

When people mention heroes in Special Operations history, most can recall names such as Mosby, Bank, McClure, Simons, Yarborough, etc. There are also women whose exploits rival their male counterparts. Their stories are all the more remarkable when considering that until recently women have not be authorized to participate in the combat arms arena of the U.S. Army. With these panels, we wish to recognize and spotlight the brave women who are not as well known, but yet no less important to our history.

CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

Virginia Hall

When the war broke out in Europe, Virginia Hall, the daughter of a wealthy family in Baltimore, Maryland, wanted to get in the action. When turned down by the United States Foreign Service because she was an amputee, losing her left leg in a hunting accident, she joined the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and became the first female operative sent into France. Her code name was Diane and her cover story was she was a stringer for the New York Post. For two years, "the lady with a limp," working in the Lyons area, wrecked havoc with the German occupation force, establishing resistance networks, setting up landing zones and helping downed airmen and escaped POWs out of the country. The Gestapo considered her "the most dangerous of all Allied spies," unsuccessfully trying to capture and kill her. They distributed "wanted" posters with a sketch of her throughout Vichy France, but she continually eluded capture.

When the U.S. entered the war and landed in North Africa, Hall fled France, traveling hundreds of miles from Lyons across the Pyrenees mountains to Spain by foot, a difficult task for anyone, but especially for a woman with an artificial leg she nicknamed "Cuthbert." After transmitting a message to SOE in London that she was experiencing trouble with "Cuthbert," they instructed, "If Cuthbert is giving you difficulty, have him eliminated." Her escape was successful, but she was immediately thrown into Figueres Prison in Spain after it was discovered she had no papers. She remained in jail for six weeks until a letter could be smuggled to the American consul in Barcelona, alerting them to her situation. She was released and continued to work for SOE in Madrid, this time undercover as a correspondent for the Chicago Times, but felt useless and returned to London. "I am living pleasantly and wasting time. It isn't worthwhile and after all, my neck is my own. If I am willing to get a crick in it, I think that's my prerogative."

She returned to London and was in training as a wireless radio operator for SOE. When she learned of the newly formed Office of Strategic Services (OSS), she promptly volunteered. She returned to the occupied Haute-Loire region of central France disguised as an elderly milkmaid with dyed grey hair and full skirts which added weight to her frame and masked her walk. Working as a radio operator with two other OSS officers, she established, recruited and trained three battalions of resistance fighters, coordinated parachute drops of arms and supplies, reported German troop movements to London, and, after D-Day, facilitated several sabotage missions against retreating Germans. In her final report to OSS headquarters, she reported that her team had destroyed four bridges, derailed freight trains, severed a key rail line in multiple places and downed telephone lines. She and her team were also credited with killing some 150 Germans and capturing 500 more.

Soon after the war ended, MG William "Wild Bill" Donovan presented Hall with the Distinguished Service Cross in a small ceremony attended only by her mother.



CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

Lieutenant Jeanette Guyot

Jeanette Guyot was a Lieutenant in the French Intelligence Bureau Central de Renseignements and d'Action (BCRA) who served with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) as part of the OSSEX/SUSSEX network. The 51 teams were composed of two officers, an observer and a wireless radio operator, and were infiltrated into the area north of the Loire River in France from January to September 1944. Their mission was to provide the Allies, during and after D-Day, firm information on the German army, its order of battle, its troop movements, in particular those of the "Panzer" divisions to include supply depots of materials and ammunition. In addition, intelligence was gathered on the location of the installation and launch pads of V1 and V2 Flying Bombs. From the agent's reports, the Allied Headquarters could then make informed decisions, intervening effectively and in particular, accurately effecting bombardment of convoys, concentrations of troops and materials. LT Guyot's role was initially as the wireless operator; however, after being inserted into her sector, she soon became the fulcrum of her operation, effectively managing her entire district. Her service earned her the Distinguished Service Cross.

"The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Lieutenant Jeannette Guyot, French Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy from 8 February 1944 to 26 August 1944. Lieutenant Guyot was parachuted, in civilian clothes, into enemy-occupied France as a member of the "Pathfinder" mission, charged with finding parachuting fields, reception committees, safe houses, and local informants for all the "Sussex" points. As the principal liaison agent of the mission, she travelled widely over the northern France and contacted a large number of agents. Lieutenant Guyot travelled by various methods of conveyance with luggage, which, if it had been opened by the Gestapo, would have resulted in her torture and death. Because of her great courage and initiative, she undertook the most dangerous assignments, such as reporting on Gestapo activities and verifying reports of the arrest or execution of any of the "Sussex" agents. Lieutenant Guyot's work and conduct were beyond all praise. Lieutenant Guyot's outstanding accomplishments, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the Allied Nations."



CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

Corporal Barbara Lauwers Podoski

Barbara Lauwers joined the U.S. Army in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1943 and was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Morale Operations (MO).



Working from a base in Italy, Corporal Lauwers, originally from the Balkans, was fluent in five languages and conceived some of the most creative propaganda of WWII including distributing printed toilet paper that showed images of Hitler with messages to stop fighting for the Fascists. Her most significant contribution came in July 1944 when, as one of the architects of Operation Sauerkraut, Corporal Lauwers designed a complete campaign to turn disgruntled Nazi POWs into successful OSS agents. After interrogating German prisoners, she assessed their willingness to be recruited. Most prisoners confessed homesickness and how fearful they were that their girlfriends or wives were unfaithful or wouldn't be waiting for them when the war ended. She translated this yearning and fear into the Lonely Hearts Club campaign. Her newly minted recruits would return to enemy lines with not only misinformation and rumors of an imminent German surrender, but also with leaflets and calling cards from the Lonely Hearts Club which they placed around German camps. The leaflets, convincingly penned by Corporal Lauwers, invited German soldiers to meet up with German women for casual relations, suggesting the women - wives, girlfriends, daughters - felt it a small price to pay if it boosted morale. Soldiers were instructed to look in windows or on tables in cafes, taverns and restaurants for small cards pruned with hearts.



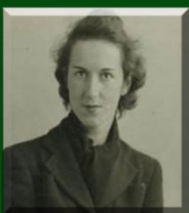
She was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Meritorious Service for her successful leaflet and radio broadcast campaign that targeted the 2,000 Czech and Slovak fighters fighting for the Germans in northern Italy near the Balkans. Over 600 of them quietly deserted and joined Allied forces.

After Mrs. Lauwers returned to the United States, she joined the Voice of America, adding her talents to inform and influence audiences entrapped behind the Iron Curtain. She later worked at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. before joining the Library of Congress as a research analyst. She retired in 1968 after 20 years. She, and her second husband, Joseph Junosza Podoski, returned to Austria to visit, only to extend their stay nine years while they worked for an international refugee organization.

Barbara Lauwers Podoski died on 16 August 2009 at the age of 95.

CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

Monuments Women



Anne Popham
(Great Britain)



Dorothy G.S. Skelton
(U.S.)



Capt. Edith A. Standen
(U.S.)



The recent movie “The Monuments Men” recounted the exploits of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives teams of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs/Military Government. Initially composed of 30 men who were largely civilian art experts “drafted” for the war effort, the MFAA crisscrossed Europe chasing after fabled works from great museums, gold and silver heirlooms from Holocaust victims and even brass and iron bells from ancient church towers. They usually were alone and under fire, with little logistical support or supervision. Among the masterpieces they rescued were the Ghent Altarpiece (1432), the Madonna of Bruges by Michelangelo (1504) and Vermeer’s “The Astronomer” (1668), stolen with the intention of adding it to a colossal museum envisioned by Hitler.

Less heralded have been the contributions of few dozen women who, like the men, were dedicated scholars and, at times, played a pivotal in helping rescue Europe’s art during the war and long after the German surrender. Although not all were Americans, the members of the MFAA worked for the U.S. Army. Captain Rose Valland, whose role is depicted briefly by Cate Blanchett in the film, was a French Resistance operative who spied on the Nazis and showed herself able to shoot and drink with the boys. Captain Edith A. Standen, a captain in the Women’s Army Corps, went on to a career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After the war, the Monuments Women were instrumental in the return of artwork to museums, churches and, in some cases, families.

Anne Olivier Popham Bell, of Sussex, England, a 97-year-old Virginia Woolf scholar who handled logistics for the team in Germany is the only female member of the MFAA still living. In a telephone interview, she spoke of the “enormous amounts of damaged works to be cared for,” among them thousands of medieval church bells seized by the Nazis to be melted into armaments.

Flora Bovio (US)
Mrs. Barbara H. Bowie (Great Britain)
Lt. Julianna Bumbar (U.S.)
Margaret Callon (Spain)
Celia Dignam, (Austria)
Ardelia R. Hall (U.S.)
Eleanor S Holland (U.S.)
Lucy Hutchinson (Austria)
Pauline Jacka, (Austria)
T/5 Elizabeth A. McGinn (U.S.)
Madame Wolff (U.S.)

Anne Popham (Great Britain)
T/5 Selena Sampson (U.S.)
Dorothy G. Shepherd (U.S.)
Dorothy G.S. Skelton (U.S.)
Capt. Edith A. Standen (U.S.)
Barbara Stroell (Austria)
Katharine W. W. Taylor (U.S.)
Evelyn Tucker (U.S.)
CPT Rose Valland (France)
Althea Westland (Great Britain)

CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

LTC Martha “COL Maggie” Raye



Martha Raye was born Margaret Reed in Butte, Montana to a vaudeville family. Beginning in World War II, Raye, a successful Hollywood actress, began visiting the troops no matter where they were located. When the Vietnam War broke out, she was 49, but over the next eight years, "COL Maggie" visited more camps and installations than any other entertainer. During her visits to remote Special Forces camps, she toured without an entourage and would linger until she felt everyone could see her. When she returned to the U.S., she carried bags of letters and messages for family members, most she delivered personally when she performed at different local dinner theaters.



In Vietnam, she did more than just entertain. Arriving in Soc Trang at the beginning of a major firefight in 1965, she immediately joined the medical staff at the field dispensary and worked for 13 straight hours. The next morning, she resumed her post, working for another 36 hour shift. General William C. Westmoreland awarded "Col Maggie," the Distinguished Service Medal, praising her "the grandest trooper of them all." During a fire fight at a Special Forces launch site, she assisted the SF medics with the wounded. Shortly after, Special Forces afforded her the Green Beret which she wore the rest of her life.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson frocked her a LTC in the US Armed Forces.



To help the SF men returning stateside, she built a "Team House" onto her redwood frame house in Bel Aire, California. Price of admission was a group coin. Decorated with her various plaques and memorabilia, the room served as a "safe house." The refrigerator was always stocked with beer and there was always a pot of beans was on the stove.

She died 19 October 1994 and is buried at the Fort Bragg Federal Cemetery (plot 780B/Row 28 - middle of the row).

CELEBRATE
Women in Special Operations

Cultural Support Teams



Started in 2011, the Cultural Support Teams (CST) were developed to fill a need and requirement for direct action assets, or surgical strike teams. The Ranger Regiment needed females on the battlefield to search women and children when they went into the objective. The other side, the special warfare side, the village stability operations, Special Forces groups and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command needed females to interact with the female populace. Their primary task was to engage the female population in an objective area when such contact may be deemed culturally inappropriate if performed by a male servicemember. CSTs directly supported activities ranging from medical civic-action programs, searches and seizures, humanitarian assistance and civil-military operations.

During its short existence, two CST officers, 1st Lt. Ashley White (Stumpf) and 1st Lt. Jennifer M. Moreno were killed in action. Stumpf, a member of the North Carolina National Guard, Goldsboro, N.C. , was commissioned in the U.S. Army as a Medical Service Corps Officer after graduating from Kent State in 2009. She volunteered for and completed the CST training before being assigned to Afghanistan. Moreno was commissioned in the U.S. Army as a Nurse Corps Officer who was then assigned to Madigan Army Medical Center, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, where she served as a Clinical Staff Nurse on a medical surgical unit. After completing CST training, she was assigned with the 75th Rangers.

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