

You're Stepping on My Cloak and Dagger

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You're Stepping on My Cloak and Dagger. By Roger Hall. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-8117-0024-0. 219 pages. \$22.95.

You're Stepping on My Cloak and Dagger is a highly entertaining and engaging account of one man's uncommon experiences in the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, during World War II. It is a tale of courage, danger and wit, with a clever turn of phrase on nearly every page. The book appeals to the patriot, the thrill-seeker and the rebel, easily capturing the imagination of the inner spy within each of us.

The author, Roger Hall, writes about his experiences as a young Army lieutenant recruited into the OSS. Hall, the son of a Navy captain and raised in Annapolis among his father's peers, had little awe for authority, so the excitement offered by the OSS seemed to be a perfect fit for him. Hall is quite the storyteller, and his personality, verbal agility and quick wit endear him to the reader.

Not fully understanding the scope of the assignment for which he volunteered, Hall reported for OSS duties almost as an exercise in intestinal fortitude. Greeted by a colonel who regarded him with a mix of awe and pity, he was mournfully told that none of the young OSS officers who processed through the office were married, nor had they ever returned. With a sense of impending doom, Hall began to question his decision to volunteer.

Seeking the thrill and adventure he associates with the OSS, Hall was disappointed when, after his initial training, he was saddled with instructor duty. The duty was designed to fill his time while he waited for the unlikely arrival of 28 Danes who were to complete the formation of his Danish operational group. After four months and the realization that a Danish operational group was not feasible, Hall was "volunteered" for parachute school at Fort Benning.

Parachute school was followed by an assessment phase in which Hall began the "cloak" portion of his cloak-and-dagger training. He recounts the students' attempts to create and maintain cover stories that backed up their phony identities, as well as the cadre's often successful attempts to crack their cover stories and break them down mentally. Hall later obtained orders to the "spy school," which was designed to provide operational training in undercover activities. From the spy school, students were sent out to performing, "espionage missions" in Philadelphia. Each student was given the task of infiltrating various factories or other places of interest. Hall elected to present himself as a wounded war veteran in search of a job. After catching the eye of a secretary, who happened to be the boss' daughter, Hall was invited to a war- bond rally in the company's cafeteria, where he made an impassioned plea for support. He performed so well that his impromptu speech appeared the next day in the local newspaper.

Having effectively demonstrated his ability to maintain cover and to improvise, Hall shipped out to London, but instead of hitting the battlefield, he received a literal five-day crash course at the British parachute school. Upon completion of the course, he learned that his first assignment was to perform a high-risk, night-time parachute drop behind enemy lines to join the French maquis groups. After nerve-racking preparation for the jump, Hall landed safely, only to discover that the lines had shifted and that he had landed behind American lines.

Hall's following assignments got better. On his next assignment, he was chosen to accompany seven German officers through parachute school before dropping them back behind German lines as spies. His job--to determine which one was really a double agent.

Fearing he would never see action, Hall finally found himself in an operational role toward the end of the war, when he was assigned to head a Norwegian operational group and to oversee the surrender of seven German battalions.

You're Stepping on My Cloak and Dagger is an excellent book. Because Hall writes so well, the book reads like a popular spy novel, and the reader sometimes forgets that this is a true account rather than an exciting work of fiction. Hall's sense of humor and irreverence keep the mood light without detracting from the danger and importance of his experiences. Instead, they highlight the humility and unassuming courage with which these unsung heroes fought the war. The only disappointment is the book's length--it is entirely too short, leaving the reader yearning for more.

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