Jacob Gurin

I Remember Juliana

Anyone who has spent any time at NSA must certainly be aware that it contains a disproportionate share of memorable characters. And if one's memory is long enough, it is possible to indulge in the pastime of recalling some of the remarkable people who have been associated with cryptology over the years. In August of 1976 the Washington newspapers reported the death, at age 87, of one of these truly unusual people, Juliana Mickwitz. Juliana began her cryptologic career with the Army Security Agency in 1946, retired from NSA in 1963, and continued as a consultant until 1966. Since she stands out in the minds of many of us as someone very special indeed, it seems fitting that her story receive special treatment.

After the funeral at the Russian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist in Washington, I wrote to a number of people who had worked closely with Miss Mickwitz, urging them to provide anecdotes and impressions of her, so that I might memorialize her in an Agency publication. Friends, colleagues, and former students sent in responses, and what follows is a collection of excerpts from their contributions.

While Miss Mickwitz was still living, Glenn Nordin, retired ASA Lt. Col., worked up a biographical sketch with her help, and so was privy to many details of her early life.

Juliana Ernestine Mickwitz was born on May 15, 1889, on her grandfather's estate "Halila" near Vyborg, Finland, then a part of Russia. Her memories of that early life up to 15 years of age included winter sleigh rides over frozen lakes, warm homes filled with plants, peasant huts filled with the smell of cabbage and pork soups, fears of wolves while swimming in the lakes, and preparations to meet the Empress. She was tutored at home and learned the German, Russian, and English languages with almost equal fluency during these years.

In 1903, Juliana entered St. Ann's Gymnasium in St. Petersburg, where she perfected her English, and on graduation, at age 18, in 1907 was awarded a gold medal for excellence.

Approved for Release by NSA on 05-11-2010, FOIA Case # 60995

From graduation to 1914 she lived with her parents in St. Petersburg, where she tutored during the winter months of 1908 and 1909. In 1909, she became personal secretary to Michael Lazareff, who was at that time the President of the Russian Unified Oil Company, owner of oil fields in Baku, and owner and breeder of thoroughbred race horses. Mr. Lazareff had set a goal in horsebreeding "to breed a horse which is worthy of Russia." He succeeded handsomely as may be seen by some of the artifacts and medals now in the possession of the Marjorie Merriweather Post Estate at Hillwood, Maryland. On Mr. Lazareff's death, Miss Mickwitz remained in the employ of his widow Eugénia Lazareff (a cousin of Juliana's mother) in managing the Lazareff estate.[1]

The Russian Revolution and specifically the ascent to power of the Bolsheviks in 1919 brought trial and tribulation to people of property such as Mrs. Lazareff. Juliana helped her to survive and safeguard a small portion of her valuables and money. Although real property, including the oil fields, were confiscated, currency and jewelry was hidden in various places or given to "safe" keeping in banks and other institutions.

In March of 1920, Miss Mickwitz and Mrs. Lazareff contrived with the aid of friends among Polish officials to secure Polish passports and permits to travel to Poland. Further, to shore up the cover of Polish nationality, a story was concocted that Juliana was to marry a Polish doctor.

All people possessing Polish identity documents were gathered together in a Moscow train station where they remained in a detention camp for two weeks (100 men

[1] Lazareff left his horses to the Russian government. Stables from England were transported to Murmansk by the Russian Navy and all horses were given to the Russian Army—it has been said there were enough to equip a regiment of the White Army in battles against the Bolsheviks.

and women together in a single large building) awaiting an exchange of Polish and Russian hostages. Miss Mickwitz remembered this period as a happy time filled with amusing sights such as a Polish countess attempting discreetly to carry on her daily bathing ritual in the conditions of the station.

This period of detention was also one of anxiety, for Juliana had sewn into her girdle over 4,000,000 Rubles in 250,000-Ruble bank notes. She had smeared soap over valuable jewelry in order to dull the brightness of the gems and wore the jewels openly. Fortunately, the confusion and the Polish identity papers permitted Juliana and Mrs. Lazareff to depart Russia without close scrutiny and they arrived in Warsaw, Poland, on 15 April 1920.

From 1920 to 1926, Miss Mickwitz capitalized on her linguistic talents in various jobs, such as translator for the Canadian U.S. Timber Corporation "CANUSA," the British Embassy, the American Consulate General, and the American Military Attaché, all located in Warsaw. For the years 1925–1926 she was employed as a foreign correspondent with KOOPROLNA, a cooperative of Polish Agricultural Syndicates. She spent the years from 1921 to 1924 primarily in the settlement and closing of the Lazareff Estate accounts and in constant struggle to keep the newly formed Soviet Government from gaining control of properties outside of Russia. As the estate dwindled through Soviet confiscation and the banknotes became valueless, Mrs. Lazareff became totally dependent on Juliana and she remained with Miss Mickwitz as her "aunt" until death separated them in 1950.

In the summer of 1926, Miss Mickwitz was persuaded by friends to seek full employment with the U.S. Military Attaché. A meeting was arranged on the occasion of a baseball game (it was her first and only baseball game). Juliana purchased a new hat with bird of paradise feathers and suit for the meeting, and sentiment caused her to retain the hat the rest of her life. It was her "lucky hat," as she was under American protection and employ from that day forward.

The next 13 years were spent with the U.S. Military Attaché's office in Warsaw, where she worked closely with Col R. I. McKenney, General Emer Yeager, Col John Winslow, and General William H. Colbern of the U.S. Army, who all maintained a close correspondence with her until their deaths many years later. In 1925, Juliana became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Memories of the Poles' struggle against the 1939 invasion by the Nazis and the Soviets stayed with Juliana until her death. Life among the ruins with starving animals and humans wandering the streets caused her painful moments even years later. She had a vivid and humorous recollection of spending several days in a cellar shelter with many other people. One night she roused her aunt because there was a smell reminiscent of fresh-mown hay in the shelter. They dressed and commenced to leave the shelter because Juliana thought there had been a gas attack and the gas had seeped into the cellar. However, as they passed a new arrival she recognized the odor as that of a rather modish perfume worn by the newcomer. Sheepishly, they and the others returned to their pallets.

Other anecdotes of her stay in Warsaw included a dinner with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, who visited Warsaw on departure from the Soviet Union. The dinner was arranged by the military attaché so that Mr. Fairbanks and Miss Pickford could hear a first-hand account of the Communist Party and Soviet treatment of the Russian middle and upper classes who possessed property. Juliana was not greatly impressed with Miss Pickford's perception of the Soviet Union and the Communist Experiment as "exciting."

Miss Mickwitz was transferred with the Military Attaché from Warsaw in December 1939 to the Hague, Netherlands, where she again witnessed the arrival of Nazi troops. Of this period she remembered being the last occupant of the American offices, proudly carrying out her duties of inventory, packing, and storage, and most important, flying the U.S. flag, as German soldiers occupied the buildings around her.

From the Hague, Juliana and her aunt moved to Berlin for a brief three-month stay and then on to Athens, where once again the Germans entered and the U.S. Military Attaché departed. In the period from September 1940 to July 1941 Miss Mickwitz attended a Russian Orthodox church in Athens. The priest serving this church, Father Nicolas Pekatoros, befriended Juliana and her aunt. Thirty-six years later, this same kindly charismatic priest officiated at Juliana's funeral services in Washington, D.C.

Leaving German-occupied Athens in July 1941, Miss Mickwitz traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, and the U.S. Attaché there. Although the odds were very great against success, Juliana attempted to get visas to travel to the U.S. She frequently recounted the "miraculous intervention" of her former bosses and students among the attachés who succeeded in getting not only visas, but loans for tickets aboard a Pan American Clipper to fly to the U.S. in March 1942.

Upon arrival in Washington, D.C., Juliana entered the employ of the Military Intelligence Directorate, East European Branch, of the U.S. War Department. From March 1942 to October 1946, Miss Mickwitz translated Polish, Russian, and German documents and became a specialist on Soviet fortifications and logistics. In October 1946, she was awarded a Meritorious Civilian Service

Medal and a reduction-in-force notice that the Military Intelligence Directorate no longer required her services. However, in that same month, the Army Security Agency hired her for employment at Arlington Hall Station.

Juliana also used her later years to take an active part in politics through the Republican National Committee's Heritage Group. She told with glee of the White House reception in 1975 when she told Special Assistant to the President Bill Baroody that he had engaged in deceit by serving rolls which looked like Russian meat pies (piroshki) but contained nothing except bread. Mr. Baroody solemnly promised that this oversight would be corrected. The incident was reported in the Russian newspaper NOVOYE RUSSKOYE SLOVO but Bill Baroody was incorrectly identified as the "Maitre De."

From her parish at St. John's comes the title that would have most aptly fitted Juliana's performance throughout life. In describing her role within the church and within the Russian-American community, an old Guards Regiment officer who had served under Kolchak said that Juliana was the Glavnokomanduyushchaya (Commander-in-Chief). The phrase aptly describes her attitude in accomplishing those duties and responsibilities that were given to her by her adopted country and religion.

Courage and selflessness marked Miss Mickwitz's approach to life's problems. Her charity toward all is well known to many immigrants and infirm friends who received money to sustain themselves on the basis of loans taken and paid for by Juliana. Throughout her later years she continued a simple, almost spartan life for herself while donating to her many favorite charities, entertaining her friends, supporting the needy, with no regrets over the losses of the past. When in 1975 she called an ailing friend to inquire as to his health, she almost casually mentioned that she herself had just returned from the hospital after receiving treatment for injuries sustained during a mugging and robbery outside her apartment. A mugger had grabbed her and her purse. She fought back and hung onto her purse until the attacker dragged her down a flight of stairs. It was only after she had called the police that she discovered she was injured.

In 1948, she and her aunt moved into the Glenayr Apartments on 4th Road North, Arlington, Virginia, which became her residence for the remainder of her life. Many people found their way to her door. For a period of time the tiny apartment housed her brother, his wife, and their daughters (Alexander, Elisabeth, and Maria von Mickwitz). Princess Vera of Russia of the Romanov family stayed overnight.

Those who worked with Julia Mickwitz attest to her role as an organizer, manager, teacher, adviser, translator, and friend within the AFSA/NSA organization. From 1952 until her retirement she worked in a unit of NSA which she had founded, expanded, and kept productive, at times, by sheer will power. In the period 1952 to 1956 she gathered a group of young military (primarily Army and Navy officers and enlisted men) and civil servants who, under her direction and daily guidance, performed many "miracles" through hard work at Arlington Hall Station and elsewhere in the world.

When organizational obstacles or bureaucratic red tape blocked the way to progress, productivity, or her people's advancement, Miss Mickwitz was known to tackle the "chain of command" head-on from bottom to top. One of my favorite recollections is that of the Director, General Ralph Canine, braced against a center post of B Building's first floor as Miss Mickwitz explained the problems faced by her unit in making their valuable information known. The General had inquired as to how "things" were going and 30 minutes later was standing there with unbuttoned blouse and loosened tie. "Action" was taken the next day to resolve the administrative roadblocks. General Canine was not the only chief to feel the force of this adopted citizen. Her opinion and wisdom were passed on both to those who sought advice and those who needed it.

When the NSA completed its move to Ft. Meade, Miss Mickwitz decided to remain at her Arlington home and commute. After investigating bus and car-pool arrangements, she determined that her need was to buy a car and learn to drive. At age 64 she passed the AAA driving school and Virginia tests with perfect scores, bought a new Chevrolet, and, much to the anxiety of her associates and friends, announced that she would drive herself daily to Ft. Meade. She offered her friend Capt. Glenn Nordin the opportunity to ride with her. He thought it would discourage her from driving the hazardous route if he refused and did so. However, on hearing of her rather "bouncy" arrival at Ft. Meade after her first solo trip (she somehow exited the parkway through the entrance) he decided that she must at least have company and someone to take the wheel on bad days. One of her favorite comments was that she knew she had truly graduated from the novice stage when Glenn stopped saying "Ay-ya-Yai!" and slept the entire trip from Arlington to NSA. Juliana continued to drive up until May 1976 at age 87, when she voluntarily gave up her driving privileges and turned the keys to her beloved Caprice over to Glenn, so that she wouldn't be tempted to drive. Of her driving experience, Juliana said that it had probably added ten years to her life because it gave her the mobility to keep up with church and friends. During the later years of her employment with NSA, Juliana helped to organize, found, and build the Russian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist at 17th and

(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

Shepherd Sts., Washington, D.C. After her retirement she began to occupy almost all her time with the church, serving as board member, warden, and teacher. She was the leader of the Sisterhood, organized bazaars and balls, served as secretary and bookkeeper, and in the words of her old friend Father Nicholas Pekatoros, became his "right hand" in church matters both locally and nationally.

Louise Prather says she remembers vividly the fire drills at Arlington Hall. When the alarms sounded, we all left our work areas promptly and lost no time in getting out of the buildings, firetraps that they were. After everyone had congregated outside the gate of B Building, a handsome, dignified woman would emerge from the building, unruffled by all the fuss. Hers was always the stately exit, and the crowd would break into applause.

Ida Currie remembers her kindness and graciousness toward the ignorant, hastily trained linguists, with their pathetically naive questions. She also recalls the warm friendship and hospitality in the marvelous Russian parties she gave and the meals she served. Ida goes on:

"Two scenes as described by Miss Mickwitz stand out in my memory. One was in her aunt's home in St. Pertersburg during the Revolution when people moved into the home with them and hung their washing on the chandeliers. Years later when I saw a similar scene in Dr. Zhivago, the movie, it was easy to believe.

"Another scene from her former life which showed her courage as well as her skill in using the German language took place when she and her aunt were leaving Germany during the war. They were on the train when the Storm Troopers boarded it to arrest her and her aunt, only to be ordered by Miss Mickwitz to leave the train. And they did, permitting the two to proceed and leave the country."

[redacted] tells about living for four years on the same street with Juliana, and being invited to tea with his wife Fia from time to time.

"On one occasion she had invited Russian-speaking friends and us to meet a clergyman who was, I think, the former Orthodox Metropolitan of Shanghai. He spoke Russian and a little English in addition to Chinese, and in introducing my wife, I said to him "Ona govorit tol'ko po franzuskij i po ital'anskij." (She speaks only French and Italian.) I meant, although it wasn't clear, that she spoke these languages *in addition to* English, and that she *didn't* know Russian. He however understood that Fia spoke *only* these languages, and so addressed not one word to her all afternoon, to her great puzzlement and chagrin."

Pat adds:

"Juliana was a Godsend. We were lacking all those dictionaries and other lexical aids which are taken for granted today. She served with neverfailing patience, charm, and good humor as a source of information on "living" Russian."

[redacted] relates his memories of her, beginning with his arrival at Arlington Hall as a new hire in 1951:

"Seated across from me was an erect and stately lady who always wore black and white and who spoke good English with just a trace of something foreign.

"Since I was assigned the same problem as she, Miss Mickwitz undertook the formidable task of teaching me Russian and something about what I was supposed to be doing. Since I had studied Russian for about three months, she started from where I was and taught me nursery rhymes and fables. She often spoke in Russian and, at that time at least, only Charlie Connelly [redacted] understood much of what she said.

"She must have been about 62 at the time, and to a kid of 25 that is a very old woman. But I noticed that she had more energy than most of us, that she bounced about the office as if she ran it, that she was very positive about everything and that she had a sense of humor. She had her own names for most of us: A fellow named Murray was "Muravej," [redacted] was "Petukh," (I understand that [redacted] and I was called and introduced in all sorts of company as Bol'shoj Ivan. Notes on Christmas cards were started: Dear B. I.

(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

"She always drank tea, hot tea, even in the hottest part of summer, and she complained often that the snack bar did not understand that tea should be made with boiling water, not boiled water. She liked to eat an orange in the middle of the afternoon and the sharp smell of it went all over the wing.

"She had one trait which, in my experience, is common to all people from old Russia: She was generous to a fault. Several times a year while we were at the Hall and she lived only a few blocks away, she invited some of us to her house for a feast at lunchtime. If I knew in advance, it was the only meal I ate all day. It started a bit after eleven and often ended around two. It was impossible not to come away stuffed.

"Miss M. had her own ideas about how things were in pre-revolutionary Russia, and she had no patience at all with those who said that Soviet tyranny was just an extension of that which existed under the Tsars. For reasons I never completely understood, she disliked Kerensky as much as she did Stalin. She often said that the average American's view of Old Russia was a picture of an unlettered peasant idly drinking vodka from a samovar.

"I will remember her as I last saw her at the big party at Glenn Nordin's place in her honor a year or so ago. Well into her 80's, she was as erect, as gracious, as strong of voice and limb as I had ever seen her. When I left after

(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

three hours she was still standing (I had never seen her sit during the evening), still laughing, still speaking Russian and English, one as easily as the other. And there was a long table spread with very rich food, all the things she liked: fish and meats handsomely done, heavy creamy desserts, and, yes, caviar. This kind of setting was, I think, the one she liked best: lots of food and drink and lots of friends."

[redacted] reminisces:

"Although she was talented and charming, her biggest asset was her ability to engender a spirit of intense enthusiasm for the new project we were assigned to. She made the work fun as well as challenging. . . .

"As aspiring linguists seeking to master the responsibilities of a difficult job, we all knew there was so much to be learned about the Russian language. And Miss Mickwitz did everything in her power to help us. At lunch time we would all gather in a semi-circle in front of her desk with brown-bag contents spread out before us and read Tolstoj or Dostoevskij. We not only learned about Russian literature but also received instruction in grammar and the structure of the language. Can you imagine a supervisor today gathering his workforce for a study period during lunch time? Somehow, I believe we are all the better for it.

"Above all, Miss Mickwitz was an American patriot. She retained her devotion to her mother country through her religion and her memories but she became a zealous citizen of her new country."

In November of 1975, Miss Mickwitz suffered a small stroke which initiated a serious of strokes leading to aphasia. She described the instant of the first stroke as a vision in which all the words flowed outward from her brain as like the patterns created in iron filings by a magnet. The gradually increasing aphasia troubled her greatly in her last months of life, but to the last she sought to recover the lost words and names of people and places. When in June it was no longer possible for her to live alone, she was taken to the Sacred Heart Nursing Home in Hyattsville, Maryland, where she slept her life away on August 21st.

There you have it, a few words describing a small portion of a life filled with excitement, glamor, danger, and dedicated labor, yet leaving ample room for compassion and generosity. How well I remember discussing with the late Sydney Jaffe the fact that one meets truly remarkable people in our business. Juliana Mickwitz was definitely one of them.

Jack Gurin's current occupation in NSA is speech research and he is concerned with the directions in which technology should take us. But he is also dedicated to the study of the cryptologic past, especially the story of the people who make up the history of cryptology. In the initial issue of *Cryptologic Spectrum* (Fall 1969) he co-authored an article about NSA's first director, General Ralph J. Canine.