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Agent Zigzag: A True Story Of Nazi Espionage, Love, And Betrayal



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF A SPY AMONG FRIENDS
A New York Times Notable Book of the Year
A Washington Post Best Book of 2007
One of the Top 10 Best Books of 2007 (Entertainment Weekly)
New York Times Best of the Year Round-Up
New York Times Editors' Choice
Eddie Chapman was a charming criminal, a con man, and a philanderer. He was also one of the most remarkable double agents Britain has ever produced. Inside the traitor was a man of loyalty; inside the villain was a hero. The problem for Chapman, his spymasters, and his lovers was to know where one persona ended and the other began. Based on recently declassified files, *Agent Zigzag* tells Chapman's full story for the first time. It's a gripping tale of loyalty, love, treachery, espionage, and the thin and shifting line between fidelity and betrayal.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Over and over through the years as I've read books about real life spies ("Comrade" Kim Philby and Sidney Reilly among others) I've been struck by how much more amazing these non-fiction stories were than those concocted as would-be pulp fiction thrillers. I've also been struck at how all the best spies were anything but good people, and they shared traits of cruelty and self-love that bordered on sociopathic narcissism. Ben Macintyre's biography of Eddie Chapman gives us a man who continues that dubious tradition. This page-turner is fact-filled and well-written and the life it tells of outdoes anything fiction has cranked out in quite a while. It's a very enjoyable read that presented the history of someone I personally had never heard of before I was introduced to him in this

book. Eddie Chapman was no James Bond or even a Sidney Reilly, but he was one of the boldest, most brazen con men ever to serve a nation or a cause, and in so doing he found some redemption from the wrongs of his earlier life. From his days as a roguish charmer who infiltrated high society and first infatuated and later blackmailed rich women in the most callous and base ways imaginable, this safecracker, thief and extortionist found himself sprung by the Germans early in the war when he was then serving a fifteen-year sentence in an English prison in the Channel Islands. The charismatic Chapman, as liked by his German liberators as by those who'd known him back home, was then recruited by the Nazis as a spy who agreed to do their bidding and sabotage a British aircraft factory in Hertfordshire. He parachuted back onto his native soil during the busy Christmas season of 1942, only to prove his ultimate loyalty by going to the British and offering to in turn spy on the Germans.

Ah, the story of Eddie Chapman; long awaited and finally produced (actually two of them on the same day, but the thrust of "Zigzag" by Booth ruled it out for me.) I had read Masterman's "The Double-Cross System in the War from 1939 to 1945" which gave Chapman six pages, seen the movie "Triple-Cross", and wondered what the story really was. The movie bore no resemblance to the truth as usual, but finding out the truth in spy stories is always a realm where educated guess and conjecture must fill in the frustrating blanks. Chapman's story rings true in every respect and well worth the read over the 2-4 nights it provides. Earlier reviewers have exalted or condemned Chapman, so allow me to state that essentially all spies/agents have a screw loose and a yen for danger, excitement and feeling special. They operate with governmental assistance well above the law -- a heady role that must in itself be its own reward. Few if any spies for western democracies have been justly rewarded for their endeavors, as such rewards are generally denied under the rubric of maintaining security. Most ex-agents are relegated to obscurity and penury while some are "terminated with extreme prejudice" (killed) if they are considered as security risks. In this respect, working for a totalitarian government like that in the old USSR has its rewards, as they tend to resettle ex-agents in government positions. There is something about a democracy that makes a spy untrustworthy to the public and unworthy of its respect. As such, Chapman was no exception. Agent handlers or case officers are usually like Ryde, Chapman's last British handler -- bureaucrats playing it safe and willing to sacrifice their agents.

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