

No Crown of Laurels An Account of the Author's Plastic Surgery on Resistance Leaders and of Their Adventures

No Crown of Laurels Secret Surgeon

Borodin G. *No Crown of Laurels: An Account of the Author's Plastic Surgery on Resistance Leaders and of Their Adventures*. London, UK: Werner Laurie, Ltd; 1950. ASIN:B0000CHO0V; OCLC:316094528. 224 pages, hardcover.

Sava G. *No Crown of Laurels*. London, UK: Werner Laurie, Ltd; 1950. ASIN:B0000CHO0V.

Sava G. *Secret Surgeon*. London, UK: William Kimber; 1979. ISBN-10:0718300068; ISBN-13:978-0718300067.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

So, this issue of book reviews starts with the reviewing of three different books by two different authors? No, not so fast. It seems George Borodin and George Sava were the same individual, a Russian exile physician and plastic surgeon named Bankoff who practiced in England. All total he seems to have published over 120 books, most of which he called fiction. He also commonly recycled material and whole stories into his later books. He was born as George Bankoff in 1903 and published under at least six pseudonyms.¹ He also admits to routinely fictionalizing actual accounts of real people to produce his "fictional" works.

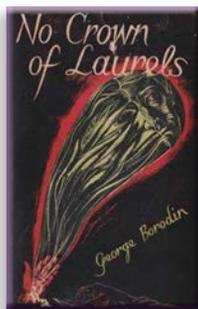
Why bother with this probably plagiaristic author? Well, he was most probably also a Special Forces Operative. First a quote from the publisher:

"Publisher's Note. During the recent war, the author, in private life a famous plastic surgeon, actually operated on various Resistance leaders, who had been smuggled into this country, so that they might return to carry out their arduous duties unrecognized by friends and relations, or more important still, by their enemies in the Gestapo.

In the interest of security, however, he has cast this story in fictitious mould by giving imaginary names to the leading characters and by adapting events and circumstances. Nevertheless, in spirit and theme 'No Crown of Laurels' is a true memorial to those lonely heroes who lived anonymously and died ungrudgingly for the cause of freedom."²

Random stories in personal memoirs of former members of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) would hint or occasionally surface in the post war era concerning cases of plastic surgery or dentistry performed on SOE Operatives prior to deployment during the war but no official records

were found. The most common procedures were bridgework and other dental procedures to approximate the look of "Continental bridgework."³ No precise accounts of actual plastic procedures were available except Dr Bankoff's fictionalized accounts in his two, but really one, book that I selected for this book review. (Another \$10.00 special from Amazon.com.) He died in 1996.⁴ His accounts were discarded as fictional works until seventy years after the end of World War II when the SOE unit records were finally opened in the British National Archives at Kew, outside London.



At that time, personnel files of Bankoff and of several of his patients were discovered. They supported his SOE career but left confused the amount of fictionalization in his works.⁵ One paper from his SOE file interestingly enough was an informed consent form signed by both Dr Bankoff and Danish SOE Operative Flemming Maus and now is in the collection of the Imperial War Museum in London. The purpose of the surgery is listed as "the object of which is to alter my face."⁶

It is a pleasure to recommend a now somewhat validated story of the career of an SOE plastic surgeon. Enjoy.

References/Notes

1. **Born George Bankoff.** Pseudonyms include George Sava, George Borodin, George Braddon, Peter Conway, and Alec Redwood. Retrieved April 13, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Sava
2. **Borodin G.** *No Crown of Laurels: An Account of the Author's Plastic Surgery on Resistance Leaders and of Their Adventures*. London, UK: Werner Laurie, Ltd; 1950:5.
3. **Bailey R.** Perspectives. The secret scalpel: plastic surgery for wartime disguise. *Lancet*. 2014;384:1421.
4. **George Bankoff** obituary. *The Times*, March 21, 1996, p. 23.
5. **Perrin N.** Undercover operators: fakery, passing and the special operations executive. *J Intellig Hist*. 2017;16:43-44.
6. **Bailey R.** The secret scalpel: plastic surgery for wartime disguise. *Lancet*. 2014;384:1423.