

Brave Girls



By HARRIETT C. PHILMUS

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**THE STORY OF GIRL SCOUTS AND
GIRL GUIDES IN THE UNDERGROUND**

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Note: *Girl Guides and Girl Scouts are members of the same world organization and try to live by the same Promise and Laws. For readers in the United States, who are used to the name "Girl Scouts", the term "Girl Scouts" has been used to refer to other branches of the organization as well, except where they are already widely known in English-speaking countries by the term "Guides".*

INTRODUCTION

"Give them our love. When you see the Girl Scouts in the United States, give them our love."

This was not an offhand statement from a group of bright-eyed youngsters. This was the message of thanks and gratitude entrusted to the Lady Baden-Powell by young women who had lived through the Nazi and Fascist occupation of their countries. Lady Baden-Powell, World Chief Guide and widow of the Founder of Boy and Girl Scouting, brought this message with her from the Girl Guides to the million and a quarter Girl Scouts in the United States who had helped to keep the Scouting movement alive throughout World War II. Wherever she went, visiting the remnants of Girl Scout troops, listening to the difficulties of reviving Guiding and Scouting after the long war, Lady Baden-Powell was asked to carry the thanks and affection of the Girl Guides and Scouts to the United States.

The story of life under German and Japanese conquerors was always horribly the same, because, when he had conquered, the enemy recognized that the Girl Scouts were a free youth group. Scout headquarters were destroyed, their supplies confiscated and the movement officially dissolved and outlawed. Often the girls continued to meet as Scouts. In addition, as individuals, many of them offered knowledge and skills learned in Girl Scouting to the Underground or resistance movement in their country. The Scout movements as such, were peaceful, educational organizations. They were not part of the Underground. Individual Girl Scouts, however, followed their own consciences and joined the Resistance in great and effective numbers.

These young women believed in world cooperation before the war. They believe in it more passionately now. They believe that, after six years of fighting, they and the young people like them have earned the right to be heard. These young people in Europe and Asia, who had seen their families sent to concentration camps or killed, who lived through the terrors of Nazism, are now determined to write a different ending to the time-worn story of war, disillusionment, and bitter defeat.

There are between two-and-a-half and three million Girl Scouts and Girl Guides in almost every country of the globe—in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Great Britain, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, The Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Suomi-Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America who are working for world peace through Scouting. They are bound together by a common purpose and a single dedication—to do their duty to God and country, on their honor.

On March 12, 1947, Girl Scouts in the United States, ranging in age from seven to seventeen, celebrated 35 years of Scouting. Girls from all walks of life, of many colors and creeds, joined hands in celebrating the birthday of an organization that has helped girls become the kind of adults that are needed to make and keep a better world. The basis for their creed has always been international friendship and understanding. The war gave the Girl Scouts in the United States the opportunity to put their words of friendship into action.

They adopted war orphans in China, France, and Greece. They sent food and clothing and blankets to Guides. Friendship Bags, filled with sewing supplies, crayons, pencils, paper, bright ribbons and friendly greetings, poured across the ocean by the millions.

Wherever they could help in any way, with money, with sup-

plies, with the hand of friendship, the American Girl Scouts were ready to share with their sister Scouts and Guides.

In the meantime, in the midst of the chaos and misery of Europe, the Girl Scouts and Girl Guides learned that war can do surprising things to values. In peacetime, it was often easy to forget to put a Scout pin on a lapel or to wear a uniform. But when wearing a uniform could mean being shot on sight, it became a matter for infinite thought and great care, for secret meetings and whispered repetition of a forbidden promise. Girl Scout trefoil pins were worn under lapels, shown only as identification to trusted friends.

Once a girl might have missed a troop meeting because of a music lesson or a family picnic. Under the Occupation, troop meetings became cherished occasions for seeing the few friends who could be trusted.

Everywhere, the world Promise and Laws of Scouting, the uniform which identifies a Scout, the pin, the ritual of a troop meeting, took on a new significance. When liberation came, girls who had grown up during the Occupation squeezed into uniforms that had fitted four years before, or gave them to younger sisters and came out into the public squares to join in spontaneous demonstrations. Those who had no pins took bits of exploded shells and hammered them into the shape of trefoils. Second-hand shops were scoured for stray copies of official handbooks that might have escaped destruction.

Gradually, after the liberation, the stories of Girl Scouts during the Occupation were told and written down. Just how many Scouts and their leaders were killed in helping others or in furthering the work of the Resistance can never be known. Most Girl Scout offices in Europe were able to destroy their records before the Nazis took over, and most Scouts and Guides were reluctant to talk about what they considered "only their sworn duty". Therefore while much of this book is a matter of official record,

many of the exciting stories were told to the author by the girls themselves.

Some names are known, but cannot be revealed even now. This is a protection for the brave girls who fought for freedom against a ruthless enemy. As one veteran Guider explained:

“After the last war, the names of the members of the resistance movement in all countries were made known so that they could get the credit they deserved for their patriotic work. When the Germans occupied a country during the second World War, the first people they arrested and usually killed were the members of the underground armies in 1914 through 1918. You see, they knew that these people and their children would not be afraid to fight them again”.

So, although all the incidents are true, the names of the girls have been disguised. Either initials or pseudonyms have been used in almost all cases. Only in this way could the story of the work of individual Girl Scouts and Girl Guides in the Underground now be revealed.