

“Mosquitoes”
Written by Hugh O’Neill
Second Place, Division I
Copley-Fairlawn Middle School
Jennifer Adair, Instructor
Word count: 933

"Mosquitoes"

"I would do anything to get my hands on that limping b----" -Klaus Barbie, Butcher of Lyon

A TRUE STORY

She walks into Occupied France

About to change the war.

The Nazis don't know it.

Hitler doesn't know it.

The Allies don't know it.

She blends into the terrified faces

Of civilians,

Their lives uprooted

By the Nazis.

Fear flickers across their faces,

Shadows fall across their eyes,

Heads swivel,

Eyes dart,

Whispers are exchanged:

"Jüdisch"

"Juif"

"Endlösung"

Anyone could be one of them -

A Nazi.

A mosquito.

Her briefcase swings with every step.

A risky step.

Then another.

A risk her leg will reveal her.

Her hollow leg.

Unbidden, memories creep in,

Memories of a snowy night in Turkey.

Barbed wire,

Gunshots,

Red-stained snow,

Screaming,

Infection.

That night,

It almost killed her once,

It could do it again.

A few weeks after her arrival,

She hides in the woods,

Looking up at the full moon.

The full moon is smothered

By the silhouette of parachutes,

Eighteen men and women,

Ready to serve.

HECKLER, they would be called by the Allies.

Heroes, they would be called by the citizens.

Dangerous, they would be called by the Nazis.

Supplies exchange hands,

Messages are whispered,

Ammunition is loaded.

"Tomorrow night," she whispers.

The next night

They lie on a rooftop,

Watching Nazi patrols below.

She makes eye contact

With her agent hidden in the foliage by the sidewalk.

A single nod.

One movement.

That movement ends the lives

Of 23 Nazi soldiers,

23 gunshots sounding out simultaneously.

They crumple to the street.

Her stomach overturns,

Empties out.

She feels sick.

Those people were brothers.

Fathers.

But she remembers what they did to her friend, Brigitte.

Left out in the plaza

For everyone to see.

Her back straightens and she stands up confidently.

This was her first time.

It won't be the last time

They kill a mosquito.

Nobody knows her true name.

She is known as either

MARIE, her codename,

Or to the citizens,

She is *la dame qui boite* -

The Limping Lady.

The Nazis don't know who she is,

And they will never know,

Not until she is in front of them,

Ending their cruel reign

Like a spider traps a mosquito.

Bridges,

Trains,

Supplies,

Aircraft;

Everything goes up in a fiery ball

Of destruction.

She watches with her agents,

Codenamed HECKLER.

Lying in the underbrush,

Frantic calls ring out in German.

"Hilfe!"

"Bombe!"

"Angriff!"

A patrolman thumps past

Boots kicking up leaves and dirt.

Dust bathed in the orange light of explosions,

Settles by Jacques.

His eyes grow wide

As his body violently shakes,

Trying to hold in a sneeze.

Despite the deafening blast

Of their explosion moments earlier,

This sneeze rings out

Through the forest.

The loudest thing

She could ever hear.

An agent curses

As they dash through the charred forest.

"Folge mir!"

The message spreads like a plague through the Nazis:

Follow me!

The patrolman chases after them,

Gunshots piercing the steady thrum of the explosion

Still ringing in her ears.

Suddenly, Germaine cries out in pain

From a bullet hole in her arm.

As Germaine stumbles, a glance back reveals the Nazis

Closing in on her.

She doubles back and lifts Germaine up,

While Jacques waves them over, urging them forward.

She sets Germaine down in the train car;

Jacques pulls out a pistol, running to the engine.

The conductor glances at him and the train speeds up.

Jacques makes his way back to them

As they kneel around Germaine,

Body covered in a sheen of sweat.

"Croire," she whispers.

"Croire," everyone responds.

Believe.

Believe that they can win.

That they can kill the mosquitoes.

Months after the chase,

Jacques dies.

He disappears and is found facedown in a river,

A single hole in his chest.

She cries.

Silently.

Cries for her friend,

Cries for the Allies.

Cries for hope.

Cries because he wanted to kill the mosquitoes too.

A man named Robert Alesch weasels

His way in the resistance.

Makes friends with informants,

Unbeknownst to her.

But with Jacques' absence,

He operates without her knowledge,

Hidden in the shadows,

Biding his time.

Then he gives his information to the Nazis

His betrayal costs the lives

of 10 HECKLER agents and 50 informants.

Devastating,

The bite of a mosquito.

Alesch's betrayal

Prompts evacuation.

She is instructed to flee France,

But the Nazis are here,

Kicking in doors.

Her neighbors' doors.

She throws on a coat, grabs her radio,

Ready to run.

The only way out is southeast,

Through the treacherous Pyrenees.

Deadly on a good day.

Suicide in the winter.

For days, she travels in a blizzard.

Radioing the Allies in pain:

"Cuthbert is proving quite troublesome."

The response:

"If he is giving you difficulty, have him eliminated."

She laughs at this

But it disappears as

That night from Turkey comes back,

Her gun slips,

Bullets fire.

A frantic rush to the hospital,

Anne-Belle comforting her,

Doctors looming over her leg.

Waking up later,

With a wooden leg,

A new life.

She names her prosthetic Cuthbert.

Gunshots ring out in the distance.

Her face contorts in grief,

Praying it wasn't someone she knew.

She will come back to fight the mosquitoes.

Parasitic mosquitoes.

Deadly mosquitoes.

Her name is Virginia Hall.

Virginia Hall was born in Baltimore, Maryland. Her gender and her prosthetic leg barred her from becoming an embassy clerk. She was awarded three major honors for her heroic actions in WWII. Virginia Hall was the most wanted Allied spy as she directed over 1500 agents, which resulted in 170 Nazis being killed and over 800 being captured. Over 50 Nazi agents were assigned solely to her capture and demise, but they never found her. Despite her achievements, she remained obscure from the public eye.

"Die hinkende Frau ist die gefährlichste aller alliierten Spione. Wir müssen sie finden und zerstören." ("The Limping Lady is the most dangerous of all Allied spies. We must find and destroy her.") -Nazi Flyers

Works Cited

- Faces of Defense Intelligence: Virginia Hall - The "Limping Lady". (2016, October 27). Retrieved October 03, 2020, from <https://www.dia.mil/News/Articles/Article-View/Article/faces-of-defense-intelligence-virginia-hall-the-limping-lady/>
- Hopmans, R. (2020, May 14). Hall, Virginia "Cuthbert". Retrieved October 28, 2020, from <https://ww2gravestone.com/people/hall-virginia/>
- Kelly, J. (2020, January 14). The Baltimore spy who beat the Nazis. Retrieved October 07, 2020, from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/baltimore-kelly-virginia-hall/>
- Lineberry, C. (2007, February 01). WANTED: The Limping Lady. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/wanted-the-limping-lady>
- Mundy, L. (2019, May 12). Female Spies and Their Secrets. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/female-spies-world-war-ii>
- Myre, G. (2019, April 18). 'A Woman Of No Importance' Finally Gets Her Due. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/2019-a-woman-of-no-importance-finally-gets-her-due>
- Prahl, A. (2019, June 19). Biography of Virginia Hall, WWII's Most Wanted Spy. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/virginia-hall-4690641>

Purnell, S. (2020). *A Woman of no Importance: The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II*. NY: Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House

Virginia Hall: The Courage of "The Limping Lady" (2017, June 29). Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.cia.gov/virginia-hall-the-courage-of-the-limping-lady/>