

Most Wanted: The Limping Lady

The Story of America's Most Heroic Female Spy

SECURITY LEVEL: **TOP SECRET**

Dispatch: **EVACUATE FRANCE**

Date: **November 1942**

Location: **France**



CIA News & Information

Virginia Hall had to clear out quickly. Germany had suddenly invaded all of France. The Special Operations Executive (SOE) ordered all its spies in France to flee. Virginia was one of a group of spies that needed to leave leave France in a hurry. Nazi Germany now controlled all of France's borders, which meant that it was impossible to leave France by the regular routes. If they were discovered, the spies would be executed. Virginia was in the most danger. She was on Germany's most-wanted list. She was known as "The Limping Lady."

The safest way out of France was very dangerous. They had to climb over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. It was wintertime and very cold. The SOE hired a guide to lead its group of spies. The guide was not pleased that one of them was a

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woman. Virginia decided not to tell him about her leg. It had been amputated below the knee after she was injured in a hunting accident. The guide surely noticed her limp. It was hard not to limp when you used an 8-pound wooden leg.

Virginia finally got to Spain. But she didn't have a passport with her. She was held in a facility that was kind of like a jail. It took her several weeks to smuggle out a letter for help.

This harrowing escape was just one of Virginia's many adventures as a spy...

Virginia grew up in Baltimore, MD. She wanted to work in the U.S. Foreign Service, but she could not get a job because of her leg. When World War II broke out, she went to England to join the war effort. She spoke several languages including French and German. America hadn't joined the war yet. This meant that Virginia could travel around Europe easily because she was an American. The SOE sent her to Lyon, France to spy on Germans for them. She had a cover, or fake identity. She was posing as a journalist.

Virginia was an expert in radio communications. Every SOE spy that entered France was first sent to Virginia. She coordinated the spies' movements and sent messages from them via radio. Her radio transmissions helped save hundreds of lives.

After her release, Virginia worked for the SOE in Spain and then in England. In 1944, she returned to the United States and joined the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Special Operations Branch.

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The OSS sent her back to German-occupied France as a spy. She had a new cover. This time she was disguised as a fat old lady, with white hair, who took care of cows on a farm. Virginia had to stay in character all the time. The Germans never suspected her to be a spy. She would see officers in the farmer's market. She would listen to their conversations and report this information back to the OSS.

Virginia played an important role in defeating the Germans. She helped the French Resistance fighters fight against the Nazis and even trained three battalions of Resistance fighters herself. She found safe houses for other spies. She sent maps showing where the British could drop supplies and troops safely inside France. She kept up her intelligence reports until the end of the war without getting caught, even though she was one of Germany's most wanted.

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When World War II ended, General Donovan presented Virginia with a special award. It was the Distinguished Service Cross.

Virginia loved her job and her country. She continued working in intelligence, eventually becoming part of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). She worked there until she retired in 1966 and moved to a farm in Maryland. She died at age 76 in 1982.



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The safest way out of France was also one of the most dangerous. Virginia and the other spies had to escape by climbing over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. It was wintertime and very cold in the mountains. The SOE hired a guide to lead its spies through the mountains. He was not pleased to find out that one of them was a woman. Virginia decided not to tell him that her left leg had been amputated below the knee after she was injured in a hunting accident. The

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