

The Spy Who Loved: The Secrets and Lives of Christine
Granville, Britain's First Female Special Agent of World War II
by Clare Mulley.
Macmillan, 2012.

The Spy Who Loved is at one and the same time a story that is very personal and intimate and impersonal and large-scale.

Christine Granville, nee Maria Krystyna Janina Skarbek, was born in 1915 to a feckless and impoverished Polish aristocrat and his immensely wealthy Jewish-born, but baptized before her marriage, wife Stefania. Her childhood was privileged by her mother's money and her father's connections, and although she had a brother it was she who was the apple of her father's eye.

But the family's fortunes took a serious dive in the 1920s, her father abandoned the family and Christine moved with her mother and brother to a small flat in Warsaw. Christine seems to have had an eye for the main chance like her father, a similarly high octane libido, and the looks of a 1931 'Miss Ski' in Zakopane.

What changed Christine's life completely was the Nazi invasion of her homeland, and instead of seeking refuge in a place of safety she opted to become a secret agent for British Intelligence, working to support the Polish Resistance.

The story that Clare Mulley tells is compelling and rich in incident, and the reader follows Christine through moments of great danger and great abandon in almost equal measure. The ending of the war seems to have terminated any sense of purpose that Christine had, though greater imagination on the part of the British security services as the Cold War took hold might have changed things.

As it was, Christine was doomed to drift from job to job and place to place, finally ending up with the man who murdered her in the hall of the hotel in which she was staying after the break down of their relationship: a banal ending for an extraordinary life.

As women strive in the US courts in the early 21st century to be allowed a combat role in the military, *The Spy Who Loved* is a powerful reminder of the fact that brave women throughout the ages have been ready to kill and die for causes in which they believed, and willing to take any number of risks for the right reasons.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh