

Eloise Randolph Page (1920–2002)

Eloise Randolph Page was a long-time and active parishioner at Christ Church. She was a Sunday school teacher, Vestry member, and directed the Altar Guild and the Flower Committee.

As chair of the Altar Guild, she was a perfectionist. Altar linens would be sent back for re-ironing for the slightest wrinkle. She often brought her personal prayer books—many of which dated back generations in her family—to prayer meetings, and she was a regular reader of the Psalms. Miss Page was known for her Southern heritage and white glove manners, literally. She was born in Richmond, Virginia, into a family that traced its roots to Col. John Page, a founder of Williamsburg and member of the British Royal Governor’s Council, who died in 1692, and the Randolph family who were descendants of Thomas Jefferson’s mother.

She never lost her Southern accent or her old-school view of propriety—and secrecy.

Although the quintessential Southern lady, Eloise Randolph Page was also a spy—the first woman in the Central Intelligence Agency to be named a chief of station.

“She was the perfect Southern lady whose proper exterior allowed her to serve her country in the not always nice world of espionage,” said James L. Pavitt, the CIA’s deputy director of operations. Once, Pavitt disclosed, CIA officials tapped Page to head a new division on technology, to be called the Scientific Operations Branch. Page declined, saying, “I’ll be damned if I’ll be the chief SOB.” So they changed the name, and Page, broke yet another barrier in the CIA’s glass ceiling.

She attended Hollins College in Roanoke, where she majored in music, prompting her mother, Lillian Eloise, to predict a career in the arts. But

the younger Eloise had other ideas, working briefly for the British War Relief Society during World War II and then, in 1942, going to work for William J. Donovan, the first director of the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA.

Known as “Wild Bill” for his “desperate resolution” in commanding infantrymen in France during World War I, America’s most decorated war hero spent the next war trying to professionalize America’s intelligence capabilities. Encouraged by Britain but distrusted by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Donovan assembled an agency on the run. Miss Page served as the general’s secretary. From him she learned the lingo, the tempo and the urgency of intelligence work.

As she moved up the ranks of the agency, Miss Page was sensitive to earning her ranks. She turned down offers to be chief of station, the top CIA operative in an embassy, in two countries where there was little need for spying because they were ceremonial posts that offered no real challenge—or threat.

In 1978, three years after Marxist terrorists had assassinated chief of station Richard Welch, she accepted the post of chief of station in Greece. It was a rough assignment, but she thrived.

Miss Page was also effective at interagency warfare, although apparently she won turf battles more often by force of will than by breaking the diplomatic china. The only time she lost a tussle with the State Department, recalled the CIA’s Pavitt, was when she was denied permission to take her beloved golden retrievers, Jeremy and Lionel, with her to work at the embassy in Greece.

A CIA Trailblazer

She was a lady, but she was not boring. Ron Kessler, author of several books on intelligence,



once interviewed her in a local hospital where she had undergone hip replacement surgery. After talking for a while, she asked if he wanted a drink. Directing him to the closet, he found some Styrofoam cups and a bottle of her favorite sherry, Dry Sac, hidden from the nurses.

The posting in Greece heightened her interest in counter-terrorism, and even after her retirement in 1987 she gave counter-terrorism training to young analysts and operatives at the Defense Information Systems Agency at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C.

When the CIA turned 50 in 1997, CIA Director George J. Tenet bestowed awards to 50 trailblazers who had, often silently, nurtured the agency's history. One of the perks was a lifetime honorary badge that allowed entry into CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. In the tightened security after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, a young security officer who had never heard of Eloise Randolph Page informed her that her badge was not properly coded and denied her access to the building. She was devastated. Friends rallied. The bar code was installed.

Upon her death, at age 82, on October 16, 2002, Tenet issued a statement calling her "an intelligence pioneer." He added, "But she did more than amass a lifetime of unique expertise. From her earliest days of service with OSS, she was a source of inspiration to others. She will be forever."

To those who knew her personally, memories of Miss Page brought a smile.

She was in charge of the choreography and decorations at weddings, and, as with everything else she did, she took this responsibility seriously. The Rev. Stuart Kenworthy, former rector at Christ Church, said he often advised members of wedding parties that they had best mind what Miss Page told them. "She's a major league spy," he sometimes said.

The Rev. Marguerite Henninger Steadman, a former deacon at Christ Church, recalled once telling Miss Page that they needed a tree branch with which to bless animals expected at Christ Church's first Festival of St. Francis of Assisi.

Reverend Steadman only needed one branch, but Miss Page, through either a misunderstanding or a devotion to dogs, all but denuded her favorite tree to ensure that every dog attending the festival was blessed with its own branch.

She came walking down the street toward the church, her arms overflowing with branches, Steadman recalled, saying, "She never held anything back."

This story of Eloise Randolph Page is based on obituaries and feature stories written at the time of her death in the Washington Post, the L.A. Times, and The People of the CIA...A CIA Trailblazer: Eloise Page (from the CIA.gov website).

