

HEROINE OF DIPLOMACY

Reverberations from the World War II cataclysm were felt even in the ultra-conservative offices of the Department of State, and forced the old guard to abandon its traditional reluctance to assign women FSOs overseas. With the call-up of American men for duty in the armed forces, it quickly became apparent the Foreign Service would have to depend on women if posts were to function. By 1943 at least 800 women were serving abroad, mostly in clerical positions, and were often exposed to danger. By the end of the war one in eight had been imprisoned in enemy internment camps. Their performance drew a warm tribute from former Secretary of State Cordell Hull in an introduction in a book about women in the State Department, where he praised them for their "efficiency, devotion, loyalty and spirit of sacrifice." But well before America entered the conflict, a woman vice consul, who subsequently would receive the nation's highest civilian award — the Medal of Freedom — made an outstanding contribution to the Allied cause. Her name was Constance Harvey.

Harvey's contribution to the war effort was so secret that the citation for her Medal of Freedom lists December 1941 for the beginning of her activities, a year too late; it was considered inappropriate to acknowledge her clandestine activities while she was serving as a neutral diplomat at Lyon, France.

Harvey was one of only two female Foreign Service officers who had entered after passing the Foreign Service exam. Her career began in 1930, when as a 26-year-old with a B.A. from Smith College and an M.A. from Columbia University, she was appointed vice consul in Ottawa. After an assignment to Italy, she was posted to Switzerland when the Nazi juggernaut rolled over Scandinavia, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France. Aching to play an active part, she persuaded her superiors to transfer her to Lyon, where she could be directly involved in the war effort, and so on New Year's Day of 1941, Harvey drove into that Vichy-controlled city to assume her duties. As a vice consul

with diplomatic status and a low-level Class 8 officer, she was in an ideal position to carry out her country's clandestine war against the Germans. Moreover, she was American and therefore neutral. She happily used all the tools at her command to carry out what she has since referred to as her "nefarious activities."

Acting in concert with a Belgian clerk from the U.S. embassy in Brussels, who had transferred to the U.S. consulate in Lyon when his country was overrun, Harvey helped "practically the whole Belgian government in exile" to escape from France, she said in an oral history interview. As vice consul in charge of Belgian interests, she issued false documentation, such as passports and visas, for Belgian officials on the run. Later, given responsibility for British affairs, she helped downed British and Canadian airmen to elude Nazis.



AS SPY, ENVOY,
FSO HARVEY
AIDED ALLIES

BY ANN MILLER MORIN

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Harvey also utilized the diplomatic pouch to excellent effect. Before she had left Switzerland, General "Barney" Legge, a good friend in U.S. Army intelligence stationed at Bern, had asked if she would help him when she was at Lyon. She soon was smuggling out military information, industrial diamonds — badly needed in the United States — and even gold sovereigns used to pay members of the British Secret Service. As diplomatic pouch control officer, she could include such material without her superiors knowing. When she acted as courier herself, she drove her own car over the border and passed material directly to Legge. Once, they met in a field outside Geneva. She recalled that when she handed him maps of all the German anti-aircraft emplacements in and around Paris, Legge "turned white." She added, "I thought it was pretty good myself."

Although Vichy was nominally in charge in southern France, the Gestapo was everywhere: in Lyon, in towns and villages, especially at border crossings. Frequently they came into the American consulate itself. Unfazed, Harvey drove her little Ford to the Swiss border with booty locked in the glove compartment. The compartment had its own key, which she hid in her bra; at the border she would get out, leaving the other keys in the ignition lock as if she had nothing to hide. Incredible as it seems today, in more than two years, neither she nor her car was ever searched.

The French patriots who brought her information knew, of course, something of what she was doing. In the summer of 1942, one of them came to her and asked if she would be willing to talk to Gen. Henri Giraud, who wanted desperately to communicate with the Americans. Giraud had been the commanding general of the French army when it was overwhelmed by the Germans. He had been imprisoned near Dresden, Germany, but had escaped and made his way to Vichy France. Swiftly disillusioned by his countrymen there, once again he fled, ending up in a chateau near Lyon. The intended victim of several assassination attempts, it was vital he remain in hiding. Harvey met him

in the otherwise deserted chateau and agreed to pass along his message to Legge.

The third time Giraud sent for her she went to an apartment in a working-class quarter of Lyon. She entered a room furnished only with a couple of chairs and a table, but on that table was an enormous bouquet of carnations, placed there as a tribute to a member of the gentler sex. Giraud handed her papers outlining plans for an invasion of the south of France with himself in command of all the troops when they landed on French soil. That was the last time she saw Giraud, but she continued to carry messages back and forth between one of his adjutants and Legge. Giraud made his way out of France and reached North Africa, where for a time he was in command of French forces there. However, by the time the invasion of southern France took place in August 1944, Gen. Giraud had lost a power struggle with Gen. Charles de Gaulle, and U.S. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was commander-in-chief of the Allied forces.

Long before that time, in November 1942, Harvey's activities, both official and surreptitious, ceased abruptly when American troops invaded North Africa. Germany occupied Vichy France and America lost its neutral status. Harvey was interned for 13 months, along with all other American officials and journalists working in France, first at Lourdes, France, and then at Baden-Baden, Germany. After the war, in 1948, Gen. Giraud came to call on Harvey at the U.S. consulate in Zurich to thank her for her help and to invite her to visit him in Paris. But although the two corresponded, they would never meet again.

Harvey's wartime experiences profoundly affected her, and she found it deeply satisfying to witness the American-led, post-war recovery, first in Athens, then in Bonn. Her last assignment was as consul general to Strasbourg, France, where she was the first American woman to hold that title. As consul general she was a highly respected diplomat, with a very different image from the daring vice consul she was many years earlier. Harvey received the U.S. Medal of Freedom in 1945 from General Legge himself in Zurich. As noted, it purposely misstates her "meritorious service" as beginning in December 1941 instead of January 1941. Today, at age 91, she lives in Lexington, Ky. ■

Ann Miller Morin is author of Her Excellency, An Oral History of American Women Ambassadors, published in 1995 by Twayne Publishers.