

Book of the Week

***The Secret Stealers* by Jean Healey**

Book Review by Sherrie Welch

The Secret Stealers is a fictional account based on the factual history of the formation and early intelligence gathering operations of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II spearheaded by General William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt. The OSS was the precursor to the current Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

This story is centered around the experiences of Anna Cavanaugh, a young recently widowed daughter of a wealthy family, a Radcliffe graduate who did postgraduate work in Paris at the elite Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques before returning to the US to teach high school French. She is fluent in French and German and is personally invited by General Donovan, a longtime close friend of Anna's father, to join his growing organization to fill the demanding position of his assistant. Looking for a new direction for her life and harboring a dream of returning to the life and friends she had made in Paris before the war, Anna accepted the challenge.

For her first field assignment, Anna volunteered to act as a courier of secret military codebooks, (stolen by a convicted safecracker working for the OSS) from the Vichy French embassy in Washington, DC to be copied and returned before the theft could be discovered. The Allies were recruiting more and more women to act as undercover agents in occupied France and after the success of this operation Anna was able to convince Donovan to give her an assignment as a field agent in Paris, despite the fact that as an American with false French identification papers she would be imprisoned or summarily executed as a spy if discovered by the Germans. Anna wanted to serve the interests of both her home country and the country she had grown to love during her post-graduate studies in Paris.

Anna was sent to England to be trained as a wireless radio operator, a highly dangerous position that was desperately needed by the underground resistance networks operating in the occupied territories



to transmit and receive information concerning troop movements and intelligence. Her training also included instruction with weapons, physical endurance and interrogation techniques. She was then outfitted and airlifted into occupied France on a night with a full moon, sent in to pose as a college student working with her "cousin" for a French industrial supply group to gather what information she could from the German officers she came in contact with at the headquarters the Germans had established at the Hotel Majestic in Paris. With the D-Day assault date approaching, her most pressing duty was to learn all she could about the location and capabilities of a rumored secret weapon the Germans were said to be building. In Paris Anna is reunited with her close friends from her days at Sciences Po who are members of the underground network she is assigned to work with and her adventures continue.

In addition to General Donovan, other real-life persons are briefly mentioned in this story, including Christian Dior and his sister Catherine, Julia Child, and even John Wayne. Through reading this admittedly fictional story we can get a glimpse of the bravery and dedication of some of the true-life heroes who helped to preserve the life we enjoy today.

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