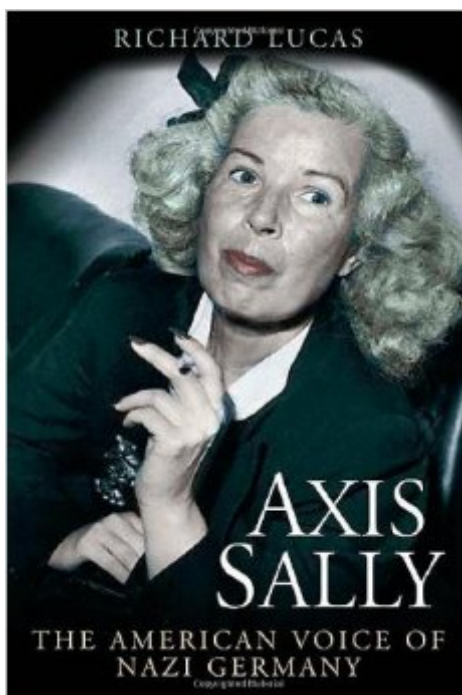


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# Axis Sally: The American Voice Of Nazi Germany



## Synopsis

One of the most notorious Americans of the twentieth century was a failed Broadway actress turned radio announcer named Mildred Gillars (1900–1988), better known to Americans as “Axis Sally.” Despite the richness of her life story, there has never been a full-length biography of the ambitious, star-struck Ohio girl who evolved into a reviled disseminator of Nazi propaganda. At the outbreak of war in September 1939, Mildred had been living in Germany for five years. Hoping to marry, she chose to remain in the Nazi-run state even as the last Americans departed for home. In 1940, she was hired by the German overseas radio, where she evolved from a simple disc jockey and announcer to a master propagandist. Under the tutelage of her married lover, Max Otto Koischwitz, Gillars became the personification of Nazi propaganda to the American GI. Spicing her broadcasts with music, Mildred used her soothing voice to taunt Allied troops about the supposed infidelities of their wives and girlfriends back home, as well as the horrible deaths they were likely to meet on the battlefield. Supported by German military intelligence, she was able to convey personal greetings to individual US units, creating an eerie foreboding among troops who realized the Germans knew who and where they were. After broadcasting for Berlin up to the very end of the war, Gillars tried but failed to pose as a refugee, but was captured by US authorities. Her 1949 trial for treason captured the attention and raw emotion of a nation fresh from the horrors of the Second World War. Gillars’s twelve-year imprisonment and life on parole, including a stay in a convent, is a remarkable story of a woman who attempts to rebuild her life in the country she betrayed. Written by Richard Lucas, a freelance writer and lifelong shortwave radio enthusiast, *Axis Sally: The American Voice of Nazi Germany* is the first thoroughly documented look at this mythologized figure of World War II.

**REVIEWS** – Arguably one of the more odious civilian figures to emerge from World War II was an American woman who broadcast radio propaganda aimed at U.S. troops. . . . What created the monster named Axis Sally? Mr. Lucas makes much of the deprivations suffered by a failed actress, and her frantic quest for fame. – *The Washington Times* – Richard Lucas leaves no stone unturned in telling this rich and compelling story. – *Polish News*, 01/03/2011 – an excellent biography of a woman who, driven by anti-Semitism and ambition, sold out her country. – *Ottawa Citizen* – If you are willing to get a close look at yourself, while reading about someone else, read this book. Mildred was neither the saintly and unsullied victim she sometimes portrayed and some believed, nor the vicious and treacherous villain the government prosecutors painted her as during her trial. She was human—just like you, and just like me. – *Douglas County News*, 01/2011 – a fascinating, well-researched account. – *Publisher’s Weekly*, 01/2011 – reveals the mostly untold story of the unfulfilled

Broadway showgirl who found international fame as the notorious mouthpiece of the Third Reich in broadcasts aimed at millions of GIs. • King Features Syndicate , 01/2011 • With the advent of film and radio, propagandists discovered a whole new world in which to disseminate information, accurate or not, preying on the psyches of enemy soldiers. . . . Whether she was naïve or just an attention-starved actress, Mildred Gillars will always be remembered as the infamous "Axis Sally." • She began to believe the Nazi propaganda she was spewing over the radio and, as the author states, "paid a heavy price for that delusion." • WWII HISTORY, 03/2011 • Lucas is a very thorough researcher but also an excellent storyteller. His book provides not just details of Gillars' life, but also the period details and contemporaneous events that put those details into perspective. • Lucas' blend of excellent research, period detail and well crafted narrative answers the questions of how an American girl put herself on the wrong side of history. • America in WWII, April 2011 "...a fascinating look at the life and trials of Mildred Gillars..." Imagination Café © Blob, 1/23/2011 • a fascinating story of a woman who was so focused on herself and her show business dreams that she was easily convinced to broadcast and work at odds with her own country. • Windy City Times, 02/16/2011 • well-researched • The Advocate(LA) Online, 02/2011, • the first fully documented biography of the notorious World War II broadcaster • Senior Beacon, March 2011 • provides the first full length biography of Gillars • raise(s) some important questions • Jerusalem Post, 3/6/2011 • definitive • a sorry story, and an essential one for those interested in the history of the war. • The Commercial Dispatch, 05/03/2011 • examines one of the most infamous characters of the Second World War • The human drama which is history is filled with tragic contingencies or "what ifs." • Iron Mountain Daily News, 05/16/2011 • For those of you interested in World War II history, there's a fascinating biography available. It's Axis Sally by Richard Lucas. The first half of the book follows her unusual childhood, her failed struggles to build a career in theatre in New York, and her career in Germany before and during the war. The second half chronicles her arrest, eventual trial for treason and her years in prison. Many of her actual broadcasts are reprinted, and the entire book makes interesting if a bit nauseating reading. • Connie Meng, Canton Public Library • The author did a great deal of research and did it well • The media still can do a great job of making and breaking anyone they want to go after. It makes you wonder how Axis Sally would do today spreading her stories through the media. • Feathered Quill Book Reviews • an excellent biography of a woman who, driven by anti-Semitism, sold out her country. • Esprit de Corps, Canadian Military Volume 19 Issue 3 • the subject is fascinating and has been researched well • an intriguing story • Lake Chelan Mirror • thoroughly researched • unearths some long forgotten aspects of

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## Customer Reviews

Richard Lucas has written a biography of Mildred Gillars, an American woman, who was known as "Axis Sally", a nick-name she acquired from her broadcast days in Berlin during WW2. I closed the book feeling sorry for this pathetic woman, who searched all her life for fame, and instead found infamy. Gillars, born of American-Canadian parentage, was a pretty woman with delusions of grandeur about her looks and her acting ability. She grew up nursing the fierce desire to act on the stage or in the movies. Unfortunately, her talent and personality did not allow her to achieve what she wanted. Dropping out of college in Ohio in the early 1920's, she headed for New York, looking for a lucky break. Instead, she got some journeymen roles and toured on road company shows. She stayed on the fringes of show business for the 1920's, and falling in love with a British Jewish man, went to Morocco with him. Eventually, in the early 1930's, she found herself jobless in Berlin. Just entering the Nazi-era, Gillars found work, again on the fringes of Berlin show-business. Falling in love again - and again unluckily - she stayed in Germany during the start of the war in 1939, through the American entry in December, 1941. To support herself as an enemy-national, she went to work for the radio propaganda department. Putting her limited talents to work, broadcasting in English to the American home front and the overseas American troops, she became known as "Axis Sally". Actually, there was another "Axis Sally" - this one broadcasting from occupied Italy - just as there were several women broadcasting as "Tokyo Rose".

"Axis Sally" was the name given to several American women broadcasting for Germany and Italy during World War II. Their broadcasts were aimed at allied troops and were intended as propaganda to demoralize them. This book is about the Axis Sally who was the most-listened-to of those. Mildred Gillars was an aspiring actress who, through a combination of bad luck and bad judgment, found herself the most hated American of the post-War period. How she got to that point is the subject of the first part of the book. The last part of the book details what happened to Gillars after the war. She was accused by the U.S. government of treason, which carried the penalty of death. The story of how she was brought to trial and how the trial proceeded, with all the behind-the-scenes politics involved, is as riveting as Gillars' path from the American Midwest to Nazi Berlin. Gillars is not a sympathetic character. She was apparently motivated by a huge desire for fame. Her anti-semitic radio rants seemed to be inspired by her true feelings as well as by living in Nazi Germany for over a decade. Her love affairs with influential men initially helped her rise in her career but always ended badly. Even after she was arrested by U.S. authorities, she continued to believe that she had done nothing wrong. But she isn't a one-dimensionally evil character either. She became Axis Sally one seemingly innocent step at a time. It was the Depression and after having had limited success in finding acting jobs in New York, she went overseas where she found what seemed a secure job. When that fell through, she managed to get a job in radio. As an American in Berlin, she had to watch her step and just as she realized she should leave, her passport was confiscated.

You might know of Tokyo Rose, the female voice broadcasting to the Pacific to dishearten and entertain our troops approaching Japan in World War II. For some reason, less famous is her counterpart in Berlin, and chances are you never heard of Mildred Gillars. She identified herself on the air as "Midge," but the GIs who were her target audience had various nicknames for her, like Berlin Bitch, Berlin Babe, or Olga. The most famous of her nicknames is in the title of *Axis Sally: The American Voice of Nazi Germany* (Casemate) by Richard Lucas. It's a sad story not just of misplaced political views and stupid anti-Semitism, but of a striving woman with a little bit of talent who could not make it big except through the doors that the Third Reich, mostly by chance, opened for her. Lucas's book is definitive; Gillars did not leave a memoir or diary, but she did leave recordings and transcripts of her work, and the research into these and other wartime and postwar documents seems to have been exhaustive. Gillars, born in 1900, quit her college theatrical studies so she could get on the stage. She worked hard at menial jobs during the day and rehearsals at night. She had one-night-stands in theaters, and joined a stock company, but she yearned for

bigger roles. They never came. She fell in with a dashing Briton (who happened to be Jewish) and followed him to Algiers where the relationship cooled. She went to Europe, and went to Berlin in 1934, and lucked into a job reviewing German movies for *Variety*. The German propaganda machine had a niche to fill. A memo said that German radio needed "speakers who have a command of English with an American accent" because Americans were put off by British accents.

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