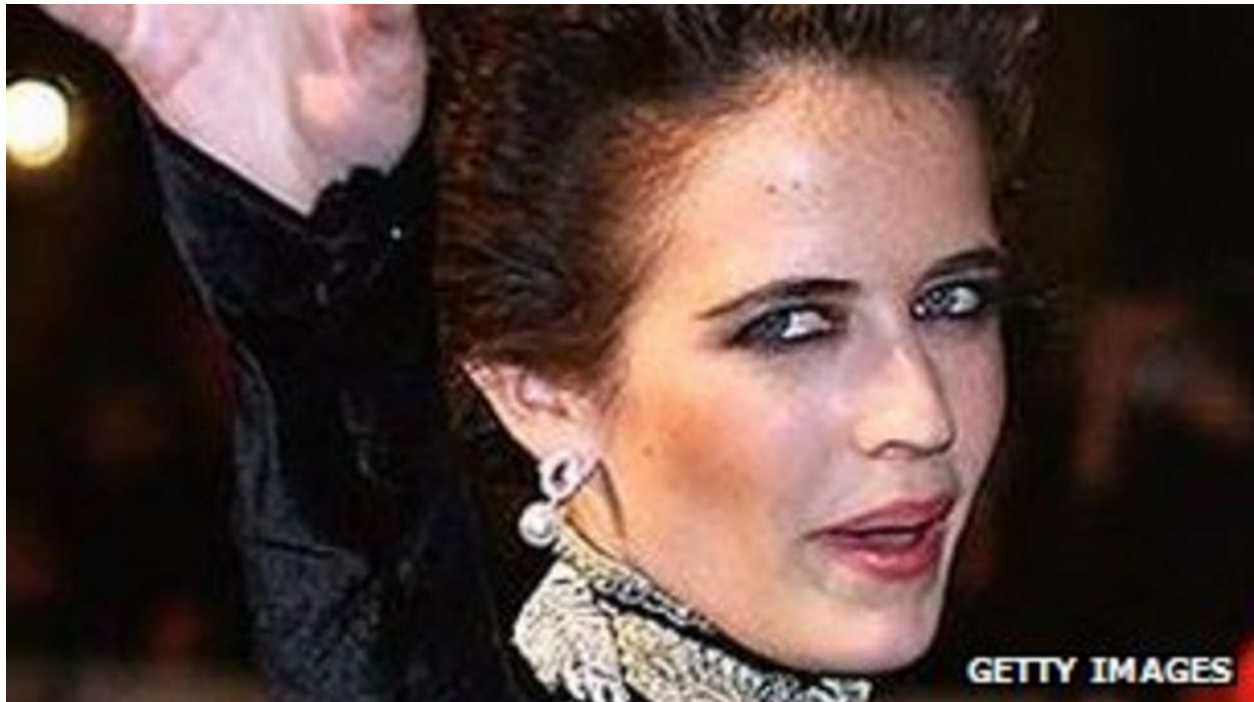


Polish spy Krystyna Skarbek remembered

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Casino Royale character Vesper Lynd - said to be inspired by Krystyna Skarbek - is played by Eva Green in the 2006 film

By Angus Crawford
BBC News

The life of a Polish-born woman, whose daring as a secret agent for Britain was said to have been the inspiration for one of James Bond creator Ian Fleming's most glamorous spies, has been celebrated at a service in London.

Krystyna Skarbek—who it is claimed inspired Fleming to create the spy Vesper Lynd in Casino Royale—died in poverty in 1952 and was buried with little fanfare.

On Friday, however, her extraordinary courage on dozens of clandestine missions during World War II, was celebrated during a memorial service at St Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Kensal Green, north-west London.

The ceremony marked the renovation of her grave by the Polish Heritage Society.

‘High courage’

Krystyna—also known by her wartime secret agent name Christine Granville—was born in Poland but fled to England at the outbreak of war.

After collecting intelligence in Poland, she was parachuted into France where an agent’s life expectancy was just six weeks.

She was later decorated for bravery by both the British and the French.

Her headstone is topped by a tall wooden cross which towers above the other graves.

After being completely refurbished, it shines brightly beside the grey of the other granite stones around.

The inscription has her name, her date of birth and death and lists her awards—George Medal, OBE and Croix de Guerre.

When she was awarded her George Medal, the citation noted her “nerve, coolness, devotion to duty and high courage”.

Her biographer, Clare Mulley, says that, while, it’s hard to pick one moment of particular heroism out of so many, there is one that shows her extraordinary calmness and resourcefulness.

“Once, when she was arrested and was being interrogated quite brutally, she bit her tongue so hard that she appeared to cough up blood, which were the signs of tuberculosis and the Germans were rightly terrified of this disease so they released her,” Ms Mulley says.

Men were said to be mesmerised by her charm and beauty.

But present at the service today was her friend, Iza Muszkowska, 94, and who remembers her more simply.

“Great energy and very quick thinking and very helpful and very kind, a true, real person.”

Sadly, Krystyna’s life began to unravel after the war.

She was married twice and divorced both her husbands.

She ended up working as a cleaner on a cruise ship and finally, in 1952, was murdered by a man who had become obsessed with her.

On Friday, though, the legacy of a woman of courage and spirit—a patriot and a spy—was celebrated.

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