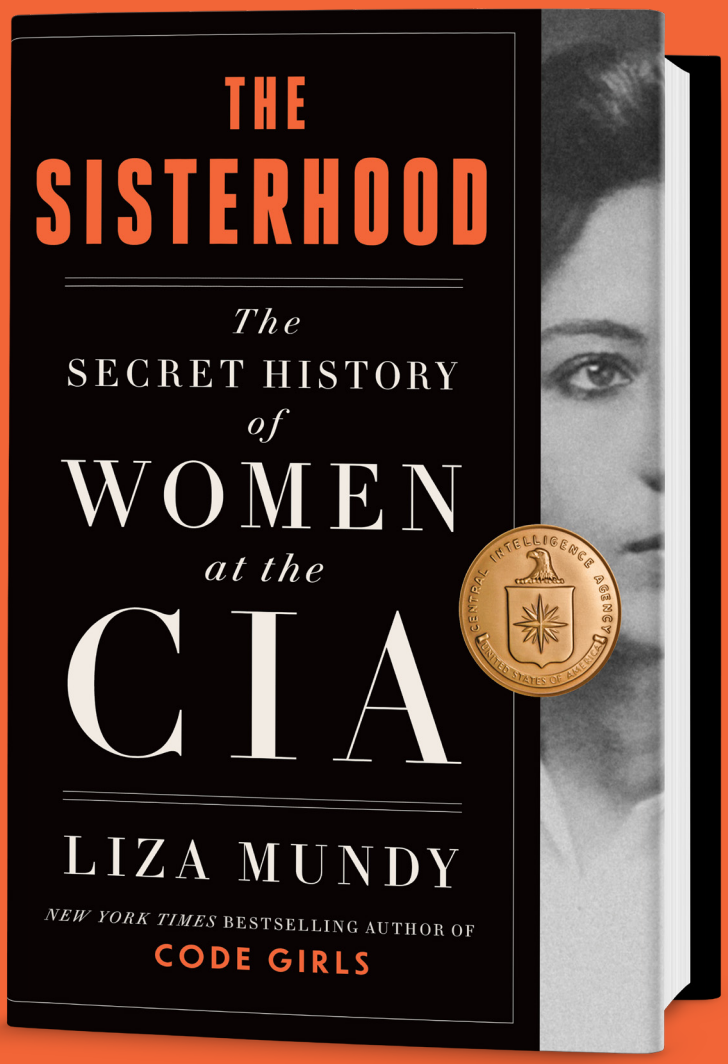
THE SISTERHOOD

BOOK CLUB KIT

LIZA MUNDY



A NOTE FROM LIZA MUNDY

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MEET THE WOMEN OF THE SISTERHOOD

CROWN

A NOTE *from* LIZA MUNDY

The casual reader, or even a close student of US history, might imagine that for most of its existence, only men worked at the Central Intelligence Agency. Countless books exist about America's flagship spy agency—its legacy, actions, errors, achievements—and it's striking how many include the words "man" or "men" in the title: *Honorable Men*, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, *A Man Called Intrepid*, *Company Man*, *The Very Best Men*.

Yet fast-forward to today, and you'd be forgiven for thinking women now practically run the place. And one has: Gina Haspel, who served as the first female CIA director from 2018 to 2021. In recent years, films and television shows have become peopled with female spies, often blond, usually slim, always brilliant, invariably problematic. The best known is Maya, protagonist of Kathryn Bigelow's 2012 film, *Zero Dark Thirty*, a character based on a group of real women who hunted Osama bin Laden.

Much has changed, on the surface, over the seventy-five-year history of the CIA. But what resemblance does reality bear to Hollywood's flock of fierce female spies? Do these women, who sometimes seem as though they arrived on the scene en masse after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, have predecessors? If so, who were those women; where did they come from; and what did they contribute to our national security?

As I researched these questions over the course of three years—enjoying many remarkable conversations with scores of interview subjects—it became clear that there was quite a hidden history to tell about women's role in American espionage. The women were there all along, resourceful, resilient, and relied upon. The male leaders counted on their loyalty, their skills at elicitation, their attention to detail, and their insights, even as the institution sought ways to suppress their voices and set them at odds. It took female spies decades to earn the posts and exert the influence they deserved. These women, like the men, were manipulators and operatives, by instinct and training.

During the Cold War and into the modern era, women worked alone and together, running operations against the adversary as well as—strikingly often—the organization they worked for. This book tells the story of one of the biggest transformations in CIA culture, from a male-dominated institution where women were seen as typists and sexual playthings to one where women propelled some of the agency's key successes. Thank you for joining me as I delve deeper into their stories. I hope you are intrigued and inspired—as I was, and am.

Best,
Liza

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

THE SISTERHOOD *by* LIZA MUNDY

1. *The Sisterhood* captures the experiences of three overlapping generations of women at the CIA. Which figures featured in *The Sisterhood* stood out most to you? What about their stories resonated?

2. How would you describe the attitudes and opportunities women experienced during each of these three generations? Put differently, what were the key differences in the experiences of Eloise Page, Lisa Harper, and Molly Chambers?

3. Mundy presents various examples of women conducting excellent spycraft, where being a woman is turned to the spy's advantage. What instances do you remember from the book? What unique qualities or perspectives might women possess that might make them good spies?

4. Mundy also includes many examples of women in the CIA being treated with disrespect, held back from advancing in their career, or being dismissed altogether. What do we as a society lose when institutionalized sexism—or other forms of discrimination—prevents some people from getting a seat at the table? How might the CIA have been a different place?

5. A number of women in the book are shown to have made unique sacrifices—foregoing marriage and families, for example—in order to pursue their careers as operatives in the field. Do you feel that such sacrifices are "par for the course" in this unusual field, or could the CIA have done more to allow all their employees to work without making such sacrifices in their personal lives?

6. How did some of the male figures discussed in the book inform or influence the culture of the CIA? Which men in the book stood out to you as being particularly antagonistic or supportive in their relationships with women?

7. As Mundy shows, sex has always been present among CIA employees—instances of misconduct and consensual affairs alike, whether in the workplace or between agents and assets. Do you think the intelligence field differs from other industries in this regard?

8. The book gives a new perspective on 9/11, notably its provocative exploration of the experiences of the women analysts of Alec Station—specifically regarding their warnings about al-Qaeda not being taken seriously—in the years leading up to the terrorist attacks. What stood out to you most? Why do you think things played out as they did?

9. In your reading, did *The Sisterhood* celebrate or challenge your sense of patriotism? How so?

10. If you worked at the CIA, would you rather be an operative or an analyst? Why?

MEET THE WOMEN *of* THE SISTERHOOD

Women have been vital to the Central Intelligence Agency since its founding, rising from clerks and secretaries to powerful leaders at all levels of the organization. Despite the institution's efforts to hold them back, many of these women found subtle, sometimes surreptitious, ways to help one another advance. They noticed things men didn't see, becoming some of the toughest, shrewdest operatives the agency employed, while making unique sacrifices.

Courtesy of Lisa Manfull Harper

LISA MANFULL HARPER: An international debutante and the daughter of a US diplomat, Lisa Manfull's childhood in Paris and Belgium in the 1950s laid the groundwork for spy work, teaching her how to blend in and quickly adapt to unfamiliar cultures.

Embarking on clandestine training at "the Farm," the CIA's training facility in eastern Virginia, Lisa Manfull was dismayed to learn that women recruits were steered toward desk jobs. It took Lisa ten years to work her way back to the full Farm course. She finished first in her class.

Lisa developed a feminine approach to espionage, using empathy and emotional intelligence to win trust and elicit secrets. Defying many efforts to undermine her—an enduring specialty of the spy service—she rose to become the first female division chief, or "baroness." She later returned from retirement to join the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

Courtesy of Heidi August

HEIDI AUGUST: As an eleven-year-old girl, Heidi wrote to the CIA inquiring about careers and received in reply a brochure about how to become a clerk-secretary. Ten years later, in 1968, as a college senior at the University of Boulder, she approached a CIA recruiter and was handed the same brochure.

Heidi was posted to Libya, where she witnessed an uprising led by a little-known Libyan officer, Muammar Qaddafi. She moved on to European stations including Finland and Bonn, Germany, where she worked in a typing pool and endured a boss known as "Mr. Peepers."

In 1978, Heidi joined the ranks of the men she worked for, graduating first in her class at the Farm with the aid of quiet advice from Lisa Manfull Harper.

In her initial case-officer posting, in Geneva, Heidi tapped into a wave of rising female discontent, targeting women assets, including one who was seeking revenge against her own exploitative bosses. Following her remarkable success in Geneva, Heidi was appointed station chief in the Mediterranean, followed by postings in the Middle East, Ireland, and India.

The turning point in Heidi August's career came in 1985, when she found herself on the island of Malta when a bullet-riddled Egyptair jet landed at Luqa airport after being hijacked by the terrorist group Abu Nidal. Among the scores of passengers killed was an American woman, Scarlett Rogenkamp, shot point-blank by one of the hijackers as Heidi watched from a control tower. Heidi felt a bond with the dead woman, and, in an era when fighting Communism was still the CIA's central mission, vowed to devote her career to fighting terrorism.

CINDY STORER: In the 1980s, a new generation of women entered on duty. Even then, women were often marginalized and channeled into niche fields—like counterterrorism—where, as it happened, they were perfectly positioned to spot a rising menace. In 1995, the analyst Cindy Storer was among the first CIA officers tracking a stateless group of Arab fighters who had helped drive the Soviets from Afghanistan.

In 1996, Storer began working with the mostly female team of "Alec Station," a unit led by the analyst Michael Scheuer, which sought to divine the intentions of a wealthy Saudi-born businessman-turned-jihadist named Osama bin Laden.

The women worked in a windowless basement unit of the CIA's headquarters. The team struggled to raise awareness even as threats—and explosions—mounted.

Courtesy of Schlesinger Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute

MARY BANCROFT: Allen Dulles served as OSS station chief in Bern, Switzerland, where his success led to his role as foundational director of the CIA. But his top wartime asset, Nazi officer Hans Bernd Gisevius, was mostly handled by Dulles's right-hand woman, the multilingual Mary Bancroft (right). Bancroft is shown here with Dulles's long-suffering and oft-betrayed wife, Clover.

Courtesy of Mike Sulick

SHIRLEY SULICK: The CIA's Cold War operations depended to a surprising degree upon the energy, social savvy, and navigational skills of CIA wives. Among the best was Shirley Sulick, who relished driving elaborate routes that enabled her to shake off KGB tails in Moscow so her husband, Mike, could jump out of the car undetected.

Courtesy of Molly Chambers

MOLLY CHAMBERS: After 9/11 transformed the world she grew up in, Molly Chambers joined a third generation of female clandestine officers. Molly and her female colleagues called themselves "lady case officers" and texted to cheer one another on amid the loneliness and anxiety of overseas postings in isolated and dangerous regions.

Her work included applying new CIA tracking techniques to humanitarian missions including finding some of the "Chibok girls" kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

ELOISE PAGE: After WWII, women were urged to depart government jobs and make room for returning GIs. Among those who stayed was Eloise Page, a highborn Virginian who started as a secretary, learned her bosses' secrets, and rose to become the first female overseas CIA station chief. Notoriously tough, Page got wind of an attempted rebellion by some of the men working in the station. Working her own sources even as members of her staff aspired to unseat her, she ran a successful operation to sabotage the saboteurs.

SUE MCCLOUD: One of the first female CIA spies of the Cold War, McCloud fit the classic espionage officer's profile of someone who runs toward danger, not away. She took a train to watch the Hungarian revolution firsthand; handled a young asset named Gloria Steinem; exfiltrated Soviet defectors; and found many sly ways to bring women into the spy corps.

JEANNE VERTEFEUILLE: Schoolmarmish, single, and singularly relentless, she led a team of cold-eyed female counter-intelligence officers who exposed the traitor Aldrich Ames after the agency's old-boy network had ignored his reckless misbehavior.

BARBARA SUDE: The analyst Barbara Sude, equipped with a PhD from Princeton and a keen nose for a money trail, authored the famous August 6, 2001, President's Daily Brief warning that al-Qaeda wanted to mount a strike on US soil.

GINA BENNETT: As early as 1993, Gina Bennett had written the first published warning about the "wandering mujahidin" and she continued to write prescient warnings based on her strategic instincts, even as she and fellow terrorism "nerds" went ignored by others in the agency.

FRAN MOORE: Overcoming decades of agency discrimination against mothers, Fran Moore rose to head the entire analytic directorate, and sat at the pinnacle during the successful hunt to bring down bin Laden.