

## 1. **Girls at War**

In Occupied Europe during the Second World War, a resistance group is asked to evaluate the possibility of destroying a telephone exchange. This is no ordinary exchange: through it pass all phone and—crucially—teleprinter traffic between the German High Command in Berlin and the army occupying France. Consequently it is guarded like a fortress. The only people allowed in and out are the female operators. The resistance group reports that it is impregnable.

Back in London, this report is considered by a joint meeting of the British and American undercover outfits: Special Operations Executive and the Office of Strategic Services. A young officer suggests sending in a team of women secret agents, who could get into the fortress by posing as telephone operators.

The same young officer is handed the task of putting together the team. He finds an explosives expert who is in jail for safebreaking, a Countess who happens to be the best shot in England, a confidence trickster who can talk her way out of anything, and so on.

They go on a tough training course during which several are eliminated and a leader is chosen, a competent young university teacher whose faithless husband is the leader of the aforementioned resistance group.

They are transported to France. Their mission is threatened not just by the Germans but by stiff-necked officers who hate secret agents, turf warriors from the peacetime secret service MI6, and the usual collection of military incompetents. Several of the women die heroically on the mission. The few who return are proposed for the most prestigious medals, but in the end it is thought inappropriate to give such honours to girls.