

Voices of War

Life Story

Natalie 'Lily' Sergueliew
1912- 1950



WWII, MI5 Intelligence, Natalie Sergueliew, 1912, Main

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Name: Natalie 'Lily' Sergueliew

Code name/alias(s): TREASURE, alias in London - Dorothy Tremaine

Date of birth: 25th January 1912

Place of birth: St Petersburg, Russia

Nationality: Russian, French citizenship

Date of death: 17th May 1950

Place of death: Michigan, United States

Burial place/memorials: Solon Township Cemetery, Solon, Leelanau County, Michigan, USA

Unit(s): MI5, Abewhr

Network(s):

Service No.:

Rank:

Medals & awards:

Education:

Clubs & affiliations: Free French Forces

Life Story

Nathalie "Lily" Sergueiew (AKA TREASURE) was a double agent who worked for MI5 during the Second World War, under the codename "Treasure". She played a significant role in the [Double-Cross System](#), particularly by deceiving the Germans about the location of the D-Day landings.

Sergueiew was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia. She was the niece of [General Yevgeny Miller](#), but that did not give her family any guarantee of safety after the Russian Revolution in 1917, so they fled to France. Sergueiew was educated in Paris as an artist, and then trained as a journalist aided by her skill in languages as she was fluent in English, French and German. During the mid-1930s she worked across Germany as a journalist, and even interviewed Hermann Göring during her travels. She also decided to cycle from Paris to Saigon (shown right on her bike) but only made it as far as Beirut due to the outbreak of war and there she decided to start training as a nurse.



Prior to the war, German Intelligence made attempts to recruit her but were rebuffed. However she did actually have an interest in undercover work and in 1940 volunteered to work with the Abwehr, the German Military Intelligence. It seems that her real aim was to get sent to England as an agent and turn double-agent, working for the British against the Nazi's. Her Abwehr handler was Major Emil Kliemann who operated out of Paris, and is shown on the right with Sergueiew. This photograph was taken during a meet in Lisbon and sent back to the British authorities. It demonstrates the trust Kliemann placed in her.

He trained her in intelligence gathering and communications techniques, and in 1943 sent her to the UK along with her dog "Babs", from whom she was



inseparable, stopping in Lisbon to collect her radio to communicate back. However she was unable to get a visa to leave Portugal due to her Russian nationality so she went to Spain. Once there, Sergueiew contacted the Madrid MI5



representative to hand herself over as a German spy who was willing to turn double-agent. She was accepted and sent to England to be processed. Sergueiew was given the code-name TREASURE and handled by MI5 officer Mary Sherer. She was a

very effective agent, but also *"exceptionally temperamental and troublesome"* as her personnel file records. She suffered from kidney problems, (which would contribute to her early death) and that might have exacerbated her temper. British doctors had recommended surgery to remove one kidney but she refused. Allowances had to be made to visit her at home in order to discuss plans as travelling was too tiring for her. Quarantine regulations were to cause a particular headache for the British – they meant that she could not take her beloved Babs back with her, and the dog had to remain in Gibraltar. Sergueiew protested heavily and told her MI5 contact that he had to persuade the powers that be to let the dog come. She threatened to quit unless MI5 arranged for her dog to be brought her. Matters came to a head in February 1944 when Sergueiew learned that her precious Babs (now living with her sister in Algeria) had been run over. She informed MI5 that she had a secret signal, which would indicate to Kliemann that she was under British control, and threatened to use it in revenge for the death of

her dog. After a rather heated meeting with Tar Robertson, she eventually revealed the secret code. The death of her dog nearly caused a massive upset for the D-Day plans.

D-Day

Sergueiew met Kliemann in March 1944 Lisbon to discuss what she knew about the Allied plans to invade mainland France and to provide her with the radio to communicate what she was learning in the UK. They suspected some locations in France, as well as Holland and Belgium and it was her job to convince them of the wrong location. In mid-April 1944 she sent the first encrypted false message to the Germans in the middle of the night. This marked the start of almost daily messages that she sent in the run up to D-Day. While the Germans thought she was travelling over the UK to source information, Sergueiew was in fact mostly in Bristol with her friends, recuperating. She passed on messages about tanks and planes as well as false troop movements. She was able to convince her German contacts that the invasion was coming in the Pas-de-Calais area and they strengthened the Atlantic Wall fortifications in that area accordingly. Her deception had been a success and in the early hours of the 6th June 1944, the Allied forces landed on the coast of Normandy, completely surprising the German hierarchy.

Given all the difficulties however, it was no real surprise when she was dismissed a week after D-Day, having done her job successfully. However, knowing her codes, MI5 could continue to transmit pretending to be TREASURE for another five months, and infinitely easier option. Her long messages were re-encrypted by the Abwehr, using the German Enigma machines, and transmitted throughout the Abwehr's network. They provided [Bletchley Park](#) with excellent [cribs](#) for the cryptanalysis of the Enigma messages.

Natalie Sergueliew French identity card.

1368427 Série B

N°

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

101

13.

75

PREFECTURE DE POLICE

CARTE D'IDENTITE

Nom: *Sergueliew*

Prénoms: *Nathalie*

Né le: *25 Janvier 1912*

à: *Petrograd*

département: *Russie*

Nationalité: *Française*

Profession: *Sans*

Domicile: *Paris 17^e*
19, rue Souffray

SIGNALEMENT

Taille: *1m 65*

Cheveux: *ch.*

Moustache: *bleus*

Yeux: *bleus*

Signes particuliers:

Nez: *Dos rect Base hor.*
Dimension moy.

Forme générale du visage: *ov.*

Teint: *rid.*

Empreinte digitale

Signature du titulaire: *Sergueliew*

Servici

Paris de la: *20 NOV 1941*

Carte d'identité

LE PREFET DE POLICE,

Française

3-D - Imp. Chaux (11) 833 10

Letter sent in praise of the work of TREASURE in May 1944
(The National Archives)

Original in SF. 57/32/24(6)
COPY
TOP SECRET

DS.
PA 3590
Treasure.

G.C. & C.S.

26th May, 1944.

My dear J.C.,

I should like you and Robertson to know how much we appreciate the assistance you are giving us in respect of TRAMP/TREASURE and BRUTUS/HUBERT traffic. I have discussed the matter again this morning with the people actually on the job, and I find that about 30% of our success with the whole French network has been due solely to TRAMP and HUBERT: experience in using the material will certainly raise this proportion even higher.

It is seldom that we get such a stroke of luck in this job, especially with traffic so valuable as our French network: so I thought it right that you should know what a high degree of importance we set this end attribute to BRUTUS and TREASURE.

(Sgd.) Denys Page.

Assistant Director.

Major J.C. Masterman,
M.I.5.

MR
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It seems after she was dismissed, Treasure was still causing difficulties. Living in Paris, she was threatening the British with writing her memoirs as she had kept a diary during the war years. Both the British and Americans were keen to censor anything she might write as it would *“undoubtedly be most embarrassing”*.¹ The same letter also notes that she had also fallen out with the American intelligence forces too. They were all trying to get hold of the threatened book in late 1944, by trickery, as Mrs Barton writes – *“I enclose my letter to Treasure. I have tried to make it gossipy and guileless so as to hide my real object of writing to her...I think the best bait to Treasure is to suggest something to her that might annoy the office.”* so deceit seemed to be the only method that would work.

She was reprimanded by the French, British and Americans for her behaviour, and yet she had also been of great use to them. The French were also not happy about any proposed book and in the last quarter of 1944 there was a flurry of communications about her proposed writing. She was referred to the British as “gangsters” in communications and on 13th November 1944, Tar Robinson to Mrs Barton who was another handler, *“she will always be a source of trouble to us, no matter what restrictions we impose on her – short of imprisonment for life.”* These letters do not create a favourable opinion of what was clearly a very difficult agent.

Sergueiew went on to join the Free French forces in England, and after training, she returned to France as a liaison officer working with Displaced Persons. Her last posting was to liaise with the US army officer in charge of the Ehrfurt area (including the infamous Buchenwald camp) Major John Barton (“Bart”) Collings. After a year, he proposed to her and they married in Paris in August 1946.

¹ TNA ref. KV-2-466_02
letter dated 12th January 1945 from Tar Robinson.

They moved back to the US where she died in 1950 of the kidney disease which had troubled her for many years. .

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