

Krystyna  
Skarbek

UNKNOWN HEROINE

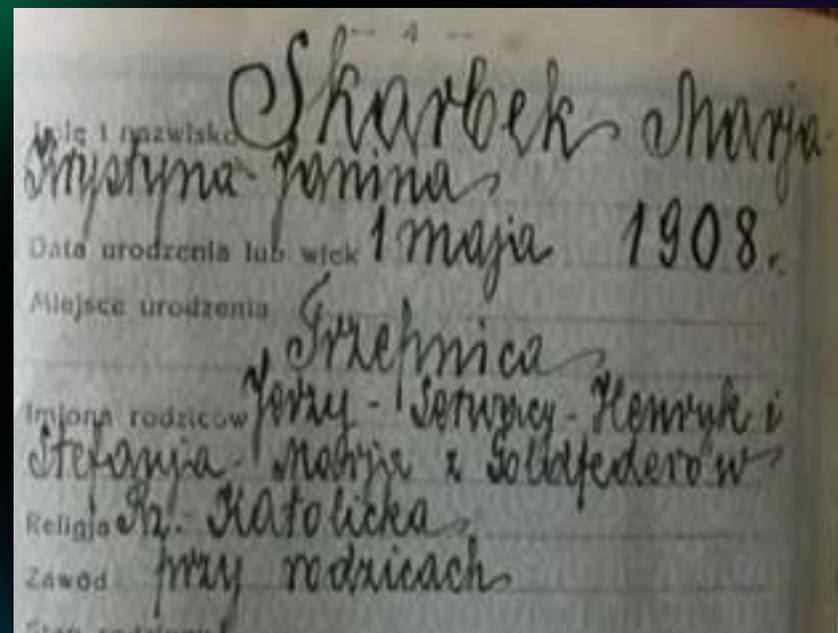
Polish James Bond

Krystyna Skarbek, or rather Maria Krystyna Skarbek-Giżycka, was one of the best Polish intelligence agents. She was also known as Christine Granville. She was an agent of the British Special Operations Executive during the Second World War.



# Origin

Krystyna was born on May 1, 1908 in Warsaw. She came from a mixed Polish-Jewish family: her mother Stefania Goldfeder was a Jew from a rich family, her father Jerzy was a Polish landowner and aristocrat. The family lived in Trzepnica, from where they moved to Warsaw after their father's death in 1930.



As a child she was quite naughty and caused lots of problems. When she was fifteen she attended a Catholic school in Jazłowiec, now in Ukraine. One day, during a mass, kneeling at the altar with a candle in her hands, set fire to the priest's cassock. She explained later that she wanted to check the faith of the clergyman and see if he interrupted the mass. For this prank, she was expelled from school.



# Her Youth



- She loved adventures and adrenaline, and throughout her life she was a very active person, practicing various sports (including skiing, horse riding).
- She was also very attractive and beautiful. Before the war, in 1930 she took part in the Miss Polonia beauty contest. Krystyna received the "Beauty Star" award there.



# Recruitment

Upon the outbreak of World War II Krystyna was with her husband in Africa where he worked as a diplomat. They decided to come to London. She wanted to work for Secret Intelligence Service .

# Recruitment

- Krystyna Skarbek sought to offer her services in the struggle against the common enemy. The British authorities showed little interest but were eventually convinced by Skarbek's acquaintances, including journalist Frederick Augustus Voigt, who introduced her to the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). The first SIS mention of her was in December 1939. She was described as a "flaming Polish patriot, expert skier, and great adventuress" and "absolutely fearless."



- She had a lot of merits as a spy during the second world war. Skarbek's most famous exploit was securing the release of SOE agents from a German prison hours before they were to be executed. She did so by meeting (at great personal risk) with the Gestapo commander in France, telling him she was a British agent, and persuading him with threats, lies, and a two-million-franc bribe to release the SOE agents.
- She managed to escape from Germans many times during the war.



- She discovered the date of the German attack on the USSR and Churchill called her his favorite spy.



# Her in Hungary and Poland

- From London Skarbek, now a British agent, journeyed to Budapest, Hungary, arriving on 21 December 1939. Hungary was not yet a participant in World War II, but was leaning toward Nazi Germany. Skarbek's cover story for her presence in Hungary was that she was a journalist.
- She persuaded Polish Olympic skier Jan Maruszarz to escort her across the snow-covered Tatra Mountains into Nazi-occupied Poland.





- She was involved in many military actions against Nazi Germans. She cooperated with French, Hungarian, British and many other agent. In one of the actions she fired the bridge in order to make it impossible to use by the enemies.

# Post-war life

- After the war, Skarbek was left without financial reserves or a native country to return to.
- After the physical hardship and mental strain she had suffered for six years in our service, she needed, probably more than any other agent we had employed, security for life. She was dismissed with a month's salary and left in Cairo. She was too proud to ask for any other assistance.
- Unable to find work, Skarbek went to Nairobi, Kenya Colony to join Michael Dunford, an old lover, but the British colonial government turned down her application for a work permit. She returned to London where she became in turn a telephone operator, a salesperson, a waitress, and a cabin steward on ocean liners.



As a very beautiful woman, she had two husbands and many lovers. She also had an affair with a well-known British writer, journalist and Naval intelligence officer Ian Fleming. He was the author of *James Bond* series of spy novels. It is said that Christine was an inspiration for him and thanks to her he created James Bond's girlfriend.



# Honours and awards

- For her work in conjunction with the British authorities, in May 1947 she was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), an award normally associated with officers of the equivalent military rank of lieutenant colonel, and a level above the most usual award of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) given to other women agents of SOE. Despite her problems with the Poles during the war, in 1945 when Skarbek visited Polish military headquarters in her British WAAF uniform, she was treated by the Polish military chiefs with the highest respect.



# Death

- Christine Granville was stabbed to death in the Shellbourne Hotel, Earls Court, in London, on 15 June 1952. She had begun work as steward some six weeks earlier with the Union-Castle Line and had booked into the hotel on 14 June, having returned from a working voyage out of Durban, South Africa, on Winchester Castle. Her body was identified by her cousin, Andrzej Skarbek.





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# The END

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