and daring personas without
distracting gendered references to their physical attributes. In addition, these women deserve
credit for the use of sexuality when they saw fit. These women had their agency diminished with every key stroke in existing monographs when instead the authors should have been highlighting their use of natural weapons against the enemy. Without these women and their quick thinking, the outcome of WWII would have likely taken a different turn.
CHAPTER TWO

THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE

The purpose of this study is not to write another history of either the SOE or the OSS. Given the scope of this project, as well as the foundational information regarding the history of the SOE discussed in the Introduction of this work, adding many more details would alter or detract from the intended goals. This study instead demonstrates that the existing literature regarding the women of the SOE over-sexualized and ultimately undermined the accomplishments of the female agents. The Introduction described the conception and implementation of the agencies as well as the selection and training process of the agents and office personnel. The issues that need more exploration and elucidation are those pertaining to the women agents’ actual missions. What follows is an account of five prominent female agents and their efforts in the fight against the Nazi regime.

As M.R.D. Foot outlined in *SOE in France*, women and men underwent the same training when they joined the SOE. The agency did not sexually discriminate when placing agents in the field; both men and women performed missions behind enemy lines and their positions placed them in equally dangerous situations. The occupations of women ranged from office workers and wireless operators to clandestine agents posing as townspeople and socialites. For agents in the field, gender was of little concern as long as they performed their duties well. Women underwent training to use firearms, explosives, parachutes and hand-to-hand combat at the same facilities that men did.49 The women, for the most part, enjoyed the same level of respect from fellow agents and SOE personnel as the men experienced. The SOE, as Foot described it, “was

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49 Foot, *SOE in France; an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944*. 54-58
more or less homogeneous socially,” coupled with the fact that the rank of an individual often
times became a moot point in the field; women sometimes took command of active resistance
groups.  

However, the freedom and respect the women received was limited. Only those
individuals who knew the women and their affiliation with the SOE extended equal treatment to
them. Society, at large, maintained the gender roles that existed prior to the start of the war.
When Sir Archibald Sinclair told a postwar session of Parliament about the women, including
British women, who were parachuted into France during the war, Parliament and the media
expressed great disapproval. The public outcry over this information led the government to
release few additional official comments regarding the women who served from that point
forward. With little or no information available from government sources, the news media and
historians alike began to speculate about what happened. Their resulting accounts are the basis
for this work’s arguments.

Foot’s monograph cited above is the only existing history of the SOE acknowledged by
the British government. Foot, given unprecedented access to SOE documents, published *SOE in
France* in 1966 before the records were sealed (and a large number of them lost in a fire). This
book also stands alone in the historiography as the only history that did not differentiate between
men and women agents. The book’s “no special treatment” policy towards women agents has
never since been duplicated in other literature on the subject. This included the follow-up book
*SOE 1940-46*, published in 1984 by Foot. After the initial history, the records were sealed in the
National Archives leaving the story of the SOE and its agents to be told by authors who lacked
access to the primary sources needed to support an objective account of either. The resulting

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Ibid., 48.

Ibid., 48.
literature consisted of military histories, biographies and autobiographies that shared a common theme: the over sexualization of women agents which resulted in a diminishing of the women’s real accomplishments.

The obvious counterargument to this work—that the end result of the existing histories of the women resulted in a thorough explanation of the experiences and accomplishments of the female agents—does not take into consideration the diminishing effects the use of descriptive adjectives referencing the physical attributes of the agents had on the overall impressions the reader is provided. While the literature does inform the readers about every aspect of an agent’s work and life, it also forces an impression of that agent on the reader. The writers, whether intentionally or not, place the female agents into socially constructed gender roles by emphasizing their beauty and sexuality. Simultaneously detailing her heroic actions and describing her physical attractiveness allows readers to create mental images of the agent but also effectively limits the capabilities of that agent for the reader. A quote from John Walker’s *Sue Ryder and the FANYs of SOE* exemplified the limitations the descriptions of the agents had when he depicted Sue Ryder as “a fine-featured and very small person, she nevertheless had huge reservoirs of energy and compassion and was always ready for some new challenge.”53 Sue Ryder’s obvious feminine features overshadowed her contributions to the war effort and suggested to the reader that she was frail or less physically capable than her male counterpart was.

Because of the characterizations of female agents in the existing literature, the attention shown to the women’s appearances also confined the texts to “sensationalized” accounts instead of “legitimate” historical accounts published by respected university presses. Of the examined

books on the SOE, academic presses published only two. It should be noted, that those two sources, if they mentioned women at all, did not physically describe the agents. When Churchill sent the order that allowed the SOE to recruit women and use them as active field agents, who received the same training and privileges as male recruits, the proposition of equal treatment of the agents should have extended to those who would write about them later. If SOE’s recruiting officer, Selwyn Jepson, did not see women agents as different from men, it begs the question why then did later historians decided to differentiate between the sexes? Jepson’s view of women was best captured when he declared “air raid bombs that demolish homes and kill children bring to every woman by every natural law the right to protect, to seek out and destroy the evil behind these bombs by all means possible to her—including the physical and militant.”

The specific positions held by women in the SOE during the Second World War suggested that they possessed the skills needed to perform what were often dangerous tasks. These agents involved in missions across Europe carried out numerous clandestine operations with their male partners as well as other female emissaries. Exactly how many women the SOE sent behind enemy lines is unknown. The results of their efforts, however, continue to be recounted today and the names of a few women appeared repeatedly throughout the available sources. The histories of such agents as Noor Inayat Khan, Violette Szabo, Virginia Hall, Nancy Wake and Christine Granville (Krystyna Skarbek) describe for the reader the extreme situations these women found themselves in during their employment with the SOE. The stories that also drew attention to their sexuality on a number of occasions both forced social constructs of gender on them and detracted from their successes. Before addressing this argument, though, the exact

54Foot, SOE in France; David Stafford, Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive, with Documents (University of Toronto Press, 1980).
56Ibid., 40.
nature of what these women did needs some emphasis. Without specific insights into their accomplishments, it is unlikely that a reader will make the connection of just how distracting the addition of physical attributes and the attention to their sexuality are to the stories of these women.

THE WOMEN AGENTS OF THE SOE

Noor Inayat Khan was of Indian and American lineage. Born in Russia in 1914, Inayat Khan was a descendant, on her father’s side, of the royal Tipu Sultan (the 18th century ruler of Mysore) and thus an Indian princess. Her childhood, essentially, seemed happy. Her parents and three siblings settled in a small village in northern France where Inayat Khan attended school and explored her creative side by writing poems and stories to entertain her family. Inayat Khan spent her young adult life writing and illustrating children’s books and paid little attention to the events transpiring in Europe. Then in 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, Inayat Khan’s writing aspirations were stalled. The world’s focus on the events of the war left little room for her children stories.

Muslim by birth and because of her Sufi upbringing that encouraged pacifism and peace Inayat Khan found herself disgusted by the Nazi ideology and was compelled to do anything she could to help stop Hitler’s forces. Since she believed a non-violent approach best suit her, Inayat Khan’s first instinct led her to the Red Cross for training. Caring for wounded soldiers and civilians seemed to fit with her ideology. However, it did not feel like enough to Inayat Khan. Therefore, she joined the WAAF as a wireless operator in 1940 and then the SOE in February

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58 Ibid., 18.
59 Ibid., 33.
1943. There was a stark contrast between her war efforts up until that point and what was in store for her in the future.62

Captain Selwyn Jepson, the SOE’s chief recruitment officer, recalled that Inayat Khan was “almost perfect for this aspect of work; she was obviously careful, tidy, painstaking by nature, and would have all the patience in the world.” 63 After her first interview with Jepson she accepted a position with the SOE, knowing fully the dangers she might face, and was sent for training at the SOE training schools. Here she underwent the same training all men and women agents endured. As Foot revealed in SOE in France, many of the comments in her personnel file suggested that she was not fit for this line of work. Colonel Spooner, head of the school, stated that she was “too emotional and impulsive to be suitable…she was too sensitive and easily hurt, but her inexperience, rendered her too vulnerable from a security point of view.” Other agents being trained along with Inayat Khan agreed and called her “a splendid vague dreamy creature, far too conspicuous—twice seen, never forgotten—and she had no sense of security; she should never have been sent to France.” Each comment conveyed a socially constructed image of a young woman not an ideal secret agent ready for anything. However, the SOE was in desperate need of wireless operators and Buckmaster, the head of “F” Section, disagreed with their assessment of Inayat Khan, as did others in charge of training her. Lt. Holland considered Inayat Khan to be “very eager to please, very ready to adapt herself to the mood of the company, or the tone of the conversation, interested in personalities, capable of strong attachments, kindhearted, emotional and imaginative,” all characteristics he believed could serve her well in the field, and sent her on to France despite any objections.64

61 Ibid., 160.
62 Basu, Spy Princess, 57.
64 Foot, SOE in France, 337; Binney, The Women Who Lived for Danger, 163.
Under the code name Madeleine, Inayat Khan was sent to France to act as the wireless operator for the PROSPER group in June. She was the first female wireless operator to be parachuted into the country and not long after her arrival, the Gestapo had begun arresting members of her group. While wildly published that Inayat Khan often seemed careless, she managed to avoid capture by the Gestapo as well as send messages with regularity to London regarding the arrest of fellow agents. On a number of occasions, Inayat Khan had to be scolded for leaving her codebook unguarded and for not destroying messages sent to her and by her. She insisted that she was told not to destroy them, but it would appear this was a misunderstanding of her orders according to Marcus Binney’s findings in Inayat Khan’s SOE personnel file.

For all her shortcomings, Inayat Khan became an effective agent in the field. Her personnel records contained several messages from her detailing the various activities of both fellow agents and the Germans. Inayat Khan, it seemed according to the file, had become the wireless operator for several circuits and transmitted for many agents in the few months she was in France. She also sent messages to London requesting supplies for the resistance as well as for herself. One report on file from Inayat Khan, dated 18 August 1943, informed London of the whereabouts of two American soldiers enlisted to help the SOE. A memo from February 1944, suggests that she may have been helping Allied airmen escape who were shot down in France. Others detail French traitors working with the Germans in an automobile factory.

Along with the notes and memos regarding Inayat Khan’s work in France, her file contained the story of the events that led to her arrest and details regarding her captivity. In an

65Foot, *SOE in France*, 337.
67Binney, *The Women Who Lived for Danger*, 165–66. The line that existed stated that she should “be extremely careful with the filing of your messages.” Foot in *SOE in France*, explains that she may not have been familiar with the use of “filing” as used by journalists to mean “feeding a message into the communications system.” (Foot, 339)
68Ibid., 169–71.
The unusual process, this information was obtained from two Gestapo interrogators with direct knowledge of the events. Hans Josef Kieffer and Dr. Josef Goetz, in an interview with Vera Atkins, SOE Squadron Leader responsible for agent coordinator for F Section, after the war described for her the last month of Inayat Khan’s life.

According to Hans Keiffer, the Germans had been searching for her for quite some time, but because she was careful not to stay too long at one location, the process took several months. Through no fault of her own, the Gestapo arrested Inayat Khan in October 1943. Inayat Khan had been betrayed when the very woman with whom she was staying, Renée, approached the Germans and for 100,000 francs (only 1/10 the amount they usually paid for British agents) agreed to give them the address and description of a secret agent. When the agents were dispatched they quickly found Inayat Khan, but her SOE training allowed her to evade capture, at least for a few more hours. Inayat Khan returned to the apartment later that day and Pierre Cartaud, a French police officer working for the Germans, was waiting. The report given by Cartaud stated that Inayat Khan fought violently against him; she bit his wrists, drawing blood, and attacked him until he could get to his gun. Once he had her at gunpoint, he telephoned for backup. The description given by Vogt, the German officer sent along with a few other men to assist Cartaud, explained: “Pierre was standing covering her from the farthest possible corner of the room and Madeleine, sitting bolt upright on the couch, was clawing the air in her frustrated desire to get at him, and looked exactly like a tigress.”

While in the custody of the Germans Inayat Khan refused to give any information to her captors. Unfortunately, she did not have to supply them with anything in order for them to obtain information. During her arrest, the Germans found her wireless transmitter as well as her codes and every message she had ever sent or received, both coded and decoded. The Germans

took full advantage of their findings and continued communicating with London for supplies, money and more agents.\textsuperscript{70}

Just because she was locked in a cell did not mean she had given up. During her incarceration, Inayat Khan met two other prisoners and concocted a plan to escape. The three agents loosened the bars on their cell windows and climbed out. With ripped sheets tied together, they climbed down the building and ran to a neighboring building. Sadly, one of the men did not make it far and divulged where Inayat Khan and her fellow escapee were hiding. Upon recapture, the two were asked to promise they would not attempt to escape again; both refused and were instantly sent to a more secure prison in Germany. This made Inayat Khan the first British women agent to be sent there.\textsuperscript{71}

Inayat Khan spent the remainder of her life under the German designation “highly dangerous prisoner…to be treated in accordance with regulations for ‘Nacht und Nebel-Rückkehr unerwünscht’ (Night and Fog-Return Not Required).” She received the least amount of rations needed to sustain life, was dumped in solitary confinement and remained shackled at her hands and feet. Held like this until September, Inayat Khan was then transferred to Dachau Concentration camp where on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of the month she, along with three of her fellow SOE women agents, was brutally beaten and then executed by a shot to the back of the head by the Gestapo and immediately cremated.\textsuperscript{72} For her heroic efforts during the war, the French government in 1946 awarded her the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star and in 1949 the British government honored her with the George Cross.\textsuperscript{73} Tragically, Inayat Khan was not alone. Of the

\textsuperscript{72}Beryl E. Escott, Heroines of SOE (The History Press Ltd, 2010), 102.
50 women sent to France during the war at least 11 of them did not return.⁷⁴ The next woman to be highlighted is Violette Szabo. Like Inayat Khan, her life ended at the hands of the Gestapo, in a concentration camp, but not before she did as much as she could to fight against the Nazis in France.

Violette Szabo, unlike Inayat Khan, came from humble beginnings. Her father, a British taxi driver and her mother, a French seamstress, raised their daughter in both England and France. At the age of fourteen, Szabo left school and without telling anyone, went to France as a show of independence. A short while later, she returned to England and took a job as a perfume saleswoman.⁷⁵ When she was just 19 years old, Szabo joined the Land Army. Her parents were supportive of the resistance in France and on Bastille Day her mother sent Szabo out to find a French boy to bring home for dinner. It was on this day that she met Etienne Szabo, a captain in the French Foreign Legion. They were married within months of that first meeting. The honeymoon was short because Etienne was called back to duty. During his time away Szabo joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service and served as anti-aircraft personnel until she gave birth to their daughter. At the time Etienne was serving in North Africa and never met his daughter as he was killed in action in 1942.⁷⁶

The news of Etienne’s death devastated Szabo. Her sadness turned to anger and a deep hatred for the Germans. She became ever more determined to exact revenge on the Nazis for Etienne’s death. In 1943, Szabo responded to a request to meet from Mr. E. Potter (the code name of Selwyn Jepson), assuming it was to discuss the pension she was to receive after

was awarded a gold star for Corps citations. George Cross— the highest award available to civilians for showing immense bravery in extreme danger.

⁷⁴J. G Beevor, SOE: Recollections and Reflections, 1940-45, First (Bodley Head, 1981), 163. The actual number of women who lost their lives is unknown. Due to a fire, many of the SOE records were lost and with them evidence of who returned from the war.


⁷⁶O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance, 183.
Etienne’s death. It was actually an interview for a position with the SOE. She accepted the position and began her training.\textsuperscript{77} Szabo already had plenty of shooting experience and has repeatedly been referred to as “one of the best shots and the fieriest characters in SOE.”\textsuperscript{78} She may have been proficient with a gun, but according to her trainers her performance in other activities lacked the same finesse. They described her as “too fatalistic and lacking in initiative.” They also doubted her suitability for SOE operations stating, “she seems lacking in sense of responsibility.” While she seemed “pleasant, sociable, likeable, painstaking, anxious to please, keen, mature for her age in certain ways but in others very childish…being very fit—the physical side of the training,” their concern lay in the fact that she had a young daughter and one instructor deemed her “temperamentally unsuitable for this work.”\textsuperscript{79} Making the assumption that mothers were not capable of remaining focused on their duties.

Even as negative as those reports were, Szabo continued her training, slowed down only by a sprained ankle resulting from a parachute training activity. In April 1944, Szabo landed in France for her first mission as a courier for the SALESMAN network.\textsuperscript{80} While there, she also “made discrete inquiries, judged the damage to the network and its members, and concluded that it was in too bad a state to restore.” Her second mission in June 1944 landed her with the French Maquis. These groups of guerilla fighters consisted of Frenchmen (Jews and republican Spanish were also members) attempting to escape the German’s new forced labor scheme (Service du travail obligatoire) and to prevent the German’s from further advancing into France. The SOE supplied arms, agents, food and financial support to the groups.\textsuperscript{81} On one occasion, she spent a

\textsuperscript{78}Foot, \textit{SOE in France}, 382; Escott, \textit{Twentieth Century Women of Courage}, 63.
\textsuperscript{80}Ottaway, \textit{Violette Szabo}, 84.
\textsuperscript{81}Foot, \textit{SOE in France; an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944}, xxi, 283; Foot, \textit{S.O.E., 1940-46}, 144.
day and a half bicycling around the network to spread instructions to the members. Philippe Liewer, the circuit leader, decided that she would need to contact another resistance leader more than 30 miles away, and in doing so, she would firmly place herself in the history of SOE as one of the most respected women agents.82

According to Jacques Dufour, the man driving her part of the way to her destination, told the story they first stopped in a village named La Croisille to pick up his friend Barriaud (he was to accompany him on the return trip). With Szabo in the front seat, they continued their journey until they came upon a roadblock and were waved down by a German soldier. Dufour slowed down and told Szabo to be prepared to run. They each grabbed their weapons as he stopped the car a short distance from the Germans. Jumping from the car, they began shooting at the soldiers, injuring three of them. Dufour then ordered Szabo to retreat into the nearby wheat field as he continued to fire on the men. Under cover of the nearby wheat field, they made their way toward the wooded area. Not long after, the Germans followed them while firing machine guns at the moving wheat. At that point, Szabo, who was bleeding from multiple scratches and possibly a reinjured ankle, told Dufour to continue without her because she was exhausted and could not go any further. Dufour ran while Szabo covered for him. He admits to hiding in a haystack on a small farm. Approximately 30 minutes later, the Germans arrived there with Szabo and questioned her about Dufour’s whereabouts. Eyewitnesses had conflicting stories, but all agreed that she refused to tell them anything and when offered a cigarette by one of the soldiers, she refused and possibly spat in his face. Some suggested that one of the soldiers told her she was the bravest women he had ever met and saluted her before taking her off to prison.83

82 Escott, Heroines of SOE, 172–3.
While in Limoges Prison, SS guards interrogated Szabo, before moving her to another prison for a short time and then eventually to their headquarters at 84 Avenue Foch in Paris. No conclusive evidence exists regarding the treatment of Szabo during this timeframe. Several authors suggested that she was violently tortured. Beryl E. Escott, in *The Heroines of SOE*, avers that Szabo “endured the cold bath, electric shock treatment and sleep deprivation, along with other forms of torture” because she refused to give any information. However, there are no footnotes or work cited in his book to confirm these allegations had merit. Whatever treatment Szabo faced while in Paris, it was not for long as she was transferred to Ravensbrück Concentration camp sometime between late August and early September, 1944. During the transfer, the prisoners sat on the floor chained together and corralled into a coach car of a train. Along the way and not too far from Paris, British aircraft began firing on the locomotive inducing panic among the German guards as well as the passengers. Tommy Yeo-Thomas, an SOE agent, recalled that moment and Szabo’s reaction as proof of her never waning bravery. As the men were all panicking she went to the lavatory and retrieved a jug of water that she, and the women she was chained to, handed to them through the bars all the while shouting words of encouragement.

Once Szabo arrived at Ravensbrück in 1944, she along with the other women on the train began their work details. The motivation of this particular camp was to work the women to death by way of “malnutrition, indiscriminate brutality and lack of medical care – or execu[tion], mostly by hanging.” Szabo and several other SOE women planned to escape but were betrayed

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85 Ottaway, *Violette Szabo*, 140.
by another prisoner and had to abort their campaign.\textsuperscript{88} At Ravensbrück on January 27, 1945, the orders received from Heinrich Himmler stated that Szabo, at the age of 23, along with two other female agents, was to be executed.\textsuperscript{89} Vera Atkins obtained a sworn statement from the camp overseer Johann Schwarzhuber, which confirmed the women’s deaths and immediate cremations.\textsuperscript{90}

Szabo was greatly admired by her fellow inmates for her eternal optimism and energy. Many former prisoners at Ravensbrück recounted their interactions with Szabo as what gave them the strength to go on. No matter how difficult the guards made it for her, she always seemed to keep her spirits up as well as the spirits of those around her. Odette Sansom, another SOE agent imprisoned with Szabo believed she “was the bravest of all of us.”\textsuperscript{91} There is no evidence that would suggest otherwise. She was, posthumously, the first women awarded the George Cross and the Croix de Guerre with Silver Star under her alias Vicky Taylor and several memorials, including a museum, have been erected honoring her name.\textsuperscript{92}

Inayat Khan and Szabo engaged in highly risky operations for their beliefs. These women lost their lives for the cause of French freedom and subsequently received awards honoring their efforts in the fight against Hitler. The remaining women that will be discussed may not have lost their lives, but their bravery and spirit made them heroines of the same caliber as those who did. Virginia Hall, an American, risked her life for the cause with no real connection (aside from a sentimental attachment) to either England or France. Her love of all things French motivated her to assist the British agency.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{89}O’Connor, \textit{Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance}, 192.
\textsuperscript{91}Escott, \textit{Heroines of SOE}, 175.
\textsuperscript{92}O’Connor, \textit{Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance}, 192.
\textsuperscript{93}Escott, \textit{Heroines of SOE}, 35.
Born into a well-to-do family in Baltimore, MD, Virginia Hall attended the finest schools in the US as well as in France, Germany, and Austria. She was an American who spoke fluent French, German and Italian, all of which made her an ideal prospect for the SOE. Hall aspired to work for the American Foreign Service. However, an accident that resulted in the loss of the lower portion of her left leg put an end to those dreams. In 1935, she joined the French Ambulance Service only to find that her artificial leg made her ill suited for the job. She left the Service in June 1940 and headed for London where she obtained a position at the US Embassy.  

How exactly Hall came to work with the SOE is not clear. She possessed obvious qualities that would draw the agency’s attention to her, but sources conflict concerning who first contacted her and about how she came to be on their radar as a possible agent. Escott describes a situation where Maurice Buckmaster, not yet the head of F Section, met with Hall and took her under his wing. Marcus Binney suggests that a colleague of Buckmaster suggested Hall for service in January 1941. There is a memo in her personnel file that confirmed this second story. Yet Bernard O’Connor suggests that it was Vera Atkins who first noticed Hall and thought she would make a valuable member of the SOE. Adkins also arranged for Jepson to interview Hall. How Virginia Hall came to work for the SOE is not as important as what she did for them.

Under the guise of being an American journalist, allowing her to travel freely through Europe, Hall went first to Vichy to set up her own safe house for agents. Hall also carried messages from circuit to circuit as well as convincing local police to release prisoners. Her

94 O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance, 175; Escott, Heroines of SOE, 35.
95 Escott, Heroines of SOE, 35.
97 O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance, 175.
greatest contribution to the SOE was the intelligence she obtained due to her fluid movement between social circles and countries. Peppered throughout Foot’s *SOE in France* are stories of Hall’s accomplishments. Hall worked as a “travel agent” for F Section and held the title of organizer for the HECKLER circuit. However, she would not take responsibility for the conduct of the other agents; she did not have time for that kind of mundane work. Foot also described Hall as the “principle heroine of the early days” of SOE. She had also taught herself to do Morse code so she could be of use to the F Section as a wireless operator when she could no longer be of service as a courier. While in France, Hall traveled around with her wireless set meeting *Maquis* members and reported back to London any possible sabotage missions they could implement.

Foot was not the only one to praise Hall’s work with the SOE. In *Heroines of the SOE*, Escott tells the story of the “Limping Lady” (as she was referred to by the resistance members) narrowly escaping the Gestapo by hiking through the Pyrenees Mountains with three fellow escapees. This was no small feat for someone without a physical disability, which made it much more impressive that she made this trek many times with only one good leg. In November 1943, Hall was awarded the Medal of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her “constant support and assistance…high degree of organizing ability with a clear-sighted appreciation…she has become a vital link between the various operational groups in the field, and her services


Ibid., 211. How the group actually performed their duties was not her concern. Hall acted as a liaison between London and the group but left the details to them.

Ibid., 372.

cannot be too highly praised.” In March 1943, Hall transferred to the newly formed American counter-intelligence agency, the OSS.

The SOE’s standard operating procedure enlisted British citizens as office personnel. In the field, the situation was much different. As the war progressed and the need grew for agents who spoke languages fluently as well as possessed the ability to “pass as natives” in German occupied countries, they found it necessary to enlist the services of non-British people. Virginia Hall was among the new group of agents trained for clandestine missions in France. Many other men and women joined her in an effort to fight the Nazis through subversive actions. Men and women from all over Europe, as well as around the world, felt a certain call to duty. However, only a select few made it through the interview and training process to join the SOE. Among those, Nancy Wake, an Australian woman, met their qualifications and proved to be one of their greatest assets.

Although born in Wellington, New Zealand, Wake grew up in Australia. At the age of sixteen, Wake received an inheritance from an aunt and with it she traveled to New York, Vancouver and on to London. While in London, she took a course on journalism that landed her a position in Paris working for the Chicago Tribune. While on a trip to Vienna to report on the rise of Hitler, Wake witnessed some of the atrocities the Nazis were conducting and decided “right there and then…that if ever [she] got the chance, [she] would do everything in [her] power to hurt them, to damage the Nazis and everything they stood for.” Wake became witness to

103 Escott, Twentieth Century Women of Courage, 122. It should be noted that the French never honored her with an award for her service in France. (O’Connor, 178) Medal of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) - is the order of chivalry of British democracy. Valuable service is the only criterion for the award. Non-British citizens are eligible to receive an honorary award for services rendered to the United Kingdom and its people.
104 Foot, SOE in France, 51–2.
105 Escott, Heroines of SOE, 186; O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance, 198.
106 Fitzsimons, Nancy Wake, 62.
Jewish persecution by the Nazis as she watched Jews being tied to a large wheel and whipped by
the Germans. When discussing it later, in what can only be described as her matter-of-fact
personality, Wake recalled being appalled at what she saw, stating “I thought…what had they
done, poor bastards? Nothing. So I said, ‘God almighty, it’s a bit much and I’ve got to do
something about it.”

In 1939, Wake met a Frenchman named Henri Fiocca, a rich industrialist, who offered
Wake a chance to help the resistance in France by funding her missions to rescue refugees in her
converted ambulance. Wake also found herself available to help British POWs on what became
the escape line “PAT” as a courier and transporter of equipment as well as people. Sometimes
she even escorted escapees over the Pyrenees to Spain on her own. Wake was living a double
life as wife and secret agent, jobs she equally enjoyed. As time went on, the Germans eagerly
sought to find the “White Mouse,” the nickname the Gestapo had given her because every time
they had her cornered she would get away, and she was forced to flee through the same route by
which she had helped so many of her refugees. Henri stayed behind and was questioned by the
Gestapo as to the whereabouts of his wife. Henri refused to give them any information, a
decision that would prove fatal. Wake, the entire time she was away, was careful not to
contact Henri for fear of bringing him danger. It was not until near the end of the war that she
was given the news that the Gestapo had killed Henri. Obviously devastated by the news, Wake
also assumed the guilt; he died protecting her whereabouts.

During her time away from Henri, Wake executed many missions for the SOE during
which she employed many of the skills she learned in training. Wake, in March 1944,

107 O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance, 199.
108 Escott, Heroines of SOE, 186.
109 Fitzsimons, Nancy Wake, 135, 275; O’Connor, Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime
Resistance, 200–1.
110 Fitzsimons, Nancy Wake, 278.
parachuted into France to begin her first mission for the SOE.\textsuperscript{111} As part of her job, Wake sent messages back to London requesting weapons for the 17 \textit{Maquis} groups she contacted in order to help. Wake met the airdrops, with the \textit{Maquis}, to collect supplies. In one instance, the two Americans who were accompanying a shipment of weapons were captured and Wake led her group in a fierce shooting match in order to rescue the Americans.\textsuperscript{112}

With every supply drop from London, Wake and her fellow agents acquired greater confidence from the \textit{Maquis}. The resistance group accepted the two men that accompanied her with greater ease than Wake experienced. She did eventually find a way, however; she simply out drank them. Her extreme tolerance for alcohol brought about a whole new respect from the men in the group and according to Wake, “ultimately, they accepted me as one of themselves…if they were talking and telling vulgar stories as I walked by, they would go on talking. They were men and they behaved as men, and I never minded.”\textsuperscript{113} Their esteem for her placed Wake in a position to dictate orders that the men would follow. Tradivat, a \textit{Maquis} leader, said of Wake, “she is the most feminine woman I know until the fighting starts. Then she is like five men.”\textsuperscript{114} Wake just “wanted to kill Germans…didn’t give a bugger about them, to kill Germans…I hated, I loathed the Germans…As far as [she] was concerned, the only good one was a dead one,” and she did not care how people felt about that.\textsuperscript{115}

Wake may have proved herself worthy to the men in the SOE and the \textit{Maquis} by acting like one of them, but the tactics she used to escape searches or sometimes even being noticed were altogether different. Wake realized very early on in her resistance work against the German soldiers that she could use the accepted socially constructed gender roles of her time. As argued

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{112}Escott, \textit{Heroines of SOE}, 188.
\textsuperscript{113}Fitzsimons, \textit{Nancy Wake}, 209–12.
\textsuperscript{114}Escott, \textit{Heroines of SOE}, 189.
\textsuperscript{115}O’Connor, \textit{Women of RAF Tempsford: Churchill’s Agents of Wartime Resistance}, 208.
by Juliette Pattinson in her essay, Wake’s use of her sexuality to deceive German soldiers “affirmed gendered divisions and the significance of her enactment for the accomplishment of the clandestine tasks in which she was engaged.” In the essay, Pattinson cites a story Wake shared that she had to travel a very far distance in order to find a wireless operator to send a message to London. Along the way, Wake hoping to be mistaken for a French housewife out shopping for food, comes to a German checkpoint. With her basket full of vegetables, she “would just look over to the officer, flutter my eyelashes and say ‘do you want to search moi? And they would laugh flirtatiously, ‘No Mademoiselle, you carry on.” Wake used the “tools” at her disposal and given to her by the existing gender divisions of the 1940s, to continue her work as an agent for the SOE. Wake did not, however, always use beauty but would also “dress in antiquated and outmoded clothing to pass as a middle-aged peasant,” which allowed her to pass unnoticed by German guards.

For her efforts and bravery, Wake was awarded the George Medal, the Croix de Guerre with two palms and Silver Star, Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur, French Resistance Medal, along with the United States Freedom Medal. In 2001, the Australian government bestowed the Companion of the Order on Wake making her the most decorated women to serve in the Second World War. Wake passed away in Britain in 2011 and her ashes were scattered over the field where she had fought the Gestapo with the Maquis in Montlucon, France.
The final SOE agent to introduce is Christine Granville (Krystyna Skarbek). Born in Poland to a Jewish mother and a father who was of Polish royalty, Granville was a Countess. Her father loved to live extravagantly and as a result, the family often had financial problems. Granville’s childhood appeared to be a happy one. She attended the best schools but due to her untamable spirit was often expelled from them. Her parents sent her to a convent school where, as a prank, she “set fire to the cassock of a priest” and was soon after told to leave. Granville, it was said, was “fearless…independent, strong-willed and at times ungovernable.” These characteristics, along with her ability to “absorb languages,” were all attributes that made her one of the SOE’s “longest-serving and most capable…women agents, outstandingly brave, resourceful and alluring.”

Prior to her joining the SOE, a date that cannot be determined with a reliable degree of certainty, Granville worked for the British Intelligence office. According to Madeleine Masson, Granville’s records indicate she may have worked with it from its inception. Her work with British Intelligence began in December 1939 when she interviewed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and offered a plan she had devised. She would go to Budapest and distribute propaganda to keep the resistance alive. Her plan also involved rescuing POWs and collecting intelligence. Marcus Binney reports that in a report found in Granville’s file dated December 7, 1939, the SOE believed that “she was a flaming Polish patriot. She made an excellent impression…we have a PRIZE.”

States. Companion of the Order - Australia’s greatest civic honor awarded for eminent achievement in service to Australia or humanity at large.

122Masson, Christine, 148; Escott, Twentieth Century Women of Courage, 66.
By mid-February, she arrived in Budapest and was on her way over the Tatra Mountains to Poland.¹²⁴ Over the course of her six visits to Poland and eight visits to Slovakia, she collected information about the resistance movements to send back to London and made many contacts, including connections with the Polish Socialist Party. She also began her propaganda campaign.¹²⁵ The information Granville supplied included “news of new gasses the Germans were producing, complete with the formulas, as well as up-to-date information on ammunition factories in Germany and Poland…detailed plans of aerodromes, aircraft factories…torpedoes, U-boat…”¹²⁶

Not long after their arrival, the Gestapo arrested her and Andrew Kennedy. After repeatedly questioning and beatings, Granville bit her tongue until it bled, faked a coughing fit and convinced a doctor that she had tuberculosis that led the Gestapo to release them both. Their repayment from the SOE for all their work was to be fired in 1941. However, this did not end their SOE work. Headquarters was working to remedy their situation as quickly as they could to get them back on the books.¹²⁷ The British minister, Sir Owen O’Malley recalled, “she was the bravest person I ever knew, the only woman who had a positive nostalgia for danger. She could do anything with dynamite except eat it.”¹²⁸ Very few people encountered Granville who did not say some version of the same. She was a striking person who was willing to risk her own life in order to save so many more.

Finally, in 1944, Granville was sent to France to work for the JOCKEY network as a wireless operator. She had two missions upon arrival: to help the Maquis and to stop Polish soldiers working with the Germans. In France she organized many sabotage missions on

¹²⁴Masson, Christine, 53.
¹²⁶Ibid., 64–5.
¹²⁷Ibid., 72–3.
¹²⁸Ibid., 65.
German owned properties. Also, in August 1944, two of three of her comrades were arrested by the Germans. She risked her own life negotiating 2 million francs for their release. She had to ride a bicycle, of which she had a fear, almost 25 miles, one-way, to collect the ransom money. She arrived in time and her friends were released. Just a year later, her career with the SOE was over; her last scheduled mission to Warsaw was cancelled indefinitely. Colonel Threlfall, Christine’s SOE commander recalled that Christine “had brains, energy and drive. Unfortunately, we had not cut-and-dried job for her, but she was helpful in filling in the Polish background for the British officers we intended dropping into Poland.” In May 1945 she received £100 and “a grateful Government then forgot all about her”.129 In her Afterword, Madeleine Masson reveals that during her research she found documents in Christine’s personnel file suggesting she was a double agent in touch with both the Germans and the Vichy French and believes this could be the reason for her dismissal from the SOE.130

Granville’s story ended tragically with her murder in a hotel. In 1952, she was stabbed through the heart by a man she befriended while working as a stewardess. Dennis George Muldowney became obsessed with Granville and when she informed him she that she would be leaving for an extended amount of time he ended her life.131 For her time in the SOE Granville received the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE), The George Medal GM), and the Croix de Guerre.132

Noor Inayat Khan, Violette Szabo, Virginia Hall, Nancy Wake and Christine Granville were all brave women. Each woman was remarkable and possessed talents and skills that served to defeat Hitler and his Nazis during the Second World War. Their reasons for joining the SOE

130 Masson, Christine, 274.
131 Ibid., 255.
varied from a deep desire to help to a profound need to exact revenge on those who killed their loved ones. They were patriotic and loyal, intelligent and cunning, and it is true they each possessed physical beauty that they used if the situation warranted it.

The use of their physical attractiveness and femininity as a weapon against the enemy in times of desperation or as part of their cover story allowed these women to achieve discernible success behind enemy lines. These agents were well trained in combat and could defend themselves as well as any male SOE agent, but they knew the risks of fighting the Gestapo. Fighting would mean risking the mission, or worse yet, the lives of fellow agents, resistance fighters or even innocent civilians. To lend any credence to the argument that female agents were selected because of the physical appearance would disrespect the strengths they possessed and used to assist the Allied forces.

Most of the literature that exists overemphasizes the sexuality of the SOE women. Many authors are among those cited in this text; however if the focus on their attractiveness is purposefully left out, the reader is able to better understand (and appreciate) the dangerous situations they found themselves in everyday. It is also easier to neutralize gender roles when physical descriptions are not employed as a way of setting these women apart from their male colleagues; their records of sabotage, destruction, enemy deaths, and other clandestine activities already draw attention to them. Whether the agent was male or female should make no difference, but it is obvious by the number of monographs available that pay special attention to the physical features of the women that it does.

An interesting comparison can be made between the number of times an “attractive agent’s” physical features are mentioned to those that do not fit the excepted and classical idea of “pretty.” The focus of the stories of those less attractive women is generally on their
accomplishments and little is said concerning their looks. This same formula applies to male agents as well. Constructed gender roles certainly factor into this also. Regardless of the gender of the author, the commonality of their subjects still remained. It could be argued that the work of women authors focuses on female sexuality more often than with male authors. However, male authors offer descriptions that are more detailed and they use more colorful adjectives to describe the women. This phenomenon lends credence to the idea that socially constructed gender roles of the 1940s have not changed much over the last seventy years. Men and women still place a great value on the physical appearances of women and are unable to accept that women were (and are) able to perform dangerous tasks as well as men. By focusing attention on the women’s looks, it is much easier to keep them in subservient positions citing their frail and feminine features. Men therefore remained the stereotypical protectors and women the damsels in distress, when, as these women have shown, the opposite was often the case.

The British historians and authors were not more or less guilty of perpetuating gendered stereotypes than their American counterparts. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, those men and women writing about the OSS objectified the American agents as well. Sadly, the most prominent authors, women like Elizabeth McIntosh, worked for the OSS and still sexualize their female co-workers.
CHAPTER THREE

THE OFFICE OF

STRATEGIC SERVICES

Several months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an order for the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI) to begin its work on subversive and “un-American” warfare. This new agency was under the direction of William “Wild Bill” Donovan, an affluent attorney and decorated WWI veteran. Roosevelt appointed Donovan (who had served as his war secretary) because he found him to possess a certain forward thinking, which Roosevelt felt few others in Washington had. With the urging of British intelligence officials and information that was flooding in from Europe, Roosevelt created the COI and entrusted Donovan with its formation, organization, recruiting and training of agents as well as its daily operations. Donovan had recently, by order of Roosevelt, spent several months in 1940 and 1941 in Great Britain learning all he could about its secret intelligence agency, and Donovan gained the trust of top British government officials. In June 1941, Donovan and Roosevelt met to solidify the conditions under which Donovan would run the new agency. Donovan insisted that he answer only to Roosevelt, that the funding of the agency would remain secret, and that no government departments would question requests made by this new agency. On July 11, 1941, Roosevelt signed the Executive Order establishing the COI and Donovan as its Director.

Six months later, shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the COI’s propaganda division became part of the Office of War Information (OWI), which later became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The job of the agency was to plan and execute acts of “espionage,

133 Smith, OSS, 1.
sabotage, ‘black propaganda,’ guerrilla warfare, and other ‘un-American’ subversive practices,” as well as, to “plan and operate such special services as may be directed by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.”\(^{135}\) Donovan enjoyed almost unquestioned authority and possessed seemingly unlimited budgetary authority to run and fund this new spy organization.

With the secrecy that surrounded this new agency, very few American officials seemed able to oppose its actions. However, John E. Hoover, head of the FBI, and a few Generals at the War Department weighed in with their opposition to Donovan running a department which used subversive measures because they saw him and his department as a “fly-by-night civilian outfit headed up by a wild man.”\(^{136}\) Those opposed to the OSS feared that the power given to Donovan would lead to national security breaches and ultimately cost the nation more than just money. The civilian packed agency threatened the power of the armed forces and caused men like Hoover and George Marshall, the Chief of Staff, to lobby for its immediate elimination. Roosevelt moved forward anyway.

By November 1941, the OWI’s budget reached over $10 million and was largely unaccounted for by the Treasury Department, yet Donovan was asking for additional revenue. The money Donovan obtained funded meetings with unnamed informants in Washington hotels and paid for meals as well as the hiring of office personnel and field agents, office space, training camps and trips to Europe for research. Donovan hired nearly 600 men and women in 1941; among them were some of the smartest and most affluent members of society. Families with

\(^{135}\) Smith, *OSS*, 1–2. Black propaganda was a technique used during the war that supplied false information to the opposing side, but appeared to be coming from their own side. This was often done with radio broadcasts or by intercepting mail and rewriting it with false information or information that would lead civilians to believe the war was going much worse than their governments were telling them.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 1.
storied names such as Mellon, Morgan, Ford, Goldberg, and Vanderbilt all had members
employed by Donovan’s office during the war.\textsuperscript{137}

In June 1942, the COI was renamed the Office of Strategic Services, and the organization
established operational branches within the OSS to monitor the enemy and to bring down the
morale of its troops by using psychological warfare.\textsuperscript{138} Donovan’s group of Ivy League men and
women, often called “oh so special” by government insiders making puns on the group’s
acronym, was divided into the Communications Branch (CB), Morale Operations Branch (MO),
Research and Analysis (R&A), Research and Development (R&D), Maritime Unit (MU),
Operational Group (OG), Wireless Telegraphy (W/T), Special Operations Branch (SO), Secret
Intelligence Branch (SI), and the Counter-Intelligence Branch (X-2). According to the OSS
Training Manual, the agency was “charged with collecting and analyzing strategic information
and secret intelligence required for military operations, and with planning and executing
programs of physical sabotage and morale subversion against the enemy to support military
operations.”\textsuperscript{139} Each group was given specific tasks to perform as part of the "shadow war"
being fought mostly behind the scenes and enemy lines. They were tasked with undermining the
Nazis, the Fascists in Italy, and the Japanese. The men and women of the MO, MU, OG, W/T,
SO, SI and X-2 branches supplied and guided local resistance groups with intelligence and
weapons as well as food and clothing. While the MO group sought to demoralize the enemy

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 16; Waller, \textit{Wild Bill Donovan}, 93.
\textsuperscript{139} “Training Manual” (Government Printing Office, June 1945), 2, Record Group 226 (OSS Documents), National
Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
through “black propaganda,” the agents in R&A and R&D gathered intelligence in order to sabotage enemy occupied territories.  

THE WOMEN OF THE OSS

Like those employed by the SOE, the British agency after which the OSS was largely modeled, the men and women recruited into the OSS received extensive training before being allowed to infiltrate enemy occupied territories. As discussed in the introduction, agents received training for a wide range of covert operations ranging from intercepting enemy information, creating “black propaganda,” and fighting techniques, to the use of weapons and various methods of sabotage. From its creation, the OSS recruited and trained men and women in each of the aforementioned operations branches; however, the training women agents received differed significantly from that of the men. A small number of women hired by the OSS were offered positions overseas and still fewer were trained for combat. Of the 4,200 college educated women employed by the OSS, the largest portion served as secretaries and file clerks.  

The women assigned to the R&A Branch and stationed abroad were more likely to be given opportunities that directly affected the war. These women acted as code breakers and propagandists.

American women were subjected to gendered social norms to a far greater extent than was seen in Great Britain, and many women readily admitted to rampant discrimination and sexual harassment within the agency. Donovan claimed that the OSS did not “rely on the ‘seductive blonde’” to succeed, but many of the women they hired did fit the mainstream

142 Ibid., 25.
conventions of beauty and often chose to use their sexuality against the enemy. These women worked as clandestine operatives, wireless transmitters and most often as couriers.

Among those women stationed overseas that will be featured in the present study are Virginia Hall, Maria Gulovich and Amy Elizabeth Thorpe Pack. Each woman was affiliated with the SOE or other secret paramilitary organizations before becoming part of the OSS. Only Barbara Lauwers and Elizabeth McIntosh (MacDonald) worked exclusively for the OSS, and while both were stationed in a foreign country, they worked “desk jobs” in the MO Branch. An argument can be made that the OSS used women from the SOE or other nations to do the “dirty work” in order to avoid the backlash from the American public if something tragic were to happen to the women. Although Hall was introduced in the previous chapter, this chapter will highlight her accomplishments with the OSS along with those of Pack and Gulovich. Lauwers and McIntosh will be discussed with regard to the contributions they made behind-the-scenes while a part of the OSS. As with the previous chapter, this section about the women of the OSS seeks to focus less on their physical appearances and more on their effectiveness as agents and personnel. What follows are the accounts of these women and their accomplishments sans the attention placed on sexuality that is routinely found in the existing histories concerning each woman.

Details of Virginia Hall’s upbringing and her work as an SOE agent are furnished in the previous chapter, and in order to avoid repetition, this section will consider only the assignments Hall undertook as an OSS agent. Her work with the OSS placed her back in France, with a rank

143 Ibid., 43.
144 McIntosh, Sisterhood of Spies, 59–69, 200–207.
of Second Lieutenant in 1943, relaying messages to the OSS via the SOE. The mission, referred to as SAINT, required Hall to make contact with French resisters and establish a network for the OSS. This left Hall wholly responsible for organizing drops and distributing goods to the same groups that were opposed to helping her. This was to be the resisters’ first experience with a female in command and many refused to acknowledge her authority.

By that time, Hall had become a highly sought after agent in France. The Nazis swore to “find and destroy her.” They also knew what she looked like and as a result, the OSS had Hall disguise herself as an old French peasant woman. She dyed her hair gray, used padding under her rustic clothing and shuffled, as an elderly woman would have, when she walked. Hall went undetected and was credited for many of the wireless transmissions that assisted the Allies in planning the D-Day attacks.

As a vital member of the operation group called HECKLER, Hall organized other resistance members whose mission was to attach explosives to several sets of train tracks around the city of Cosne in central France. Her job was to stand guard while the resister worked. In just one night, Hall’s group, according to her last report to OSS headquarters, listed her teams’ accomplishments as “destroying four bridges, derailing freight trains, sever[ing] a key rail line in multiple places and down[ing] telephone lines.” There were also over 500 German soldiers captured and 150 more killed because of the groups’ actions.

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145 Escott, *Heroines of SOE*, 37; Patrick K. O’Donnell, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs* (Free Press, 2004), 173. The agencies worked closely throughout the war and many SOE agents were employed by the OSS (officially or unofficially).
149 Pearson, *The Wolves at the Door*, 201.
Hall’s time with the OSS was short but productive. For her service, Hall was honored as the first woman to receive the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest military award in the United States. General Donovan suggested to President Truman that he personally present the award to her. However, she declined stating she was “still operational and most anxious to get busy.” Her career with the US government did not end after the war. Hall took a position with the newly formed CIA until she retired from the agency in 1966.152

It was not unheard of for the American agency to seek out the help of resistance workers in other countries during the war, and Maria Gulovich was one such operative. The former schoolteacher was born in Czechoslovakia where her father was a Greek Catholic priest. Gulovich’s decision to aid her nation in the fight against the Nazis stemmed from the teachings of her father. Gulovich was taught that God would judge her actions during a crisis and the quote from Dante’s *Inferno* echoed in her mind: “The lowest depths of hell are reserved for those, who in time of crisis, do nothing.” Therefore, when asked to hide a Jewish family friend from the Germans, she felt it was her duty to help.153 This was the first of many involvements she would have over the next few years. In 1944, she joined the Slovak national uprising where she acted as a Russian translator for the resistance. Not long after, in June, she began working as a courier under the code name Gita.154

One of her missions was to escort a highly sought-after Colonel to a guerrilla camp where she and her partner were forced to pass through several German checkpoints. During this mission, Gulovich and her partner posed as a married couple who were moving. As they attempted to pass through the final checkpoint, the guards became suspicious and began jabbing

152Ibid. 138.
154Ibid., 23.
bayonets into the furniture and clothing the couple were sitting on to conceal the Colonel. Their narrow escape was facilitated by Gulovich’s quick thinking partner as he told the Germans that she was pregnant in order to explain away her nervous facial expressions. The mission was a success and they delivered their “package” without any further incidents.  

After being officially recruited by the OSS in October, Gulovich was sent to assist a group of twenty OSS men by acting as their guide and interpreter and was to obtain food for them along the way from Banska Bystrica to Donavaly. This operation, code named Dawes, would be the largest the OSS initiated in Eastern Europe. Maria, who spoke fluent German and Russian, would prove “invaluable when they intercepted Russians as they proceeded further east” and “[her] familiar[ity] with the political and military situation” was a valuable asset to the team. Stephen Catlos, OSS Staff Sergeant, also praised Gulovich for her bravery, as she was the only one in their group willing to enter Nazi-occupied villages to search for food for them. Gulovich led the Americans through the Tatra Mountains where they faced torrential rains, harsh winds, freezing temperatures and German troops in every direction. Gulovich and the OSS troops suffered from hunger, frostbite, and were nearly captured over the course of more than four months before they finally reached the Soviet line. Fifteen members of her group perished along the way and Gulovich crossed the Allied lines with only two OSS and one SOE agent still with her.

Gulovich’s last mission was to lead the escape efforts for herself and the three remaining Dawes members from their Rumanian captors. Knowing that attempting to escape from Russia (which was where they were being transported to by train) would be futile, Gulovich donned a Russian uniform and persuaded the Russians to allow them to remain in Budapest overnight.

155 Ibid., 25.
156 Ibid., 74.
157 McIntosh, Sisterhood of Spies, 155–165.
There, the group devised a plan that allowed Catlos to escape and bring back American and British troops to rescue them and the other refugees held in the camp before any of the Russians even noticed.\textsuperscript{158}

As a reward for her efforts, Donovan personally arranged for Gulovich to be brought to the United States as an exchange student on scholarship at Vassar, where she graduated in 1948. However, the United States Army, in a letter to Henry Noble McCracken, the President of Vassar, denied that Gulovich was ever actually employed by OSS and that the food, clothing and transportation to the States she had received up until that point was the total compensation she would receive from the Americans for her efforts during the war.\textsuperscript{159} She was also the first woman awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious achievement in ground operations against the enemy, an honor bestowed during a full dress ceremony held at West Point in May 1946.\textsuperscript{160} It is the opinion of this researcher that this calculated move made by the United States government allowed them to avoid giving Gulovich the money she requested to finish her degree, but more importantly, it permitted them to deny their use of women in arguably failed missions overseas.

Much of the population in the United States after the war was focused on grieving the loss of loved ones and getting back to the pre-war “normal” they missed. Americans were overjoyed to have the men home from the front lines and there seemed no reason to ruin that by disclosing the use of women as secret agents. For all the strides forward women in America had made while their men were off fighting, the social constraints placed on them remained unchanged from those they experienced in 1941. At the time, society had been conditioned to believe that a woman’s place was in the home and most Americans thought it was time for her to return to it. Those men who served overseas with women might not completely agree with the

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 166–67.
\textsuperscript{159} Jason, Maria Gulovich, \textit{OSS Heroine of World War II}, 243–44.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 260.
rest of the population. Those men stationed overseas who witnessed firsthand the work of female agents, for example, most likely felt differently. As a case in point, the few members of the Dawes Mission who survived knew that no amount of money or public recognition would be enough to thank Maria Gulovich for her guidance and her bravery in a mission that cost many men their lives. They could agree that to have never let her out of the kitchen would have been disastrous for the war effort at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{161}

Both Hall and Gulovich risked their lives while working for the OSS. Working as an agent in the field required survival skills as well as instincts that most people do not possess. Elizabeth Amy Thorpe Pack was another of those women who exhibited the ability to assess the situation she was in and quickly find solutions to any number of problems she may have encountered. She appeared fearless when facing anything and was resourceful enough to travel through war torn countries without harm, even before allying with any government agency. Pack’s privileged upbringing may account for many of the skills she embodied. Her father, United States Marine Corps Major George Thorpe, and her mother, the daughter of Senator Harry Wells, raised Pack among highly educated members of society as they traveled around the world. During her family’s treks across Europe, she mastered what would come to be an incredibly valuable skill later, her command of foreign languages. Fluent in Spanish and French, well traveled, associated with scores of foreign dignitaries and ambassadors, and deeply concerned about the devastation she witnessed in Europe at the start of World War II, made Pack an obvious candidate for undercover work.\textsuperscript{162}

The existing literature on Pack, much like those about Christine Granville of the SOE, suggests that Pack possessed a beauty and charisma that few men could resist. Her sex appeal

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 4,175, 244–45.
coupled with her intellect and unwavering bravery made Pack a triple threat that did not go unnoticed by officials in the OSS. Pack’s first “mission,” she traveled across a war torn Spain in search of her husband, was one she alone initiated and authorized. In 1935, she and her driver set out to find Arthur Pack (said husband) and were detained by Republican guards who interrogated and placed her in a cell for hours until she was able to “befriend” an inmate who was able to secure her release. Viewing this incident as a minor delay, Pack continued on to San Sebastian in search of information or a confirmation of her husband’s death. She traveled another two days before being taken in for questioning again. This time Pack was able to persuade the commander to give her a one-day pass as well as an armed escort. Arthur Pack was found alive and in the company of other US ambassadors who recognized what an asset Elizabeth Pack might be to the nation. They gave her an envelope containing secret information for her to deliver to the Foreign Office. After successfully delivering it, she set out on her next self-approved mission.

Pack’s next adventure would be to help five Franco supporters to join other rebel forces in Fuenterrabia. Pack sympathized with the plight of the Spanish revolutionaries, despite being chastised for her too obvious support of the Nationalist cause. Many of her friends were Spanish Franco supporters and Pack adamantly disagreed with the Republican government’s execution of church officials. To accomplish the mission, Pack needed to find a way to distract her armed escorts. To accomplish this, she set out to ply them with drinks until they were too intoxicated to care about the five men she had loaded into their vehicle. In their drunken state, her escorts did not seem to mind the extra passengers and they all drove off together. She dropped the five men off in the mountains and returned to her hotel before her husband noticed she had gone.\textsuperscript{163}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid., 47–48.]
\item[Ibid., 42–45.]
\end{footnotes}
Before Pack began working for the OSS in 1942, she had already contacted the British to offer them her services as an agent. She worked as a covert agent for the British Security Coordination (BSC), the SOE’s British intelligence agency in the United States, performing several information seeking missions for the agency where her “contribution was enormous and the information she provided was extra-ordinary” according to Marion de Chastellaine, Pack’s former go-between in the SOE.\textsuperscript{165}

Pack’s most dangerous mission while under the command of the OSS could have resulted in major international conflicts if she failed. Donovan and the BSC decided that, in a joint effort, they would infiltrate the embassies of several neutral nations in order to steal their military codebooks. According to a Presidential Directive, the OSS was given only a limited amount of power concerning foreign embassies, making this mission even more dangerous than most. If an agent were caught in the embassy, the results could be “catastrophic” for both the agents and the countries they were working for.\textsuperscript{166} It appeared that the rewards outweighed the risks, and Pack was contacted to be a part of that mission in March 1942.

Colonel Ellery Huntington of the OSS outlined a plan where she and her partner Charles Brousse, who worked at the French embassy and with whom she became intimately involved (originally to obtain information from him), would break into the safe in the navel attaché’s office. Over the previous year, Pack had cunningly earned the trust of Brousse and he supplied her with information regarding the embassy’s cable traffic on a daily basis. She was also able to convince him to help her with this mission. Somehow, the two agents needed to get into the office and remove two codebooks, hand them through the window to the OSS to photograph and then wait for the books to be returned to them, at which point she would return them to the safe,

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 142-43.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 208; McIntosh, \textit{Sisterhood of Spies}, 24.
all within a few hours. The two devised a plan where Brousse would “fabricate” a story to the
night security guard at the embassy about wanting to spend time with his mistress without his
wife’s knowledge. Relying on the guard’s sympathy for his situation and a hefty bribe, he asked
the guard to leave them alone for a while so they could “be together.” This plan worked and for
weeks, Pack and Brousse routinely met at the embassy and gained the trust of the guard and his
dog, allowing them to implement their actual plans in mid-June 1942.167

On June 19, the couple arrived at the embassy to “celebrate an anniversary” and asked the
guard to have a drink with them. His glass of champagne contained a dose of medication that
Pack had secretly slipped in to it when he was not looking, to render him unconscious so they
would not be disturbed in their attempts to open the safe and remove the codebooks. The dog
also received the sedative in his water dish. Once both the dog and guard were asleep, Pack and
Brousse let their safe cracker in and he opened the locked naval officer’s door and began
working on the safe. Over four hours later, the safe was finally open, but by then it was too late
to finish their job. They were forced to write down the safe’s code and leave empty handed.168

Two days later, the couple was back at the embassy for another attempt at retrieving the
codes. Unfortunately, Pack was unable to open the safe even with the combination she had
written on a piece of paper and brought with her. They were forced to leave and try again
another day. In the meantime, the original safecracker who had accompanied them to the
embassy taught Pack how to quickly open the safe. With her newfound skill, Pack and Brousse
met one last time at the embassy for their “final evening together.” To their surprise, there was
no guard on duty, a detail that greatly concerned Pack; it seemed too easy and she feared they
had been discovered and were walking into a trap. The two went about their normal routine until

167 McIntosh, *Sisterhood of Spies*, 27.
168 Ibid., 28.
Pack, to Brousse’s surprise, began undressing. She ordered him to do the same, explaining that if the guard did appear, their cover would not be blown. Her instincts were right on point, and as Pack stood there wearing nothing but a string of pearls and Brousse attempted to undress the guard burst through the door to find them. Embarrassed, the guard apologized and exited the room as quickly as he could. Pack went to work immediately on opening the safe, dressed only in a slip in case the guard returned. She opened the safe, removed the books and passed them out the window to the OSS agent waiting outside. She and Brousse waited several hours for the books to be returned and when they were securely back in the safe the couple left. Pack’s use of her sexuality at that moment, as a creative problem-solving technique, was proof of her quick thinking and of her constant awareness of her surroundings. Pack knew if they had been caught, their mission would not only have failed, but she also would have been responsible for putting many other agents at risk. She was willing to do whatever it took in order to obtain the information that was so desperately needed by the OSS.

The success of this mission fostered the confidence of the OSS in both of the new agents and led to another mission, this time in France. Pack would act as Brousse and his wife’s daughter and the two would become part of an ongoing OSS operation called BANANA. Their job would be to gather information from Spain and report it to Donovan. This mission however, never came to fruition because Operation TOURCH had begun and the Vichy interned American diplomats as a result. This meant that any possibility of Pack and Brousse being infiltrated into France would have to be postponed indefinitely. Despite this, Pack continued to supply the OSS with information until the war ended in 1945. When asked about the means by which she obtained much of this information, as it was sexual in nature, she stated that she was not

169 Lovell, Cast No Shadow, 228–29.
170 Ibid., 239–57.
ashamed. She also remarked that “my superiors told me that the results of my work saved thousands of British and American lives….It involved me in situations from which 'respectable' women draw back–but mine was total commitment. Wars are not won by respectable methods.”

Pack knew what it took to obtain information and used every tool she had available to do so. Conventional methods of warfare alone were not going to win WWII for the allies, and women, like Pack, had to use other means.

The final two women featured in this study used unconventional methods as well. Elizabeth McIntosh (MacDonald) and Barbara Lauwres worked for the OSS too, only their work placed them behind the scenes and not on the front lines. Both McIntosh and Lauwers worked for the MO branch of the OSS where they created “black propaganda” to bring down the morale of the enemy soldiers and civilians in an attempt to procure a victory for the Ally forces.

McIntosh, before being recruited by the OSS and stationed in India, lived in Hawaii as a journalist who happened to be fluent in Japanese. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, McIntosh was sent to India to rewrite intercepted mail from Japanese soldiers to their families. Her job was to make the families believe that their sons who were off fighting were losing the battle against the Americans. McIntosh was later transferred to the OSS office in China where she worked on a project that intercepted an Imperial Order describing the terms of Japan’s surrender. They rewrote the order and distributed it to Japanese soldiers, effectively convincing them of its authenticity. After the war, McIntosh went on to write several books about her time in the

OSS, and in 1959, she began working in Operations for the CIA, the organization that was created shortly after the OSS disbanded in 1946, until she retired in 1973.  

For her part, Lauwers, who spoke flawless German, worked at the OSS headquarters in Rome. While there, she was part of the team that was responsible for creating false passports, visas, diplomas and other documents for secret agents in the field. However, her greatest accomplishment while part of the OSS was the part she played in Operation SAUERKRAUT. For this operation, Lauwers trained and accompanied a team of German prisoners who would be placed behind enemy lines and would spread “black” propaganda in nearby occupied Italian villages. Every agent who was deployed with her returned safely and had obtained valuable information about the German military and its movements. 

Lauwers also helped to create the "League of Lonely War Women," another “black propaganda” effort that airdropped letters to German soldiers in the field. The letters, supposedly written by women back home, suggested that they were seeking sex and relationships with soldiers. The mission’s purpose was to bring down German soldier’s morale by making them believe their wives and girlfriends were being unfaithful while they were off fighting the war. Because of the success of missions headed by her, Lauwers was given the authority to conduct another in Italy that would force Czechoslovakian and Slovakian soldiers to end their support of the Germans. The results showed over 600 Czechoslovak soldiers defecting from the Italian frontline and withdrawing their support for the Germans. The leaflets that Lauwers created were found in the jacket pockets of more than 600 soldiers who crossed the battle lines. For her efforts, Lauwers was awarded the Bronze Star. 

174 Ibid., 60; “World War II.”
These women, some of whom risked their lives at the hands of the enemy, served America under extreme secrecy. If the American public had been aware of the dangerous missions women were being used, in the backlash the United States government would have experienced would have been immense. In 1942, many Americans were likely not prepared to make the necessary changed to their socially constructed ideas of gender, so the mere thought of a woman using a weapon, or worse yet, her body as a weapon against the Axis powers would have been met with anger and protest. Therefore, the only way to avoid such conflicts was to create those positions in secret. Years later as the histories about these women began being published and circulated, the nation was surprised and fascinated with their stories. The general public found it difficult to believe that women acted as secret agents and that a few of the women actually killed enemy soldiers. Perhaps this reaction explains why most of the existing literature about these women placed so much focus on their sexuality. The reaction of the public, supported by their socially constructed ideas of women, forced the authors to portray the women agents as sweet, fragile, incapable of harm, or worst, sex-crazed women on the prowl. The idea that these missions could not have been performed without women using their sexuality to trick men into giving them the information sought after by the OSS was much easier to accept by Americans than the idea that these women chose to use their sexuality as a tool.

The previous chapters feature brave and intelligent women who put their lives at risk just to do their part for the war effort. The following chapter will illustrate how the women in both the SOE and the OSS paved the way for women in their respective countries to obtain higher positions in and out of the military.
CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN, WORKFORCE,

AND WAR

That most of the female spies associated with the OSS were actually employed by the SOE serves as evidence that, comparatively, the women employed by the OSS were less likely to be used as clandestine agents. Officials within the United States government feared the public outrage and political backlash that accompanied allowing women to use weapons or to occupy positions behind enemy lines. The socially constructed ideas pertaining to which occupations women could hold also dictated the United States’ policy on women in the military. However, in Great Britain, the necessity to fill many positions left by men fighting on the frontline forced the SOE to employ women as secret operatives much sooner. Once the decision to use women in these positions became a regular practice, women were increasingly afforded many of the same rights as their male counterparts. Nevertheless, women in both nations faced sexism and discrimination, whatever their position, as they entered the workforce and took on responsibilities and occupations once held by the men in each country.

Before the war began, women in both Great Britain and the United States primarily took care of their homes and children. While women in Great Britain’s workforce were nearly five million strong prior to the war, most did not expect to continue their employment once they married. As the war progressed however, women found themselves making up one third of the total employed persons.176 Between 1940 and 1950 in the United States, women made up approximately 10-20% of the work force compared to the 2-5% they represented between 1890

Women quickly replaced men in factories, service industries, offices, and the armed forces. The need for men on the battlefield facilitated women to enter into employment previously forbidden to them. By 1941, with the enactment of the National Service Act No. 2 (Great Britain), women aged 20-30 were conscripted into occupations vital to their country’s need. By 1943, that number rose to almost 90% of single women and 80% of married women who were working outside of their homes in some capacity for the war effort. Women found employment in manufacturing as well as in civil defense areas such as land armies that employed women in the agricultural sector. They worked on lands previously farmed by men, who left for military service, as a means to increase food production during the war. Many women also found employment in Air Raid Precautions (ARP) where they watched for enemy aircraft and warned civilians of approaching dangers, as well as worked in fire and rescue services. Eventually, women-only auxiliary branches of the armed forces were created and women became code breakers, secretaries, telephone operators and filled non-essential positions so the men could be transferred to the frontlines.

SOCIETY AND WOMEN – HOW WOMEN WERE TREATED IN THE WORKFORCE

For women in Great Britain the transition into the workforce began during World War I when the need to relieve men from their prewar jobs became essential. Due to the enormous demand for men in the armed forces, women volunteered in order to hold positions for the men as they went off to fight in the war. As the men returned, women relinquished their positions and returned to caring for their homes. Then, as WWII loomed over Great Britain, women once again entered the workforce to fill vacancies left by soldiers who were called up for duty.

178 Harris, “BBC - History - British History in Depth.”
179 Ibid.
response by men not on active duty during this time was less than favorable toward the women. Even as the need for workers increased, women met discrimination in almost every field of employment. According to Connelly, the long hours and low wages women received, coupled with the “intolerable attitudes” from men, made it increasingly difficult to recruit women into necessary factory jobs. The author contends that the men who remained at home refused to adjust to the increasing number of women in the workplace or to accommodate their increased responsibilities both inside and out of the home.

The increased occupational stresses accompanied by social stresses placed on women caused many more problems for them. Rumors of “good-time gals” who would have sex with anyone in uniform and the increased number of reported sexually transmitted diseases only furthered the negative social attitudes many had about women working outside the home. One nationally syndicated column, Capitol Stuff, falsely reported that women in the WAAC were being issued condoms and other contraceptives while stationed abroad, an untrue rumor meant to blame those “seductive women” for increases in venereal disease cases among American soldiers stationed overseas. The new freedoms women found in procuring their own income (sometimes far from home), the exposure to new and “exotic” foreigners and a growing fear of what the future might bring, fostered a sentiment of “do as you please for tomorrow you may die,” that placed women in constant conflict with the old and new ideas of femininity.

Women wrestled with their traditional values and their desires for social and financial independence. However, men and women alike were expected to maintain their social

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181 Ibid., 55.
182 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 130–32.
183 Connelly, “Working, Queueing and Worrying: British Women and the Home Front, 1939-1945,” 56–59. For more on rumors that were spread about women during the war see Gruhzit-Hoyt, They Also Served; Yellin, Our Mothers’ War.
constructed and defined roles of masculinity and femininity. Gender roles, argued Graham Dawson, shifted throughout the war. The result of which, he states, did not have a lasting effect because men and their attitudes regarding the social positions of women did not change after the war.\footnote{Connelly, “Working, Queueing and Worrying: British Women and the Home Front, 1939-1945,” 59.}

There are striking similarities between the social norms in Great Britain with those in the United States during the 1940s. As more women entered the workforce, stories abounded of the harsh treatment they suffered from men and even from other women. Constance Bowman Reid discusses at length the social ramifications of the simple act of wearing slacks or overalls had in the 1940s on the newly employed women. The treatment Reid received when she worked in a bomber factory during the war ranged from derogatory comments to unwanted sexual advances from men and sporadic disrespect and rudeness from fellow women.\footnote{Constance Bowman Reid, \textit{Slacks and Calluses: Our Summer in a Bomber Factory} (Smithsonian Books, 2004), 67–74.} Women crossing over the socially constructed line of how one should act and/or what it meant to be the ideal woman suffered emotional and sometimes physical abuse for their work for the government. Reid and other women who worked in wartime roles noted that the behaviors of people who knew them changed and they “acted as if they didn’t [know them],” as well as “people who didn’t know [them] whistled as if they did,” just based on the clothing they wore.\footnote{Ibid.} Condescending men and women eschewed those women who chose to (or were forced to for economic survival) work in factories instead of offices because they were suddenly unfeminine. Ironically, these women suffered unwanted sexual attention as well. Reid recalled that “men grabbed [them] and

\footnote{184 Connelly, “Working, Queueing and Worrying: British Women and the Home Front, 1939-1945,” 59.}  
\footnote{185 Constance Bowman Reid, \textit{Slacks and Calluses: Our Summer in a Bomber Factory} (Smithsonian Books, 2004), 67–74.}  
\footnote{186 Ibid.}
followed [them] and whistled at [them]. They called [them] ‘Sister’ in a most un-brotherly way and ‘Baby’ in a most un-fatherly way.”

These women struggled with their own individuality and ideas of femininity too. Taking on a “man’s job” and trying to maintain their ideas of beauty, Sandra Gilbert affirms, “the ‘girls’ [were] declining to join the masculine realm of regulations and uniforms ruled by the bureaucratically inclined foremen, affirming instead a more joyous and mischievous regimen of feminine misrule.” Women enjoyed their recently acquired freedoms and intended to hold on to them as well as their femininity; to them, it seemed, the two were not mutually exclusive. However, social norms were slow to change, and while women experienced a new sense of autonomy and eventually greater equality in the workplace, they rarely saw increases in their salaries or received promotions, which held them in subordinate positions to men.

Financially, women continued to endure discrepancies as well. The National War Labor Board in the United States declared in 1942 that women should receive equal pay for doing the same work as men. According to an article in the University of Pennsylvania Law Review, “the Board has consistently endeavored to abolish the wage differential between male and female employees...a policy providing that "the company shall pay equal pay for equal work," regardless of whether the employees were male or female. This principle has been reiterated time and again in varying shades of language.” Many business owners ignored it because the NWLB’s focus was on the stabilization of wages nationwide and the avoidance of labor strikes during the war and not on the issue of equal pay for men and women. In 1944, a woman working in manufacturing was averaging about $31 per week compared to a man performing the same job,

187 Ibid., 67–69.
188 Ibid., xi.
who brought home $55 per week. Opportunities for advancement were also limited for women as few received promotions from their entry-level positions.190

Part of the explanation for this could be their children. Men and women alike expressed concerns about who would care for the children while their mothers were at work. These gendered social expectations continued to burden the working woman. Even as women shouldered more of the home front wartime responsibilities outside of the home, men were unlikely to increase their contributions to household duties.191 Women, expected to work long hours for little pay in factories, were also expected to maintain clean, healthy and happy homes at the same time. Women with children and families often missed work in order to care for them, as there was no one else to fill in for her at home during her shifts in the factory. “Women’s work,” as household chores were considered by most, still needed to be completed even if women worked late hours. Society needed to change. It did not take policymakers long to recognize that existing social norms interfered with industrial productivity and to accommodate working women by offering later store hours, shorter work days and daycare centers. In 1942, the United States Congress passed the Lanham Act that provided government funds for daycare centers, and by 1945, 3,102 such facilities opened. In Great Britain, women faced the same issues and the government responded in much the same way as their American allies by creating childcare facilities and greater flexibility regarding the number of hours a woman spent at work.192 That was a start, but many more adjustments needed to be made in the workplace and in social norms before real changes could be measured.193

190 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 64–65.
192 Harris, “BBC - History - British History in Depth.”
193 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 59–60.
In both countries, the governments set forth agendas that attempted to counter the negative reactions women received from men in the workplace. The British passed several laws regarding women’s employment. By the end of the war, all women between the ages of 18-40 were eligible for employment in any capacity, regardless of their marital status. \(^{194}\) In the United States, the government encouraged women to join the war effort by replacing men in essential civilian jobs, allowing the men to join the armed forces. Propaganda posters were displayed nationwide depicting pretty, young women with slogans like “Soldiers Without Guns,” “Free a Man to Fight,” and others that featured Rosie the Riveter, the “ideal single woman war worker.” \(^{195}\) President Roosevelt also addressed the nation and encouraged Americans to accept women in these new positions, stating that in some communities “employers dislike to hire women. In others they are reluctant to hire Negroes. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudice.” \(^{196}\) Even though more women became employed during the war years than ever before, little seemed to have changed for women once the war was over. Of the millions of women in both countries who volunteered or were conscripted to work in factories, service or other wartime employment, less than half remained in the workforce after the war. \(^{197}\)

**WOMEN ENTER THE ARMED FORCES**

Not long after both Great Britain and the United States entered the war, the governments began to see an increase in their need for soldiers. Before the war began, able-bodied men occupied non-combat positions in the armed forces and were rapidly becoming necessary on the front lines. As early as 1907, the British had enlisted women to assist men on the front line. The

\(^{194}\) Celia Lee and Paul Strong, *Women In War: From Home Front to Front Line* (Pen and Sword, 2012), 53. The National Service Act 1941, Registration of Employment Order 1941, Employment of Women Order 1942 allowed women to be conscripted in Great Britain.

\(^{195}\) Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 38, 43.

\(^{196}\) Ibid., 39.

First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) women rode onto the battlefield to pick up and carry away wounded men to waiting doctors. Women also belonged to the Women’s Emergency Corps, the Women’s League, and the Women’s Defense Relief Corps by the end of World War I. In 1917, these groups combined to become part of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and then the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in 1938, a group whose purpose was to replace men in non-combat positions so the men could move to the frontlines where they were desperately needed.\textsuperscript{198} The ATS employed women as chauffeurs, clerks, telephone operators, cooks and instructors in order to transfer the men who held some of those positions into combat. The Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS), also created in 1917, was re-commissioned in 1939 for the same purpose. In April 1918, the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) began offering women positions as clerks, drivers, cooks and shopkeepers and continued the WAAF’s work during WWII.\textsuperscript{199}

In the United States, there is evidence that women have served in every war since the American Revolution, usually as nurses. Congress did recognize one women soldier, Deborah Sampson Gannett, from that war and also awarded her husband a widow’s pension.\textsuperscript{200} World War II, however, called for a vast number of women to serve in various capacities for the armed forces, beginning with the Army in 1942. After months of debating and deliberating, Representative Edith Nourse Rogers introduced House Bill 4906 to create a “Women's Army Auxiliary Corps for Service with the Army of the United States." The Director of the Army Nurse Corps, Maj. Julia Flikke, protested allowing women to join the WAAC, citing that, "It is

\textsuperscript{198} Lee and Strong, \textit{Women In War}, 77.


[her] opinion that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages . . . complications would arise between that organization and other existing organizations." Her concern was that "this organization necessarily would be composed largely of married women who would find it difficult to comply with regulations because of home ties, and would always need special consideration and no doubt there would be many who would object to regimentation."201 Essentially, Major Flikke opposed allowing women to enter an auxiliary branch of the Army because it conflicted with what was considered acceptable “women’s work.”

Despite the many objections to the WAAC, in May of that year, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was formed with the expressed purpose of "making available to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of the nation" and began recruiting women to fill open positions as “typists, hygienists, chauffeurs, cooks, bakers, accountants and telegraphers.”202 Not long after the WAAC’s approval, the Navy presented a request for its own women’s only branch, and in July of 1942, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) was established along with the US Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, the only group to give women full acceptance in the service from its inception. The WAAC became the Women’s Army Corp in September 1943 and women gained full military status. The SPARS of the US Coast Guard began enlisting women in November 1942, and the Air Force followed in 1943 by adding the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).203 Combined, the women’s only branches boasted nearly 400,000 enlisted women who served in every theater of the war.204

201 Ibid., 17–18.
203 Gruhzit-Hoyt, They Also Served, 62, 102, 125, 139, 150.
DISCRIMINATION IN THE MILITARY

As noted earlier, women employed in civilian war efforts suffered a significant amount of social discrimination. Those who joined the women’s auxiliary branches of each country faced their own unique challenges inside the military in addition to the similar social treatment all working women received. Women enlisted in the British FANYs, ATS, WRNS and the WAAF, as well as women in the American branches of the WAC, WAVES, SPAR, Marines and WASP, were subjected to public ridicule that suggested these women were neglecting their duties at home and that their involvement in the armed forces would leave the next generation morally and socially bankrupt. Rumors spread rapidly about the WAAC women being immoral prostitutes or that they became pregnant by “servicing” the male troops. Even more rampant were the rumors that the women spread venereal diseases. All of these rumors suggested, as Leisa Meyer states, that the only use women had to the military was sexual in nature. The rumors were baseless; in fact, the WAAC’s STD rates were close to nonexistent, and the rate of pregnancy among unmarried WAACs was 1/5 the rate of unmarried civilian women. Other women in the WAC found themselves “locked in barbed wire compounds and only able to leave with armed guard escorts” while stationed in the Pacific. In a moralistic and perhaps paternalistic attempt to protect the virtues of their women, the government further restricted their freedoms.

Women faced especially harsh discrimination from the enlisted men. One ATA pilot recalled her experience with her male co-pilot, “one man who refused to fly with me, because he said he wasn't going to be flown by a woman. I remember being absolutely furious and having to sit in the plane while he took charge.” Men in both countries were frequently unwilling to

relinquish their authority over women. There was also a significant amount of racism in all branches of the armed forces. In the United States, all military branches segregated people not only by sex but also by color. In Great Britain during WWII, Stuart Foster notes, “Black men were not even permitted to lie alongside the white corpses of their fellow men,” and he quotes historian Christopher Somerville’s observations that “some were issued with spears and clubs, rather than rifles and grenades.” Foster also points out that the British army had no black officers and that the War Office did not want African troops to serve in Europe but did allow them to serve in other parts of the world.206 Nowhere in his report, or any other sources about women during WWII, are African women who served in the British military specifically addressed, which suggests that they were not relevant enough to the war effort for the authors to mention.

**THE CREATION OF THE SOE AND OSS**

World War II presented new challenges for Great Britain and the United States. The technological strides made since the last war along with the challenge of defeating the Axis powers proved taxing on both counties. It did not take either government long to realize that this war required the use of different strategies than any they had employed before. Therefore, both nations set out to create agencies whose sole purpose was to fight the Nazis and the Japanese without detection.

Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during WWII, declared, “a new organization shall be established forthwith to co-ordinate all action, by way of subversion and sabotage, against the enemy overseas…This organization will be known as the Special Operations

Executive,” and ordered its director, Hugh Dalton, to “set Europe ablaze.” Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States during the war, authorized the creation of the Office of Strategic Services, under the direction of William Donovan, in 1942. His order read: “All measures will be taken to enforce our will upon the enemy by means other than military action, as may be applied in support of actual or planned military operations; or in furtherance of the war effort; unorthodox warfare, guerrilla activities behind enemy lines; contact with resistance groups; subversion, sabotage and unorthodox or ‘black’ psychological warfare.” Both agencies, supplied with a seemingly endless supply of funds and executive support, recruited and trained many of the brightest, affluent, and well-connected members of society.

Among the recruits from both the SOE and the OSS were women selected as much for their connections as their abilities. Many of the recruits possessed a special skill, like fluency in a foreign language that made them an asset to the agencies. The women were expected to be equally intelligent and brave. Most women became secretaries, telephone operators, file clerks and code breakers. However, some women did work in the field as saboteurs and spies. What set these agencies apart from other military branches was their willingness to hire and promote women.

The SOE, far more often than the OSS, trained women with the same skill sets the men received. SOE agents learned survival skills, how to use explosives, and parachuting as well as code breaking, how to transmit and receive messages and counter-espionage techniques like the

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207 Foot, SOE in France: an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944, 8, 11.
208 McIntosh, Sisterhood of Spies, 6.
209 Smith, OSS. Aforementioned monographs detail both agencies recruiting and training techniques.
210 Foot, SOE in France: an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944, 51–53; Foot, S.O.E., 1940-46, 47; McIntosh, Sisterhood of Spies, 6.
211 McIntosh, Sisterhood of Spies, 12–13; Foot, S.O.E., 1940-46, 47.
use of propaganda.  The SOE was also willing to allow women to work from behind enemy lines, most often as couriers or wireless operators, but a select few were responsible for spying and for setting explosives. Women like Australian-born Nancy Wake, Violette Szabo, and the American Virginia Hall (who worked for both the SOE and then the OSS), can be credited for their share of damage to the Nazi endeavors in France. Wake, known as the “White Mouse” by the Gestapo, parachuted into France, sent messages back to London requesting weapons for 17 Maquis groups, met the airdrops to collect supplies, and led her group in a fierce shooting match in order to rescue two captured Americans.

Szabo, while a courier in France, along with a Maquis member, was involved in a roadside gunfight with German soldiers. As she attempted to flee from the area, Szabo may have injured her ankle forcing her to stop running. She insisted that her male partner continue without her as she supplied him with cover until her capture by the Germans. While under arrest, she may have been tortured by the guards but refused to disclose any information about her identity or the others with whom she was in contact. Her failure to cooperate with the Germans resulted in her death in the infamous Ravensbrück Concentration Camp in 1944.

While working for the SOE, Virginia Hall was responsible for setting up her own safe house for fellow agents; she also carried messages from one circuit to another and she convinced local police to release prisoners. Her greatest contribution to the SOE, however, was the field intelligence she obtained. Hall worked as a “travel agent” for F Section and held the title of

212 Foot, SOE in France; an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944, 53–58.
213 Escott, Heroines of SOE, 188.
organizer for the HECKLER circuit, an almost unheard-of accomplishment for a woman.\textsuperscript{217} Hall also taught herself Morse code so she could be her own wireless transmitter in the event that she was no longer of use anymore as a courier.\textsuperscript{218}

Many of the duties performed by the women for the SOE were previously unimaginable for women to achieve prior to the war. With the onset of WWII, the British government understood the need for new ways of fighting that included women in combat positions, even if it was in secret. The female agents of the SOE bravely undertook the tasks required of them and completed missions that had previously restricted the use of women. In doing so, these women commanded and earned the respect of their male colleagues and, once their stories became known after the war, that of the rest of the world.

Like their British allies, the women of the OSS were highly trained agents. However, most women did not receive the same training as male agents in the United States. Instead, women received training for positions that kept them in secure office settings. Even in the cases of those women who worked in Special Operations (spies), Operational Groups (foreign language specialists and saboteurs), and the Maritime Units (underwater explosive experts), the majority of them spent most of their time behind a desk. A few women like Virginia Hall, Amy Thorpe Pack, and Barbara Lauwers found themselves behind enemy lines working as agents.

While working for the OSS, Virginia Hall relayed messages to the OSS through the SOE.\textsuperscript{219} She also made contact with French Resistance operatives and established a network for the OSS. Hall singlehandedly organized drops and distributed goods to the same groups that

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{219} Escott, \textit{Heroines of SOE}, 37. The agencies worked closely throughout the war and many SOE agents were employed by the OSS (officially or unofficially).
were opposed to helping her because they refused to take orders from a woman. Hall was a master of disguise and impersonated a French peasant woman. She dyed her hair gray, used padding under her rustic clothing and shuffled, as an old woman would have, when she walked. Hall escaped detection by the Germans, who by this time were actively searching for her, and she transmitted many of the wireless messages that assisted the Allies in planning the D-Day attacks. Hall’s report to OSS listed her teams’ accomplishments as “destroying four bridges, derailing freight trains, sever[ing] a key rail line in multiple places and down[ing] telephone lines.” She also armed and trained three groups of French resisters that were responsible for the deaths of at least 150 German soldiers and the capture of 500 more.

Amy Thorpe Pack, code named Cynthia, procured navel codes for the OSS that led to the Allies concurring North Africa. She planned a mission to obtain the codes by tricking the security guard on duty that she and her “lover” wanted privacy. This afforded her enough time to sneak the OSS safecracker in through a window and open the safe. Thereafter, Pack took the code books to the OSS photo team so they could take pictures and then returned them to the safe unnoticed.

Barbara Lauwers, working for the Morale Operations (MO) unit of the OSS, helped lead Operation SAUERKRAUT, a mission whereby German POW selected and trained by Lauwers would infiltrate German held territories and distribute propaganda that would decrease German morale. The only woman involved, Lauwers, was also credited with the creation of the “League of Lonely War Women,” a fake group of German women looking for love. The purpose of the “League” was to make German soldiers believe that their wives and girlfriends were searching

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220 Ibid., 38.
222 Ibid., 178.
223 McIntosh, *Sisterhood of Spies*, 23–32.
for new foreign men in their absence. This tactic was so successful at deflating German morale that the Washington Post ran a story about it in 1944. Then, in April 1945, Lauwers team was responsible for distributing “black” propaganda that resulted in 600 Czechoslovakian troops who were aiding German soldiers to defect to Italy.²²⁴

Even if the female agents of the OSS were not involved with the war behind enemy lines, their top secret efforts greatly affected the outcome of the war. Hall and Pack offered services that directly placed them in danger of being captured by the Germans, yet they bravely preformed their duties. Women agents like Hall, Pack, and Lauwers gained respect from the men in the OSS by working competently and repeatedly completing their assigned missions successfully. They also gained the admiration of many more Americans by the end of the war, and each received commendations from the United States government.

POLICIES RELATED TO WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

The concept of a woman remaining a housewife and mother who cooked, cleaned, shopped, and cared for the children while her husband went off to work in order to singlehandedly support his family may seem antiquated today. However, for the majority of women prior to the 1940s, working outside of the home was only acceptable if they were young, unmarried (but looking for a husband), or from an underprivileged family where their income was necessary for survival. Every aspect of their lives, from what was acceptable for them to wear to their morality and their status in public, was dictated to women by society. In both Great Britain and the United States, the idea that a “woman’s place was in the home” continued to limit the availability of higher education and employment for women. Nevertheless, necessity proved to be the catalyst for social and economic opportunities for women in the late 1930s.

²²⁴ Ibid., 61–67.
As both countries inched closer to becoming involved in WWII, they began to reassess the social constraints placed on women. The need for men in the armed forces outweighed the desire to keep women “in their place.” Once the war began, each country passed legislation allowing (or insisting, in the case of Great Britain) women to work outside of the home and eventually in auxiliary branches of the armed forces. The number of women employed in 1944 in the United States reached nearly 17 million, and in Great Britain, “almost 90 per cent of single women and 80 per cent of married women were employed in essential work for the war effort.”

By 1942, every branch of the military in both nations employed women in one capacity or another. From their new occupations, women obtained a unique sense of freedom that, once the war was over, would be difficult to give up. As Olga Gruhzit-Hoyt pointed out, “women learned a sense of self-esteem and an independence that would help push the so-called women’s liberation movement into overt action.” Women finally had the opportunity to test their abilities in the workforce and discovered that despite the initial negative responses from men (and oftentimes other women) that they were capable of bringing about change. The most tangible results were in the military sphere, as both nations incorporated the auxiliary groups into the male branches.

New positions in the military opened up for women as did advancement opportunities. By 1970 the Army appointed the first women General Officer, and in 1973, the Air Force had its first Major General. Over the next twenty years, more combat positions became available to

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225 Harris, “BBC - History - British History in Depth”; Walsh, “Womanpower: The Transforming of the Labour Force in the UK and the USA Since 1945.”
226 Harris, “BBC - History - British History in Depth.”
227 Gruhzit-Hoyt, They Also Served, xvii.
women as laws that prohibited them from serving were repealed.\textsuperscript{228} Because of the struggles faced by women during WWII, women in the United States, as well as in Great Britain, are able to join the armed services today.

According to David Hoghton-Carter, United Kingdom Defense Forum Research Associate, in 2009

\ldots about 9.4\% of serving British forces personnel are women, 17,620 people, including 3,760 commissioned officers. The RAF has the highest proportion of roles open to women of the three services, at 96\%, followed by the Navy at 71\% and the Army at 61\%. A BBC report from May this year suggests that as many as one in five of those currently serving in Afghanistan are women, proportionately greater than their overall representation in the military. Our own research has revealed that the RAF has 58 qualified female pilots, some 12 of whom are qualified to fly Fast Jets, out of a total of 148 female aircrew. Still a small proportion of the final tally (720 qualified Fast Jet pilots, 1989 qualified Pilots, based on data from April this year), it shows that women are making inroads into the RAF’s most prestigious front-line roles.\textsuperscript{229}

On January 23, 2013, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that he would authorize the use of women in combat in the US military. The US policy on women in combat detailed in the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule bans servicewomen from units whose primary mission is direct ground combat. According to recent data from the Pentagon, “active-duty female personnel make up some 15 percent -- more than 280,000 members -- of the more than 1.4 million troops in the U.S. Armed Forces. As of May 2012, just over 19\% of the 1.2 million positions available in the military were open to women.” Although women already serve in combat, the armed forces and the government do not officially recognize this. The

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., xviii.

effects of which limits women's professional advancement or access to benefits male soldiers are eligible to receive.\textsuperscript{230}

The social expectations placed on women changed drastically as the threat of WWII increased in both Great Britain and the United States. The increased need for men on the frontlines propelled women into civil and military positions where they had previously been forbidden. Many women embraced the new freedom they experienced and continued to work outside the home once the war was over. Despite the discrimination and harassment they received from men at the time, women understood that their work “was some form of proof that women could do these sorts of jobs, more or less successfully,” and felt that “it was quite a normal step forward for women.”\textsuperscript{231} These initial “steps forward” paved the way for future generations of women in the military. While the progress was slow, it was steady.

Agencies like the SOE (disbanded in 1946) and OSS (disbanded in 1945 by Executive Order and its responsibilities distributed to various agencies) still exist and employ women at all levels. Both agencies acknowledge the use of women today, a stark contrast to the WWII era procedure. A select few women have even reached the higher ranks, as Nora Slatkin did in 1995 when she became Executive Director of the CIA. Stella Rimington, became the first female Director General of the British civilian intelligence agency MI5 in 1992.\textsuperscript{232} It took these nations decades to make this progress; perhaps in another 50 years, these women will see greater equality in their pay and in how their male coworkers, who might still believe to some extent that the military is “man’s work,” treat them.

\textsuperscript{231} Juliette Pattinson, “Secret Agent,” \textit{HerStoria Magazine}, Winter 2009, 13. This is a quote from an SOE agent Yvonne Baseden in an interview with the author.
CONCLUSION

The decision to use women in the workforce, in order to replace men who were needed on the battlefield, was much simpler to make than the one to replace men in the armed forces with women. As the threat of war loomed over Great Britain and the United States in the early 1940s, both nations found themselves in dire need of personnel to fill essential positions in both civil and military industries. These needs resulted in the metaphorical doors to the workforce being thrown open for many women who had never sought employment outside of their homes. As more women entered the workforce out of necessity, they faced challenges that many had not expected, like sexual discrimination and the reality that they now had two full time occupations—that of employee and of homemaker.

Along with the new responsibilities women faced in the 1940s, many of them took advantage of the new-found freedoms that accompanied working outside of their homes. Women were making their own money and often became the sole providers for their households. This allowed them to make many of the financial decisions that their fathers or husbands had been responsible for before the war. Societal standards were changing rapidly and what had once been acceptable only for men, was now the responsibility of the women they left behind—whether or not the women were ready or even wanted those responsibilities. However, for the women who embraced their new opportunities, the governments in both nations offered them a chance to experience many things that, prior to the war, would have been unimaginable for most of them. Work became available in factories, offices, retail outlets, and in the military; all jobs once held exclusively by men. Many women who entered the military traveled abroad and
obtained positions that required their intelligence, quick thinking and an incredible amount of
bravery.

With the onset of the war, it quickly became clear to government officials that a variety
of tactics – including innovative intelligence operations – would be needed to win the war. The
need for specialized forces that could perform subversive duties under a shroud of secrecy
became obvious as they realized this was not a typical war. Great Britain and the United States
developed agencies that regularly practiced sabotage and other acts of espionage against the
enemy. The SOE and the OSS began as paramilitary organizations that would serve their nation
in ways that traditional military forces could not. Both organizations facilitated the defeat of
Hitler and his Nazi regime by employing men and women as secret agents behind enemy lines in
German occupied European countries. Those men and women performed missions that directly
placed them in danger of being captured, tortured, or killed by the Germans. Therefore, the
training they received needed to be extensive and thorough and left little time for discriminating
against potential agents based on their gender.

The previous chapters addressed the histories of women prior to WWII and at the point in
which they entered the workforce. The chapters also discuss, specifically, nine female agents
chosen not only because their accomplishments set them apart from all other agents, but also
because the histories that exist about them (and in the case of Elizabeth McIntosh, written by
her) are particularly focused on the sexuality and physical appearances of these women. This
study presented information about the women in the SOE and the OSS much like many
historians and authors have offered over the previous four decades. The difference between what
is presented in the preceding chapters and that of published works about female agents is that this
study excludes reference to the beauty or sexuality of the women unless these qualities were
directly relevant to the success of specific missions. By contrast, the bulk of the existing
historiography written about both agencies repeatedly referenced either how female agents used
their sexuality or, at the very least, how attractive the women were.

One may wonder why it is significant to address the issue that books authored about
women during the 1940s focused on sexuality. Even if the information is accurate,
sensationalizing the presentation of female agents continues their objectification and reinforces
the mainstream standards of physical attractiveness. This study suggests that the answer is two-
fold. First, the results of this rhetorical approach diminish the agency of the women along with
the value of the work they did for their respective organizations because they were over-
sexualized. Secondly, the women became victims of discrimination from all members of society.
For example, the acronyms FANY, WAVES, and WAAC (the agencies that employed women in
auxiliary units of the armed forces) quickly became victim to word play by those who opposed
women in the military. The play on words used for the FANYs made reference to their body
parts. The term “fanny” dates back to 1879 in Great Britain where it meant “vulva” and is still
seen as offensive today.233 In the United States, when the WAVES and the WAAC began
recruiting women, the public started to spread rumors about the promiscuity of the women who
joined. According to Gruhzit-Hoyt’s They Also Served, men would joke that they “joined the
navy to ride the WAVES,” and there were endless accounts of harassment in the official US
Army history of the WACs.234 The WAAC and WAC women, like those of the FANYs, were
confronted with the obvious “wacky” references, insinuating that the women were “not right in
the head,” as soon as the branches began accepting women. The discrimination women faced,
which was also propagated in the historiography, insinuated that they were “easy” or “crazy.”

234 Olga Gruhzit-Hoyt, They Also Served: American Women in World War II, 1st Edition (Birch Lane Pr, 1995), xvi.
The results fostered the idea that women were incapable of performing the duties of their positions or, worse yet, that their duties were sexual in nature.

The discrimination that women faced during the 1940s in the workforce has not been addressed as thoroughly in this study as it may need to be because the foremost argument of this work is that the existing historiography oversexualized and diminished the value of the efforts and successes of the female agents of the SOE and the OSS. Additionally, this thesis argues that the historiography discards the agency of the individual women agents by suggesting that they either used their sexuality as a tool against men or by leading the reader to believe that the only explanation for why these women were able to accomplish their missions was because they were attractive. Were these women successful because they were beautiful or were they intelligent enough to know when and how to use every tool in their arsenal in order to complete their missions successfully? This composition contends it was the latter.

Marcus Binney suggested that women agents used their “feminine charms” in order to escape from certain situations. Women, he says, would distract men by flirting or “making a date” with them or by offering them good like fresh fruits.\(^{235}\) Mary Lovell, in *Cast No Shadow*, described Amy Thorpe Pack as an agent who sought out men in power and “us[ed] all her skills, including sex, to extract [information from them].” She qualified this by stating that “to a certain extent [Pack] regarded her work in the bedroom as mere expediency.”\(^{236}\) Even Pack’s former go-between said “she could only get information one way; she used it and got the information” implying she had to use sex or would not have been useful to the Allies.\(^{237}\) Because Pack was not ashamed of her techniques, she is often written about as if she was a “femme fatale; very

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 142.
sweet; a nymphomaniac; a romantic; extremely beautiful; rather ordinary; electrifying; and highly intelligent.”238 Of these characteristics used to describe Pack and the other women agents, it was their sexuality that received the most attention.

While it is true that these women used their sexuality at times, by choosing when to employ their sexuality, the women demonstrated their intelligence and a keen perception of other people and of the situations they found themselves in. The authors exploited the women’s agency when they suggested that the women used their sexuality indiscriminately and as a first line of defense against their enemies. Never was it suggested by the authors that men were easily persuaded, of weaker moral character, or that male agents ever attempted to seduce women in order to obtain needed information. The authors portrayed women as predators and men as victims when it suited, however they would then use verbiage that suggested the women were somehow less noteworthy than their male counterparts throughout the rest of their monographs. The authors’ analysis of female agents was often constrained by their own proclivity toward the stereotypes about women and their positions in society during WWII.

Chapters 2 and 3 focused on reiterating the histories of a select few women agents of the SOE and the OSS without regard for their physical beauty. Both chapters also served to draw attention to their contrast with the published works that are available about the SOE and the OSS and the women who worked for them. The present chapter offers a deeper investigation into the notion, and offers evidence, that the women were subjected to socially constructed gender roles in the 1940s and that those roles continued to influence the authors writing about them decades later. In 1945, for example, Squadron Leader Simpson was quoted in the Sunday Express that “the interesting thing about these girls is that they are not hearty and horsey young women with masculine chins. They are pretty young girls who would look demure and sweet in crinolines,”

238 Ibid., xiv–xv.
suggesting that women, or at least attractive women, were performing unladylike duties for the SOE.\textsuperscript{239} While a certain amount of historicism is necessary when writing about WWII as well as other areas of history, the monographs in question use language outside the context of a timeframe and as a tool to describe women for their audience. To reiterate, the majority of the historiography on women in the SOE and OSS has been published within the last thirty years, yet they still use language that was commonplace in the 1940s when referencing women. Their works are laden with sexual references about women; however, the need to extend the same courtesy to the readers regarding the male characters does not apply.

A researcher attempting to compile a list of sources about the women who served in the SOE or the OSS will find it difficult to obtain many sources published by academic presses which have come to be heavily relied upon for accurate and thorough information by historians. Most of the existing literature on these women is published by commercial publishing houses whose standards can be less scholarly. The effect this has for the researcher is that their findings are unfortunately weighted with sensationalism, overexaggeration, and inaccuracy as well as a free-flowing use of lurid adjectives designed to draw the reader in by creating a visually pleasing mental image. This becomes particularly problematic when discussing the women of the SOE and OSS because those “mental images” foster a continued gender bias that labels the women as either weak, motherly, or as harlots. This researcher is not suggesting that the featured women were unfeminine or unattractive by conventional standards for the time. However, referring back to Chapters 2 and 3, in most instances, how a woman looked had little to do with transferring data to London, coordinating airdrops of supplies, blowing up bridges, or distributing propaganda to enemy soldiers. It would seem that men, no matter what they looked like, would have been used for the exact same jobs if they were not off fighting on the frontline.

Once the evidence has been presented suggesting the authors oversexualized their representation of the women, two questions surface 1) why is this an issue if the end product informs the reader of all relevant information; and 2) why do the authors use such language when describing the women? The first question was addressed more thoroughly in the chapter on the SOE, but the diminishing of the agents’ successes because they are overshadowed by the implied feminization of them is again worthy of reiteration. The answer to the second question was also partially answered in the same chapter with the advertising cliché that “sex sells.” When writing any work, the authors must keep their audience in mind, and since popular presses publish most of the literature about these women, the general public is the target. Their target audience has come to expect certain things from books they read. Suspense, intrigue, excitement and sex are just a few of the covered topics in books topping the *New York Times* Best Sellers List.\(^{240}\) Therefore, when analyzing the content of these books, a certain level of “entertainment” is acceptable. However, writing entertaining prose does not exclude the authors from presenting the facts accurately, nor does it absolve them of the responsibility to present neutral representations of both men and women in their works.

A commonality exists between biographies, autobiographies, general histories and military histories of the women involved with the SOE and the OSS that positions women as overly sexual beings who must use their femininity and their bodies to persuade, distract or manipulate men (usually German soldiers) into allowing them to pass through checkpoints or accommodate the women in any other way. This representation of women as licentious or sexually conniving has a long history in the Western tradition and has thusly become part of the dominant or conventional social construction of how women are viewed and often times how

they act. Female agents, regardless of how they viewed themselves, needed to blend in with the local population and in doing so, had to act and dress their “part” in order to remain undetected by the German soldiers or Nazi sympathizers. This need to conform to the “norms” of their surroundings is described by Judith Butler as “performativity,” and better explained by Joan Tumblety, as the use of what society accepted as “feminine” and employing those characteristics to hide the true nature of their work, which society views as “masculine.” The female agents’ decisions to flirt or act “helpless” directly reflected their abilities to survey a given situation and determine their best course of action. Intelligence, not beauty, was their greatest weapon in the field. For example, women in the field took on many personas depending on their circumstances. If they were placed in high society circles as Pack and Granville were, seduction was often a tool used to obtain information from men who perhaps had a susceptibility to persuasion or seduction and held vital information needed by the SOE and OSS. However, those same techniques may not have worked for women like Hill, Szabo, or Wake who were running messages between Maquis groups across France. Obviously, evening gowns and make-up would have drawn the wrong kind of attention to these women.

While the socially accepted notion of “femininity” was certainly present in the everyday lives of these women, they were able to perform their clandestine duties “concealed under a mask of locally and historically specific femininity,” as Juliette Pattinson explains in her essay on the women of the SOE. How women were viewed by society was well established. The women agents knew they needed to work within these social constraints; however, they were

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241 For information on women who are depicted as temptresses see: Lovell, Cast No Shadow; Madeleine Masson, Christine: SOE Agent and Churchill’s Favourite Spy: A Search for Christine Granville, New Ed (Virago, 2005); Clare Mulley, The Spy Who Loved: The Secrets and Lives of Christine Granville, Britain’s First Female Special Agent of the Second World War (London: Macmillan, 2012).


243 Ibid., 137.
also expected to perform tasks that required the strength of men. Nancy Wake, Virginia Hall, Maria Gulovich, and Viollette Szabo’s stories offer examples of how women acted in the most “unfeminine” ways while in the field, yet the authors who wrote about them still overly sexualized them. These authors’ works unnecessarily characterized the agents’ duties as masculine or feminine, thus continuing the gendered representation of the agents as they had been conventionally defined in the 1940s. Labeling duties based on gender was yet another way the authors advanced the notion of keeping women in subservient roles to men several decades later.

In her essay, “Turning a Pretty Girl into a Killer,” Pattinson argues that the socially constructed ideas of femininity suggest that women cannot be killers. Society wants to depict women as weak and fragile beings who are responsible for giving life and therefore would not, or could not, take a life no matter what the circumstances. War, according to this gendered paradigm, is masculine in its very nature, and women just do not possess the ability to do what it takes to win in battle.244 Male aggression, however, was encouraged by the socially accepted correlation of guns and masculinity and continued to bolster the idea that women did not belong on the frontlines of battle. The SOE and the OSS ultimately threw out these notions by training women for combat and weapons usage. Once trained, women were placed in the field among other male agents and male resistances fighters where they had to work harder to gain acceptance and respect. Even after female agents had obtained some respect from the men, they were still not seen as equals. No matter how accomplished these women became in the field, the prevailing social ideas of a woman remained on some level. Nancy Wake was described by one of the men she worked with as “the most feminine women [he had] ever met in [his] life, but in

battle she’s worth ten men,” suggesting that Wake’s abilities were extraordinary because she was a woman. It would seem that, according to society, women could not be both strong and beautiful but Wake and the other women proved otherwise. They used weapons and killed many enemy soldiers as well as destroyed bridges and railways to limit German advancement, transportation and supplies. So, the question remains: why do the authors of books on females in the SOE and the OSS continue to draw attention to their attractiveness and sexuality?

The authors, especially those who have published works within the last twenty-five years, must be aware, at least on some level, that their characterization of female agents is driven by the social construction of femininity and masculinity that has embedded itself into their own ideas of these women. They must also be aware, since the feminist movement began many years before their books were published and drew attention to how women have been represented in history, that referencing the appearance and sexuality of female agents detracts from the intellectual abilities and the bravery of these women, as those are socially constructed traits that are usually attributed to men. To use adjectives such as “vivacious,” “beautiful,” or “glamour girls” to describe the women agents creates a distraction for the reader because the focus is taken away from the activities being performed by the women and places it on their pretty faces, what they were wearing or with whom they were intimately involved. What purpose does it serve the reader to know that an agent was “five feet seven…slender, with high cheekbones, and a warm smile,” if only to follow the description with “that belied her toughness and leadership abilities”? Was it only possible to be tough and a fine leader if the person was short, stocky, and gruff? This is exactly what the existing historiography suggests with the way women are handled in their texts. By playing on the cultural assumptions held by their readers—that a petite

245 Ibid., 24.
and pretty girl could not be tough secret agents—the authors were suggesting a contrast existed between the appearances and the abilities of the female agents. Using such literary strategies, the authors force their readers into complicity with their discourse, again subjugating the women.

If consideration is given to the possibility that the authors are unaware that their portrayal of these women is socially constructed, or if it is argued that contemporary rhetoric accounts for the language they use, it begs the question of why do they not attribute the same type of descriptive language when discussing male agents or authority figures? This researcher found only one source, the biography on Amy Thorpe Pack, which applied equal treatment of its characters. In *Cast No Shadow*, both Pack and the men she became involved with were described with sexualized adjectives like “handsome,” “dazzling,” “elegant,” and “good-looking.” All other sources stay within the constraints of social convention and, at best, mention height, weight or age when introducing a new male character. By contrast, when introducing new females, how attractive she was, what she was wearing, or some other beauty identifier is always present. A particularly interesting similarity can be found in the works written by both male and female authors.

Elizabeth McIntosh, for example, both worked for the OSS and authored several works about the subject of women in the organization, and her descriptions of male and female agents serve as evidence that more attention is placed on the female agents’ appearance, sexuality and romantic lives than on the male agents. In *Sisterhood of Spies*, McIntosh repeatedly uses words like “vivacious,” “sensuous,” and “debonair,” to describe the agents of the OSS. Throughout the book, there are few places where these adjectives add to the recounting of the female agents’ missions abroad. The fact that women authors focused on sexuality and beauty just as often as the male authors suggests that this is not a “male chauvinist” act. Instead, it supports the
argument that oversexualizing women comes from being socially constructed to label women as weaker, sex-crazed, and not intelligent enough to be successful without using their bodies to seduce the men around them. Socially constructed ideas instilled in the authors’ subconscious do not excuse the women writers from perpetuating the stereotypes that the agents had to be sexy to be successful. The attractiveness of these women had as much to do with their self-confidence and self-assuredness as it did with the conventional definitions of beauty. Men being “drawn to” these women went beyond the superficial level, and many men grew to admire the women’s personal strength and bravery.

Women, whether working as secretaries or secret agents, faced discrimination from their male and female peers when they entered the workforce at the beginning of the Second World War. The histories written about these women offer insights into the experiences they had working in factories and the military in the 1940s. For some women, those who were part of the secret organizations of the SOE and the OSS, the challenges they faced were much more dangerous and required skills and bravery that many men did not possess. The existing literature that seeks to retell the stories of the women spies of the SOE and the OSS are informative, but because of their focus on the sexuality and physical beauty of the agents, many of their accomplishments of the female agents were overshadowed.

This study serves as a small collection of gender-neutral accounts of nine women who served their nations and risked their lives for the cause of freedom. Its purpose is to draw attention to the ways in which women are portrayed in history as overly sexual beings who were unable to fulfill their duties without seducing as many men as they could along the way. It also proposes that the way society dictates what is feminine or masculine has caused the authors to continue writing about female spies as if their performance in the field was remarkable because
they were women and not because they were remarkable agents. Many of the featured women
did use their sexuality while in the field, but they did so because they knew it was necessary for
the success of their mission and sometimes for their survival. The intellect and the bravery of the
women in the SOE and the OSS should be the focus of the literature, not how pretty they were by
conventional and superficial standards of beauty. Focusing on physical beauty detracts from
how significant the efforts of these women were to the war. Men were not subjected to the same
type of critiques by these authors. For men, it was assumed that war was second nature, but
women had just as much to lose during WWII and chose to join the fight.

It is this researcher’s hope that future histories of the women who belonged to the SOE
and the OSS will feature more stories about their missions and less about whom they shared their
beds with. Ideally, the authors will present histories that deconstruct the ideas of gender roles
and exclude constructed identities of feminine and masculine agents. The results would offer a
clear picture of the missions these agents were sent on and illustrate how effective the agents
were in the overall effort to prevent the Nazis from conquering Europe. This study could serve
as that first step toward a representation of female agents that excludes any reference to physical
beauty or the oversexualization of the women.
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