



# Code Name Pauline: Memoirs of a World War II Special Agent (Women of Action)

By Pearl Witherington Cornioley



**Code Name Pauline: Memoirs of a World War II Special Agent (Women of Action)** By Pearl Witherington Cornioley

**An NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People**

There was a full moon on the evening of September 22, 1943, when Pearl Witherington, age 29, parachuted into France to aid the French Resistance as a special agent for the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). Out of the 400 agents sent to France during the German occupation, 39 were women. Pearl, whom the SOE called “cool and resourceful and extremely determined” and “the best shot, male or female, we have yet had,” became one of the most celebrated female World War II resistance fighters.

In *Code Name Pauline* Pearl describes in a series of plainspoken reminiscences her difficult childhood and harrowing escape from France in 1940; her recruitment and training as a special agent; the logistics and dangers of posing as a cosmetics saleswoman to make her way around the country as an undercover courier; and both failed and successful attempts at sabotaging the Nazis. She tells how, when the leader of her network was caught by the Gestapo, she became “Pauline” and rose to command a 3,500-strong band of French Resistance fighters.

With an annotated list of key figures, an appendix of original unedited interview extracts—including Pearl’s husband Henri’s story—and never-before-published photographs from Pearl’s personal collection, *Code Name Pauline* will captivate World War II buffs of any age and, just as Pearl wished, inspire young people.

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## **Code Name Pauline: Memoirs of a World War II Special Agent (Women of Action) By Pearl Witherington Cornioley Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

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During WWII, Cornioley was one of 39 women who worked with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in France with the Resistance movement. Although she and the other members of the SOE were ordinary citizens, they played a crucial role in defeating the Germans. For seven months, Pearl worked as a courier under the assumed name Pauline. The editor of this English translation first learned about Cornioley while researching her book *Women Heroes of World War II* (2011). Until 1994, Cornioley had been reluctant to share her memoirs; however, she realized that young people needed to understand the dangerous situations people were willing to endure for freedom. She worked with a translator for the French edition, and she was later adamant that the English translation be accurate and not embellished. Thus, this work is straightforward and, at times, rather unimaginative in approach, but it could be a useful resource for a world-history library. Grades 9-12. --J. B. Petty

#### Review

"Told in Pauline's' own no-nonsense words, this is an eye-opening look at what life was really like for a secret agent fighting in occupied France."

-- **Steve Sheinkin**, award-winning author of *Bomb: The Race to Build -- & Steal -- the World's Most Dangerous Weapon*

"A wonderfully vivid and engaging account. [I] loved it."

--**Alex Kershaw**, author of *The Longest Winter: The Battle of the Bulge*.

"Pearl's appealingly personal account is moving, thrilling and humbling all at once... 'Never lose hope, never give in', is her fierce message to young readers. *Code Name Pauline* is both a shining tribute to the real and ordinary people whose relentless determination brought about an end to Nazi oppression in Europe, and an inspiration for future generations."

-- **Elizabeth Wein**, author of the award-winning *Code Name Verity*

"Code Name Pauline is the real deal -- a treasure trove of primary source material."

-- **Margi Preus**, author of the Newbery Honour-winning *Heart of a Samurai & Shadow of the Mountain*

"This honest and gripping memoir of the secret side of WWII behind enemy lines, elegantly edited by Kathryn Atwood, is a must-read, not only for anyone fascinated by the underground war in France, but also for anyone who admires bravery and ingenuity in the face of evil."

-- **Brendan Foley**, co-author of *Under the Wire*

"Young adults and adults will be fascinated to read this memoir detailing a piece of neglected World War II history."

--**Doreen Rappaport**, author of the award-winning *Beyond Courage: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*

Pearl Witherington's fascinating memoir provides a concise yet illuminating account of some of SOE's audacious activities in occupied France during World War II. Ideal for younger readers, or those new to the subject."

-- **Roger Moorhouse**, author of *Berlin at War & Killing Hitler*

"A gripping, true story of a courageous secret agent fighting behind enemy lines, as riveting as any work of historical fiction."

-- **Kirkus Reviews**

"This is an important first person account of the . . . little-known story of the women who daily lived under the threat of capture and execution."

-- **Library Media Connection**

About the Author

**Pearl Witherington Cornioley** (1914–2008) worked for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) as a special agent and with the French Resistance as an undercover courier and later a network leader of 3,500 men. She was instrumental in carrying out numerous acts of espionage and sabotage. **Kathryn J. Atwood** is the author of *Women Heroes of World War I* and *Women Heroes of World War II*. Visit her online at [www.kathrynatwood.com](http://www.kathrynatwood.com).

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**Martha Wilson:**

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