

home with their father. In midsummer she packed her bags and typewriter and boarded the train for what would prove to be her most life-changing journey. Katy Gates, who was already in Washington with her Navy husband, said, "Washington was where the action was. New York was passé. Julia always wanted to be where something was going on. She wanted to keep up with the times." Julia added: "The war was the change in my life."

*MISS McWILLIAMS*  
GOES TO WASHINGTON

As Julia left the magnificent Union Station with her suitcases, Washington, DC's white monuments seemed to intensify the summer heat. The spirit of action in the city was contagious, young civil servants caught up in the midst of world events. The arena fit her size. The sight of the Capitol brought tears to her patriotic eyes. Volunteering for the Aircraft Warning Service and the Red Cross in Pasadena had not been enough.

After a brief stay with Janie McBain, whose father was an influential San Francisco lawyer who knew many leading figures in the political world, Julia settled in the Brighton Hotel on California Street and waited for news about her application to the WAVES. The Naval Reserve returned her letter with an "automatic disqualification." The form was checked as a "physical" disqualification, though the category listed only "under five feet," with no mention of the other extreme. But someone had circled the phrase in her letter mentioning she was six feet one inch, an understatement at that. "I was too long," she would explain later. Thereafter, she would list her height as six feet—a shaving-off of two inches.

With adventure on the high seas beyond her reach, Julia took a job the end of August 1942 as Senior Typist for the Research Unit of the Office of War Information, Department of State. In short, "Mellot's Madhouse," after the Director and the frenetic environment. The Assistant Director was Noble Cathcart, husband of her cousin Harriet. She worked in a building opposite the Willard Hotel, madly typing white file cards for every government official mentioned in the newspapers and official documents, listing full title and agency. In two months she had typed herself through 10,000 cards and to the door of madness. She applied for a job with the Office of Strategic Services, where she had friends. "I worked so hard they replaced me with two people," she said of her stint at Mellot's Madhouse.

Still a social animal, Julia, when she was not typing and enlivening the office madness, partied with her growing number of friends in Washington

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from Pasadena and Northampton. The dinner parties and martinis of Smith College and San Malo beach continued in Washington, but the nights were not as late.

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In December, wearing a new leopard fur coat to the work, Julia began her career in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) as Junior Research Assistant in the office of the Director, William Donovan, on E Street. She was now in the Secret Intelligence (SI) branch of government. Her immediate supervisor was Marian O'Connell, an old friend of the Director and in charge of the Registry, which processed all records and correspondence. Edwin J. (Ned) Putzell, Jr., the Executive Officer and Assistant Director of the OSS, remembers Julia as "the life of the group. Julia was energetic, light of spirit, always of good humor—and willing to jump into any assignment." Aline Griffith, who later became a countess and authored *The Spy Wore Red* (1987), also worked with Julia before going to work in Spain. *The Spy* captured the cloak-and-dagger atmosphere quite dramatically.

Occasionally they were visited by the Director himself, who flew in from world hot spots. William (Wild Bill) Donovan was a corpulent, rather dumpy-looking man who was anything but wild. He had intense personal magnetism, but spoke with a restrained voice when he was in the office or in the field. Unemotional, but a risk taker. Julia's personal memory of him was that she only said "yes, sir" and "no, sir" to him: "He was rather small and rumped [with] piercing blue eyes; and it was said that he could read a document just by turning the pages, he was so fast at it, and he was . . . somehow fascinating [to people]. He gave you his complete attention and you were just fascinated by him."

Donovan had been a Wall Street lawyer and Republican when Franklin Delano Roosevelt and he planned what would be called the OSS, America's first espionage unit. FDR was impressed with Donovan's prophecy that Britain would withstand the Nazi blitz and wanted an intelligence organization equal to that of the "Brits." Nothing like it had existed in any previous American war.

Donovan reported only to FDR, a status that, together with his loose administrative style (he was in fact a terrible organizer), provoked much jealousy and criticism from other government people, particularly in the military. Donovan (a lawyer) was not of the military establishment, nor were his Ivy League employees. Just as the British Secret Intelligence Service seemed to be staffed from *Burke's Peerage*, so the Office of Strategic Services was composed of blue bloods or, as some called them, "a bunch of college professors" or "Donovan's amateur playboys." Like Julia, they came from wealthy families and did not need the money; hence Donovan reasoned they were not bribable.

Political views were irrelevant to the Director—indeed a number of communists were recruited. He valued creative intelligence, a love of adventure, and a willingness to fight the enemy. And he left them alone to plan their capers. At the time this was positively un-American—shrouded in secrecy and outside any military or governmental system. And it was exhilarating—not only for Julia and the file keepers in Washington—but for those abroad. Thus Donovan gathered around him the best and the brightest, from James B. Conant to Moe Berg of Red Sox fame; from filmmaker John Ford to David Bruce, Allen Dulles, and Junius S. Morgan. One cynic said that Donovan staffed the OSS with “potential postwar clients.”

Julia was promoted to Clerk within the Director's office in the spring of 1943, and at the beginning of the summer she became Senior Clerk, reaching the salary of \$1,800 a year, all of which was transferred to the First Trust and Savings Bank of Pasadena.

When a new section concerning air-sea rescue opened in midsummer, Julia was transferred out of Donovan's office. Several branches of government were involved, but the OSS paid for the office personnel, equipment, and space. The Information Exchange of the Emergency Rescue Equipment (ERE), started by Harold Coolidge and Henry Steel to aid fliers downed at sea, was located in Temporary A Building at the corner of Second and T streets. Julia dubbed it the “fish-squeezing unit” because one of their experiments was to see if survivors in life rafts could squeeze a fish and drink the water from the fish's body. Julia and her colleague Alice Carson carpooled to the market and bought the fish for their test. Naive, perhaps, but certainly in keeping with the experiments of America's first espionage organization. ERE's most important work was developing exposure suits, and their pioneering work, according to one of Julia's colleagues, became “the founding of the Coast Guard's air-sea rescue service.”

The OSS budget was “largely unvouchered,” claimed one historian, who documented that Donovan bought ships, houses, printing plants, and planes. “Every eccentric schemer with a harebrained plan for secret operations (from phosphorescent foxes to incendiary bats) would find a sympathetic ear in Donovan's office.”

Histories of the OSS are filled with stories of the early attempts at black espionage against the Germans and the Japanese. Because the OSS was filled with Ivy Leaguers and professors, and Donovan did not want to stifle action and creativity, there were some inventive plans to sabotage the enemy's reputation in occupied lands, including the manufacture of a substance that smelled like dung, to embarrass the Japanese in China.

Only Donovan's closeness to Roosevelt kept him safe from his detrac-

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tors. The military believed that the OSS was a "fly-by-night" organization; West Pointers called it "Donovan's dragoons"; the isolationist Charles Lindbergh said the organization was "full of politics, ballyhoo, and controversy"; J. Edgar Hoover was a bitter rival; and Herr Goebbels called it a "staff of Jewish scribblers." By the end of the decade, it was clear to everyone that "Donovan's Dreamers" were idealistic and "helter-skelter but brilliant," a far cry from the view that today demonizes its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency.

Long before Julia was promoted from Senior Clerk to Administrative Assistant, she was supervising an office of forty people (directly overseeing eight), securing office furnishings, hiring clerical help, and initiating procedures related to financing, office security, and supplies. When Julia wanted to talk to Lieutenant Commander Earl F. Hiscock (Coast Guard Reserve, which eventually took over the unit) about the many sinkings of merchant vessels carrying supplies to Europe (this bureau was gathering all the information on sinkings, survivors, and possible new equipment), she turned over the wastebasket to sit on and talk to him at eye level, according to her friend Alice Carson, who later married Hiscock.

While Julia was working six days a week in a domestic branch of America's Secret Intelligence, she lived in her cramped apartment in the Brighton Hotel with a two-burner hot plate on top of a refrigerator in her living room. She did what she later called "some minor cooking" and had "nice crowded parties." Alice Carson, who graduated from Smith the year Julia enrolled, remembered eating a fried chicken dinner at Julia's apartment. Julia remembered, "I got chicken fat all over the wallpaper," in her awkward attempt at cooking.

Another friend whom she met in the "fish-squeezing unit" was Jack Moore, art school graduate and Army private who worked for a civilian named Paul Child in the Presentation Division (photography, graphics, maps). Jack and Julia met in the Naval Yard because the ERE needed some graphics. His boss had just been shipped out to New Delhi to work for Supreme Commander Mountbatten, and Moore would soon follow. Moore, who would be the initial illustrator for her first cookbook, thought of Julia "as a woman of extraordinary personality. She was just not any kind of an American stereotype. By virtue of necessity—I mean, here is this six-foot-two-inch-tall American woman looking down on all the males she ever meets—she had to evolve a sense of herself that was different from the person who is a physically standard specimen."

Her promotion at the end of 1943 placed Julia closer to her dream of more active service, even if it meant returning to files again. She became

Administrative Assistant in the Registry of the OSS, returning to Donovan's office. There was a \$600 raise for the new year and a feeling of being part of America's first espionage organization. Donovan had decided he could not collect intelligence by having all his people in Washington, DC, and began establishing bases around the world. Julia wanted to serve overseas (her brother John was in German-occupied France, though they had no news of his whereabouts). When she heard the organization wanted volunteers for work in India, she applied. She was free, white, and thirty-one.

