

Sonia Purnell. *A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II*. New York: Penguin, 2019. Pp. 312. Hardcover. \$28.00.

Sonia Purnell, a biographer and journalist for the *Daily Mail* and *The Sunday Times*, investigates the espionage involvement of private Virginia Hall during the German occupation of France during World War II. Hall searched for a way to join the cause and found it in Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE). Purnell's book sheds light on some not well-known history of American women's involvement in War World II and their contribution to the gender revolution.

Purnell argues that women had a much more significant role in World War II than the public believes. Purnell highlights the women of World War II and their determination to help their country, evident in the life of Virginia Hall. Women were remarkably united, most notably in the circuit of women informants that Hall set up. Homemakers, factory workers, and prostitutes who were thought of as not crucial to the war effort turn into essential participants. These women were determined, organized, and vital during the war.

This biography of Virginia Hall emphasizes her involvement in World War II. Hall was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1906, attended George Washington University and continued her studies abroad in Europe. While touring the continent, she managed to get a job at the American Embassy as a service office clerk in Poland. The first adversity she overcame was losing her leg in a hunting accident while visiting Turkey. Hall continued working as a clerk in various European cities, eventually ending up in France in 1940. She first joined the war effort as an ambulance driver for the French military. By 1941 Hall Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) where she became a master of disguise and highly efficient at close combat. Her new skills allowed Hall to move from place to place in Lyon, France unnoticed in order to gather intelligence from stationed German troops. Hall eventually set up a circuit of informants composed of housewives and prostitutes who obtained information from German soldiers. By 1943 Hall managed to build a reputation amongst her superiors, and the Germans. Her status grew to that of a folklore character,

even her prosthetic leg gained a reputation. Germans code-named her "The Limping Lady of Lyon." Eventually, Hall was let go of the SOE for her safety. She then joined the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The book ends with Hall continuing a life of service in the CIA after the war.

This book is important because it shows that women's involvement during WWII became pivotal to allied victory. Purnell uncovers and shares another facet of women's involvement in this war. For anyone interested in the history of the Second World War and specifically women's history, this book is a must-read. Although Purnell is not a trained historian, she relies on thorough archival research, both from the U.S. and Europe.

A Woman of No Importance does an excellent job showing the importance of women during World War II. Showing how gender roles can be changed is important today more than ever. The world is seeing a new wave of women's empowerment and feminism. This book is sure to grab the attention of many and inspire more.

Jair Neftali Haro