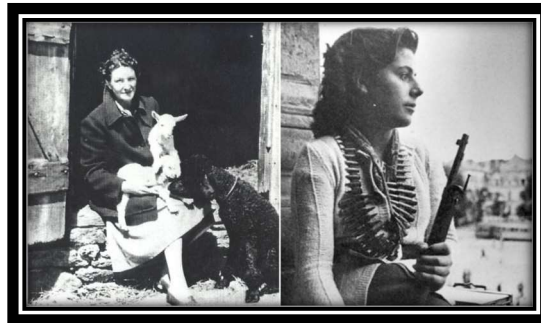


VIRGINIA HALL
THE ONE LEGGED SPY WHO TORMENTED THE NAZI'S
AND BECAME THE MOST DECORATED FEMALE SPY IN US HISTORY



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VIRGINIA HALL
(1906-1982)

THE MOST DANGEROUS SPY OF ALL

SUGGESTED VIDEO

THE LIMPING LADY – THE INCREDIBLE LEADERSHIP OF VIRGINIA HALL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RKU-qL-r4I>

Virginia Hall was born into a privileged family in Baltimore in 1906. During WWII, she kept the Gestapo at bay and coordinated both Jedburgh teams and Resistance cells behind enemy lines in France, knowing that her life could end at any moment.

If the Gestapo had broken into where she was working, it was highly unlikely that Hall could have gotten away - she had a wooden leg.

Hall didn't have to do this type of work. At the time she was born, not much was expected from upper-class women. They might go into the teaching of some kind or organize local charities. Perhaps, if she were a loner, she might become a poet or locally known artist.

Of course, there were exceptions to this informal rule, the biggest one being the First Lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, who came from a similar background.



The OSS of World War II forged a French identification certificate for "Marcelle Montagne," an alias of spy Virginia Hall

Virginia Hall was another of those exceptions. Extraordinarily smart, she attended the prestigious women's colleges of Radcliffe and Barnard where she studied French, Italian, and German. She was quite fluent in French and more than proficient in the others.

She asked her parents to send her to Europe to finish her studies in 1930 and she traveled through France, Austria, and Germany. She then secured a job in Warsaw at the American Embassy in 1931.

The exposure she got to the languages and culture, and the experience of working in governmental and bureaucratic circles would pay off during the war.



Radcliffe class in radio science, 1922

Unfortunately for Virginia, during a visit to Turkey in 1932, she had a hunting accident. She shot herself in the left leg, and it had to be amputated from the knee down. She was given a wooden leg which she used for the rest of her life.

Of course, there had to be times when she was shaken and depressed by the loss of her leg, but if she was, it rarely showed. She nicknamed her wooden leg "Cuthbert."

Unfortunately, the injury made an advanced career in the diplomatic corps impossibility at the time, and she resigned from the State Department in 1939.

She came back home for a brief period to continue her studies, but the coming of the war brought out her humanitarian spirit and love for France. She volunteered for the Ambulance Service of the Red Cross and was in France during the German invasion.

When France surrendered, Hall was in Vichy-controlled territory, and that made it easier for her to get to England, where she volunteered for a new force: the Special Operations Executive ("SOE"). Churchill had instigated the SOE to "Set Europe Ablaze" with sabotage, assassination, and other acts of resistance and irregular warfare.

In the summer of 1941, after her training, Hall was sent back to Vichy France where her language skills and knowledge of the country would come in useful. She was to help coordinate the activities of the Resistance in Vichy with that of the Resistance in German-occupied France.



Kofferset 3 MK II portable radio transceiver for the communication between continental resistance movements and the London-based Bureau Bijzondere Opdrachten (a Special Forces unit of the Dutch exile government), during WWII.

Although she could speak French very well, America was a neutral country at the time, so it was easier and more convenient for Hall to take on the cover of a correspondent for the New York Post. This allowed her more travel than normal people and gave her access to people of power and influence.

She gained contacts and knowledge and was able to get a full sense of what was going on in the country. Of course, all of this she reported back to England, where it was added to the growing amount of intelligence being gathered to use against the Nazis and their collaborators.

Though America was officially at war with Vichy after the Pearl Harbor attacks, most Americans in the territory went unmolested. However, in November 1942, the Germans occupied Vichy as well. This caused Hall to make her way to Spain.



French prisoners of war are marched off under German guard.

By this time, the Gestapo, which had been working in Vichy, had an inkling that Hall was much more than a correspondent and wanted to “talk” to her. Both the Germans and the Vichy French had nicknamed her “The Lady who limps,” and were on her trail. She barely made it to Spain ahead of them.

On her way out of France, she sent a signal to the SOE telling them that she hoped “Cuthbert” wouldn’t hinder her escape. The SOE handlers in London didn’t know about “Cuthbert” and assumed it was a code name they had overlooked. It was war, so the SOE returned the message: “If Cuthbert troublesome - eliminate him.”

Hall worked for the SOE in Madrid for a time and returned to England in July 1943.

When France fell under the Nazi boot in June 1940, Great Britain stood alone against the enemy. Fearing a similar fate for his country, Winston Churchill created the Special Operations Executive (SOE), an organization specializing in irregular warfare against German forces in occupied countries.

By the spring of 1944, American forces were massing in England for Overlord, and Hall transferred to the Office of Strategic Services (“OSS”), the forerunner of the CIA. Her experience made her quite valuable to the nascent American organization, and they sent her to France to work behind enemy lines in preparation for the invasion.

Unlike many other OSS agents, Hall was not parachuted in — parachuting with one leg was not a good idea. Instead, she was dropped off by a British Motor Torpedo Boat on the coast of Brittany in the dead of night - alone.



MTBs returning from an anti-E-boat patrol, June 1944

Hall made her way to central France under the identity of “Marcelle Montagne.” Her code name was “Diane.”

During the run-up to D-Day and afterward, Hall mapped drop zones for the famous “Jedburgh” teams made up of three men to work behind enemy lines and create havoc as well as gather intelligence and coordinate the Resistance with Allied forces.

The teams were made up of one of each of the OSS, SOE, and French Underground. Hall had ties to them all, making her extremely valuable and effective.



Jedburgh in front of a B-24 Liberator before departure

She continued to operate from central France after the invasion, helping to train three battalions of Resistance fighters in irregular warfare and reporting on German movements. This she continued until the front lines caught up with her in the fall of 1944.

In 1945, she was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General William Donovan, the only one awarded to a civilian woman during the war.



Virginia Hall of Special Operations Branch receiving the Distinguished Service Cross from General Donovan, September 1945.

Many, including President Truman, wanted the award ceremony to be public, but Hall demurred, saying she was still working for the OSS and did not want her face in the public eye. She was later made an Honorary Member of the British Empire (“MBE”).

Hall continued working in intelligence until 1966. She and her husband, also a former OSS member, worked for the CIA in France, gathering information on events in that country. She passed away in 1982.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON VIRGINIA HALL SEE BELOW

VIRGINIA HALL: THE COURAGE AND DARING OF “THE LIMPING LADY”

The Central Intelligence Agency, in celebration of both the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and National Disability Employment Awareness Month, honored historical Agency figures who served with distinction and a disability, leaving a lasting impact on the Agency and in American History

GO TO:

<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2015-featured-story-archive/virginia-hall-the-courage-and-daring-of-the-limping-lady.html>



Virginia Hall



The Movie “A Call to Spy” about Virginia Hall’s life is currently available on Netflix

[SEE THE TRAILER AT:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qpXI6n6Ea0)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qpXI6n6Ea0>

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