

MISS VIRGINIA HALL (Deceased)



*Virginia Hall receives the Distinguished Service Cross from General William Donovan, September 1945
(Photo Courtesy of CIA Museum)*

Virginia Hall was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on 6 April 1906. She was college-educated in both the US and Europe and had dreams of a career in Foreign Service. She served as a consular clerk in Poland, Turkey, Italy, and Estonia. While on a hunting trip in Turkey, an accidental gunshot led to the amputation of her left leg. For the rest of her life she would wear a wooden leg, the origin of her nickname "The Limping Lady." This injury barred her from her desired diplomatic career in Foreign Service and she resigned from the State Department in 1939.

At this point in her life, Hall's accomplishments begin to take on a hint of legend. Many stories of her exploits, some inaccurate, have been published, but not until key documents were declassified in the late 1980s could her true story be told.

When France declared war on Germany in 1939, Miss Hall was already in Paris and decided to enlist as a private in the French ambulance corps. After France surrendered, Hall made her way to London where she was debriefed at the US Embassy and offered a job as a code clerk in the US Defense Attaché Office. Bored with this desk job, she joined the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). She completed the intense agent training and became a SOE special agent in April 1941. During her first mission in occupied France, Hall posed as a reporter for the *New York Post* for 15 months while secretly organizing, funding, supplying, and arming the French resistance. She sent regular radio messages to London about German activities, organized acts of sabotage against German installations, and aided in rescuing political prisoners, prisoners of war, and downed Allied airmen. German intelligence considered Miss Hall "one of the most dangerous Allied agents in France" and increased their efforts to capture her. To ensure her safety, the SOE recalled her to London in mid-1943.

On 21 March 1944, however, Hall arrived back in France via boat (not by parachute with her wooden leg under her arm, as many accounts state). This time she was in the employ of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Known as Diane (one of her many code names), she embarked on her mission to send messages to London on the strength, movements, and activities of the

Germans in France as the Allies prepared for Operation Overlord. Miss Hall organized three French Forces of the Interior combat battalions which harassed enemy combat units. Working again with the French resistance, she also organized sabotage teams that destroyed German ammunition dumps, railroads, bridges, highways, and telephone lines and caused numerous German casualties. Following the liberation of France, Hall was selected for a dangerous mission in Austria, but the war ended before her team crossed the border.

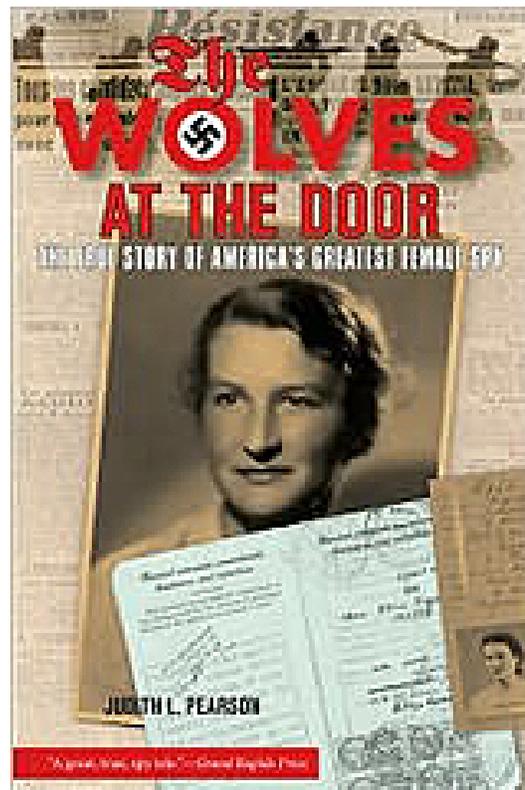
In September 1945, MG William Donovan, head of the OSS, personally awarded Miss Hall the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for “extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against the enemy.” She was the only female civilian to receive the DSC for her service during the war. After the war, she married Paul Goillot, a fellow OSS agent. She joined the Central Intelligence Group (later the CIA) in 1946 and worked there until her mandatory retirement at age 60 in 1966. Virginia Hall Goillot died on 14 July 1982 at the age of 76.

After her passing, Virginia Hall continued to be honored for her accomplishments. In 1988, she was inducted into the MI Corps Hall of Fame. The US Army Intelligence Center honored her further by naming a dining facility after her in 1994. In 2006, the British ambassador presented her niece, Lorna Catling, with a Royal Warrant giving Virginia Hall membership in the Order of the British Empire. The award had been signed by King George VI in 1943, but Hall refused to accept it because it might have blown her cover. In November 2013, a bill was introduced to Congress “to award the Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the members of the OSS in recognition of their superior service and major contributions during World War II.” Hall was specifically mentioned in the bill.

For further reading, see Judith L. Pearson’s *The Wolves at the Door: The True Story of America’s Greatest Female Spy*.



Unveiled at a ceremony in Washington honoring Virginia Hall, this portrait was added to the CIA’s Fine Arts Collection. Painted by artist Jeff Bass, it shows her transmitting messages from occupied France using her suitcase radio. The painting was underwritten by a donation from attorney Robert Guggenime. (Photo property of Jeff Bass)



***The Wolves at the Door: The True Story of America's Greatest Female Spy* (2006)
by Judith Pearson has been optioned for an upcoming motion picture.**