



Sisterhood of Spies: The Women of the OSS

By Elizabeth P. McIntosh

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The daring missions of America's World War II intelligence agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), are the stuff of legend, yet the contributions made by the 4,000 women—including Julia Child and Marlene Dietrich—who served in the OSS are largely unheralded. To tell their fascinating stories, McIntosh, a veteran of sensitive OSS and CIA operations, draws on her own experiences and on interviews with more than 100 OSS women who served all over the world. Captured in rich detail are the riveting tales of clandestine spies, saboteurs, cryptographers, cartographers, analysts, and experts in propaganda, recruiting, and communications, along with the less visible but no less important drivers and secretaries. The book was first published in 1998 to great reviews.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Sisterhood of Spies is a real-life James Bond story, double-X chromosome-style. Here, though, the heroines aren't sex kittens in black spandex, but rather upper-crust women risking their lives in the service of a country at war. Elizabeth P. McIntosh was a reporter in Hawaii when the Office of Strategic Services (the C.I.A.'s precursor) recruited her to aid in its campaign of wartime disinformation. Fifty-five years later, she's taken it upon herself to tell the story of the women who served with her undercover--some of whom have also achieved aboveground celebrity, such as Marlene Dietrich and Julia Child. The narratives contained in *Sisterhood of Spies* couldn't be any more gripping if they were written as fiction: Nazi interrogation ordeals, daring escapes across mountain passes, expeditions behind enemy lines, even Mata Hari-style affairs. Ms. McIntosh's book is a fond ode to these women and a bravery that has remained unsung too long.

From Publishers Weekly

Within the ranks of America's intelligence community retirees, former agent McIntosh is a legend. A one-time war correspondent, the young McIntosh joined the fledgling Office of Strategic Services in 1943 and plunged gamely into her assigned task of running morale operations against the Japanese in Burma and China. She went on to become a longtime employee of the CIA. After WWII, she wrote a rollicking account of her wartime experiences in *Undercover Girl* (1947), now long out of print but still spoken of admiringly by fellow former agents. In this new memoir, McIntosh includes others in the "sisterhood of spies." Recording the exploits of an international cast, she underscores how women were grossly underused in the wartime spy agency, often being relegated to mainly secretarial duties. But McIntosh doesn't skimp on the adventures of female combatants, such as the remarkable Virginia Hall, aka "The Limping Lady" because of the gait produced by her wooden leg. Hall was so daring she was dubbed by the French Gestapo as "one of the most dangerous Allied agents in France." Another notable female spy was the intrepid Betty Lussier, who was instrumental in forming an extensive double-agent network in France. Amid the tales, interesting nuggets of spy craft emerge—for instance, that Morse code transmission is like handwriting, individualized to the extent that trained recipients instantly recognize a change in the sending "fist." This is an enthralling tribute to the largely unsung Mata Haris who worked undercover to help win the war, told with aplomb by one of their own. 25 photos, not seen by PW.
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From Library Journal

This appears to be the first historical overview of the women who worked for the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA. Individual women who were involved, including the author and Julia Child, have already written biographies detailing their OSS work, but this book is broader in scope. Each chapter outlines an individual woman or women in a particular department at the OSS. McIntosh clearly demonstrates the breadth of activities in which the women were involved, such as coding and decoding messages, creating disinformation, organizing resistance groups behind enemy lines, and analyzing research. The restrictions placed on women in the workplace are noted but not harshly stated. The rule against spouses being placed in the same theater of war is given as a factor in several divorces. In less-skilled hands the chapters would be choppy, but McIntosh provides excellent segues. Though written at a level that high school students can understand, this book will be useful to undergraduate and graduate students as well. For public and academic libraries. —Julie Still, Rutgers Univ. Lib., Camden, NJ
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ronald Fowler:

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