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The Wolves At The Door: The True Story Of America's Greatest Female Spy



Synopsis

"Judith Pearson does a remarkable job of bringing one of America's greatest spies back to life. I highly recommend this story of derring-do and white knuckles suspense." —Patrick O'Donnell, Combat Historian and Author of *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs*

The remarkable story of one of WWII's greatest spies. Virginia Hall left her comfortable Baltimore roots in 1931 to follow a dream of becoming a Foreign Service Officer. After watching Hitler roll over Poland and France, she enlisted to work for the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), a secret espionage and sabotage organization. She was soon deployed to occupied France where, if captured, imprisonment and torture at the hands of the Gestapo was all but assured. Against such an ominous backdrop, Hall managed to locate drop zones for money and weapons, helped escaped POWs and downed Allied airmen flee to England, and secured safe houses for agents. And she did it all on one leg: Virginia Hall had lost her left leg before the war in a hunting accident. Soon, wanted posters appeared throughout France, offering a reward for her capture. By winter of 1942, Hall had to flee France via the only route possible: a hike on foot through the frozen Pyr  nes Mountains into neutral Spain. Upon her return to England, the American espionage organization, the Office of Special Services, recruited her and sent her back to France disguised as an old peasant woman. While there, she was responsible for killing 150 German soldiers and capturing 500 others. Sabotaging communications and transportation links and directing resistance activities, her work helped change the course of the war. This is the true story of Virginia Hall. "Riveting..." —Publishers Weekly

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Customer Reviews

Virginia Hall was a friend and colleague of mine in 1950-51, when we both worked for the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE), the parent organization of Radio Free Europe, on the third floor of the Empire State Building in NYC. While we knew that she had worked with the O.S.S. during World War II, we never knew the nature of her work in sabotaging the Nazi war effort, nor the extraordinarily dangerous nature of this work. Virginia, although perfectly sociable, was secretive about her private life. During the time she was working for NCFE, she married Paul Golliot, her French war time colleague, and never even told us anything about it. The extraordinary thing about Ms. Judith Pearson's book is that, without ever having met her or her husband, she is able to bring Virginia so completely back to life for those of us who knew her 55+ years ago! You can hear Virginia talking and even thinking in Pearson's pages. I have given this remarkable work a rating of "4", because of some sloppy editing which could easily have been avoided. There are allusions in what is supposed to be French or Spanish which in fact are neither in French nor Spanish!--and there are also some inaccuracies in the recounting of the military operations on the Western front between D- and VE-Days. It is high time our children's and grandchildren's generations knew something about what these heroic fighters like Virginia Hall did for all of us during that long struggle. John Foster Leich

Virginia Hall was a Baltimore-born American Foreign Service officer in Lyon, France, when Hitler invaded in 1940. She quickly made the decision to use her familiarity with the region and contacts she had made as an espionage agent for the Allied forces. She worked effectively in coordinating and directing sabotage, assassinations, and other activities until the Nazis took over the southern part of France which they had allowed to remain nominally independent under Petain. After fleeing Lyon to Spain, Hall was brought to London by the British and American intelligence services she had been working with. They had come to prize her abilities in operating undetected, working with the French Resistance, and causing damage to the German war machine in France. Recognizing

that she would be a valuable agent working in France in the time leading up to D-Day, she was sent back into France. After the War, Hall received high awards for her incomparable espionage work from the British and American governments. Pearson--author of other works on personal stories from World War II--tells Hall's daring story in a quick-paced style occasionally going into historical background. An engaging commemoration for this little-known, but major World War II Allied spy.

In Leo Marks excellent book 'Between Silk and Cyanide' he says that the average life of a radio operator in the resistance in France was six weeks. Virginia Hall was in France on two tours for a lot more than six weeks. She was the only female in the war to receive the Distinguished Service Cross. Born in 1906, she was not the beautiful young thing that gets featured so often in movies. In fact she even had a wooden leg and became known to the Germans as the 'Lady with the Limp.' She survived the war and worked for the CIA until the mandatory retirement age of sixty. This book is her story, well told by Ms. Pearson who has written a number of other books, mostly on POWs. She has done a superb job, able to capture the tone of the times while making Miss Hall's story stand out as one of great courage and accomplishment.

All the reviewers are correct about Virginia Hall being an extraordinary person. No debate here. My only rather large disappointment with the book has to do with the author's writing style. It resembles the style of pulp romance novels on sale at your local supermarket. For me, at least, this gets in the way of completely enjoying the book. I also got the impression that the author projected what she thought Hall's feelings were about incidents so incidental it didn't seem possible anyone would know. Credibility. Here's an example of the author's style from page 27: "The tail end of spring greeted Virginia on her arrival in Paris. As May slid into June, and the Parisian summer began, solace washed over her. The quintessential French conversations, bouquinistes selling books and postcards at stands along the seine, throaty French tunes pouring out of cabaret doors...etc, etc." It's painful for me, at least, to read prose like this on such an incredibly interesting life.

Kudos to the author, Judith Pearson. I almost always prefer first person accounts of those who lived through WWII. However, this book gripped me throughout the narrative. This would make a wonderful movie with Virginia Hall played by an actress of Cate Blanchett's caliber. Exhaustively researched and well written. Thank you Ms. Pearson, I'll be looking for your next book!

This is a very interesting and readable book. Though I remember World War II vividly and have read

about it ever since it ended, I had never heard of this remarkable lady. She makes a better model for younger women today than the current stars of movie and music fame. This is not the greatest literary work available, and it is certainly a one-sided view of the war, but it was informative and rather well documented. I plan to give it to my teenage granddaughter. She can use it as a book report and will enjoy the true story of an able, fascinating American woman.

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