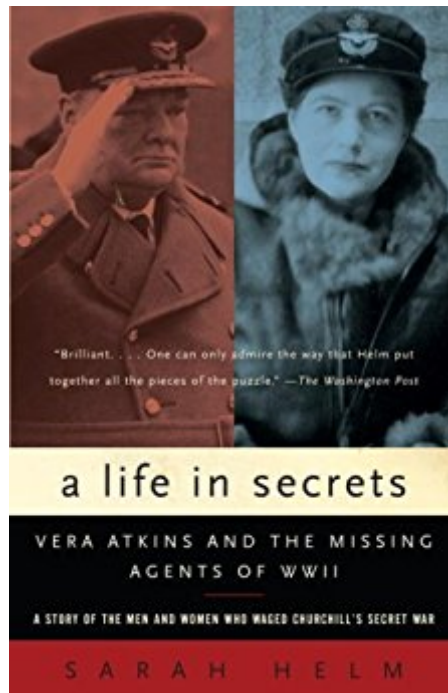




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# A Life In Secrets: Vera Atkins And The Missing Agents Of WWII



## Synopsis

From an award-winning journalist comes this real-life cloak-and-dagger tale of Vera Atkins, one of Britain's premiere secret agents during World War II. As the head of the French Section of the British Special Operations Executive, Vera Atkins recruited, trained, and mentored special operatives whose job was to organize and arm the resistance in Nazi-occupied France. After the war, Atkins courageously committed herself to a dangerous search for twelve of her most cherished women spies who had gone missing in action. Drawing on previously unavailable sources, Sarah Helm chronicles Atkins's extraordinary life and her singular journey through the chaos of post-war Europe. Brimming with intrigue, heroics, honor, and the horrors of war, *A Life in Secrets* is the story of a grand, elusive woman and a tour de force of investigative journalism.

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## Customer Reviews

Churchill's line about Russia, that it was "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma," is an apt description of this fascinating book about spymaster Vera Atkins and the missing agents of

WWII. "A Life in Secrets" tells the riveting story of the heroic agents who parachuted into France to aid the anti-Nazi resistance. It painstakingly documents their movements behind the lines and their fates in the last years of the war. In the process, it slowly reveals the mysterious character of Vera Atkins, a Romanian-born Jew and, technically, an enemy alien, who recruited and trained women agents for the French section of Britain's Strategic Operations Executive. "A Life in Secrets" is a great piece of investigative journalism and far more exciting (and heartbreaking) than any fictional spy novel I've read. Each chapter takes you deeper into the layers of personal danger and bureaucratic intrigue. Leads seem to take the story in one direction, only for it to be derailed or redirected elsewhere. Just when you think you know what has happened, more information is discovered that puts a different spin on things. Throughout the book, the heroism and sacrifice of the agents makes you ache for answers about their fates. And you root for Vera Atkins' persistent efforts to account for and honor her missing agents. I agree with everyone here who has praised Sarah Helm's outstanding research and writing. The number of people she interviewed, the extensive war documents she quotes, and the multiple verifications she obtained to confirm information result in an extraordinary achievement. This book is so layered. It's not only an important history of Britain's spy network in France, it's a major biography of the mysterious Vera Atkins. It includes dozens of shorter biographies of secret agents, military officers, concentration camp survivors, SS officers and prison guards. There's perspective on the deteriorating circumstances of the Jewish community in Romania and Hungary in the 1930s and lots of information on the war crimes prosecutions in 1945-47. My only warning to readers is to be patient and really take the time to carefully read this book. The large numbers of people, places and times can be daunting to keep track of but your patience will be rewarded. I've read it twice to fully appreciate it. The Anchor Books edition includes a map and list of characters at the beginning which are helpful references. Highly recommended.

fascinating time in history; well written about Vera Atkins' background, her service during WWII and most fascinating about her search for her agents in the aftermath of the war. Sarah Helm writes a picture of this woman that was carefully researched and does not embellish or sentimentalize any part of this biography while still providing the emotional reality of this difficult period. highly recommended

A wonderfully written (although stretched a little too far) and researched work indeed. It brings home the thousands of unknowns that people lived with during World War 2, the lost lives of so many

brave souls. Heroine Vera Atkins seems vastly interested in the females who gave their lives to their brave beliefs... a trite disappointing, yet the dedication of those girls and women were brilliantly displayed.

A sober biography of MS Atkins. It is good because it is very thorough and the only biography of Vera Adkins. I thought the author a bit cynical at times, looking for character defects, about this great woman doing a great and responsible job. Every biography of every SOE hero mentions Vera Adkins appreciatively. So, reading this is like finding a key to all spy stories. God bless this woman (Vera) and may she rest in peace. A good read. I think I shall read through it again in a couple of years.

This book is in many areas an eye opener and gives the live story of Vera in relation to SOE etc. Like a number of books on this subject it does tend to cover the same ground a number of times when people are giving their accounts to the writer. So, it is a "bit in depth" for some who may read it but, it is worth the effort. The double agents, the faults of SOE top brass and those even further up the ladder come to the fore. In my opinion many agents will have been sacrificed to give false information to protect the final D-Day invasion and it is unfortunate that some were betrayed without acknowledgement of their bravery. I thank the writer for the effort that has been put into this work.

This was a very engaging read. I enjoyed this book although I thought it did go on a bit longer than I wanted it to. It revealed much about the intricacies of the SOE, in World War II. I was interested in following up after reading Leo Mark's book "Between Cyanide and Silk". This was a new perspective on some of the players mentioned by Marks, taken from a different vantage point. The book was very well researched, paralleling the book's subject, Vera Atkins' own perfectionistic style. Ms. Atkins was a deeply complex, inscrutable individual who contributed significantly to the War effort in England. As with many historical figures involved with espionage and intrigue, they can be seen in retrospect as many faceted, complicated characters, motivated by sometimes opposing forces. The more I read the more complicated she became. That's more true to life; things aren't as neatly wrapped as we'd prefer. She was a complex figure who played a major role in the operations of SOE. Ms. Atkins' personality is explored in depth in this book with many questions raised as well as some answers provided. Espionage is a complex field with many twists and turns and many questions left unanswered. The book is also disturbing in recounting the horrors the SOE agents were subjected to by the monstrous, criminal elements of Gestapo/SS. It is horrific hearing about

the abuses and torture they were subjected to, which raises their level of heroism to a higher degree. The book was fascinating to me, holding my interest and again educating me beyond what I thought I had already learned, as painful as it is.

Very good read...the life of Vera Atkins is worth remembering. This also gives more info on some of the people who went to France to help in the underground during WWII.

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