

★ ★ ★ ANTOINETTE MAY ★ ★ ★

# WITNESS TO WAR

A BIOGRAPHY OF MARGUERITE HIGGINS,  
THE LEGENDARY PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING  
WAR CORRESPONDENT



PENGUIN BOOKS

WITNESS TO WAR

Antoinette May is the author of three other books, *Haunted Ladies*, *Different Drummers*, and *Haunted Houses and Wandering Ghosts of California*. Her biographical series "Women Who Paved the Way" is syndicated by Chronicle Features, and she has written a weekly column for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



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*A Biography of*  
**MARGUERITE  
HIGGINS**

*Antoinette May*



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To John Wilson, whose enthusiasm,  
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helped to make this book a reality.



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But there were other witnesses as well, many who provided truly invaluable aid and information in gathering the varied skeins of a narrative that spanned more than four decades and three wars. The only possible means of crediting them seems to be alphabetically. Marguerite Higgins, for all her daring and romanticism, was also a pragmatist. I think she would approve. My heartfelt thanks to:

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*Photographs appear following page 124.*



## PROLOGUE

The January day at Arlington National Cemetery was as gray as the mood of those gathered. Grim and overcast, its appearance underscored the tragedy. It was sad; funerals always are. But the loss was more abstract: that one so young and so vital could be struck down suddenly and mysteriously.

There had been jokes and stories about "La Belle Higgins" dating from World War II. Journalists had talked of "Maggie"—her "liberation" of Dachau, her sad affair with a hero of the French Resistance, and her ingenious methods of stealing stories. "What Makes Maggie Run?" had been a frequent topic of conversation at press clubs and cocktail parties. It had always been difficult to reconcile the young heroine of those faraway adventures with the Washington superstar she had become.

In one pew sat Robert and Ethel Kennedy. Marguerite had always been close to the Kennedy family; someone once dubbed her the "Madame Recamier" of Camelot. Among the familiar figures seated was Vice President Hubert Humphrey. One rarely saw so many political notables assembled away from the Hill. The military brass was also well represented. Naturally the largest contingency was the Washington press corps, which was out in force, boosted by many from the old *New York Herald Tribune* staff.

A huge wreath had been sent by President Johnson. A bouquet was from Jacqueline Kennedy. Others, some who loved Marguerite best, couldn't be there. Ruth Montgomery was in Egypt and Keyes Beech was in Saigon. Jim O'Donnell was on assignment in Berlin. John and Mary Michaelis were in Turkey. They were all much like Marguerite herself,

individuals whose hectic, often tempestuous lives took them to far-off places.

Many of those present were men. Marguerite Higgins was known to have loved not only well but also frequently and for the most part wisely. The controversy that had invariably swirled about her when she was alive promised to be immortal. The turbulence that had always surrounded Marguerite's career—a dazzling climb to the top that left a bitter trail—had produced memories that could never lie buried.

Two small children, unaware of the extent of their mother's fame, listened quietly between their father and grandmother. How proud Marguerite had been of her exquisite son and daughter; how she had delighted in bringing them out to bow and curtsy, say a few polite words, and then disappear with their nurse. Had that busy mother, forever jetting from one trouble spot to another, really ever known her children? How would they remember her in years to come?

The grandmother, another Marguerite, was a young-looking woman with caramel-colored hair and a marked French accent. Today her eyes darted anxiously about the church, as though assuring herself that everything was right. Even in her grief there was a sense of urgency, an air of barely suppressed drama.

Then there was the husband, Lieutenant General Bill Hall, a tall, handsome man, who was years older than Marguerite but well known for his attraction to and for women. What were his thoughts now? There had been a wife and four children before Marguerite. How soon would another woman follow her?

Alone with his thoughts was Peter Lisagor, the distinguished author and columnist, who had been Marguerite's mentor and constant companion during the last difficult years, the man that many were convinced had been more than a friend.

The requiem mass was drawing to a close. The military chaplain had talked about Marguerite's youth, her talent, and her bravery. Soon the legendary reporter who had sat at polished desks in the world's capitals exchanging ideas with Nehru, Khrushchev, Chiang Kai-shek, Franco, and Tito would be laid to rest among the fallen heroes of the wars that she had so ably reported.

How strange it was that this woman who had so often defied death—who had crossed the German lines to beat the United States Army to Dachau and had landed with the marines at Inchon—would succumb to

the assault of a tiny insect. A body that had proved immune to the ravages of wars had been destroyed by a rare tropical parasite.

Mourners left the chapel and took their places in the cortege that would take them to the grave site selected for its proximity to John Kennedy's final resting place. Death was a waste for one so young; but this might have been Marguerite's choice—quitting while still ahead.

Marguerite Higgins, woman of fact and legend, would have had little patience with old age. She would have hated the restrictions, the limitations, and the final inevitable relegation to the sidelines. To die young would have been infinitely preferable to a lingering, perhaps undignified exit. She would have wanted to be remembered above all for her vitality and yes, her style, when there would be no Maggie around to tell the story right.



*PART I*

**WHAT MADE  
MAGGIE RUN**



