

reconnaissance by the division. At the lowest levels, tasks merged with scouting routines for all infantry units, but infantry units were not always available, and were not trained in specialized amphibious techniques. Clearly there was a need for Marine commanders at all levels to have dedicated units equipped and trained to conduct amphibious or ground reconnaissance.

The Raiders and the Marine recon forces illustrate how the lines between elite and conventional forces were often blurred in World War II, at least practically if not theoretically. Other units in the US military fell into the same middle ground. One other famous example was the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), better known as “Merrill’s Marauders” after its commander Frank Merrill. This 3,000-man formation was formed in 1943 specifically as a long-range deep-penetration force in the China–Burma–India (CBI) theater, each man being trained in specialist skills such as demolitions, jungle navigation, survival, camouflage, scouting, and close-quarters marksmanship. Travelling by foot, with support from mules and air drops, the Marauders entered Burma in 1944 and were a deep thorn in the side of the Japanese, attacking formations many times their own size. Eventually, however, combat losses and disease whittled down their numbers until they were no longer combat effective as a unit, and after a truly epic war in the jungle the Marauders were finally disbanded in August 1944.

The Marauders and similar sized elite units were the most visible end of special forces operations during World War II. In complete contrast, however, were far smaller, and more secretive, groups of men and women who would virtually define the notion of special forces, akin to today’s SEAL Team 6 and Delta Force. These were the operatives of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

In July 1940, William J. Donovan was sent to Great Britain by the Roosevelt administration to determine if the island nation had the ability to fight on after the German victories in Western Europe during May and June. Donovan, a Medal of Honor holder from World War I and a successful Wall Street lawyer, met with Britain’s leadership, toured her defenses, and was given access to her clandestine services – the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the newly created Special Operations Executive (SOE). After delivering a report calling for increased American aid to Britain, Donovan advocated the creation of an American centralized intelligence service to combat enemy espionage and subversion, which was believed at that time to be a major factor in the fall of France. On July 11, 1941, by order of President Roosevelt, the



Coordinator of Information (COI) was established as a civilian agency with Donovan as its director. Its mission was to gather and analyze security information obtained from agents around the world and from government departments and agencies. COI was to report its findings to President Roosevelt and to government agencies as he deemed appropriate. The FBI and the military services mistrusted this new intelligence agency, which they believed could threaten their control over American intelligence-gathering.

Donovan first established the Foreign Information Service (FIS) branch under the direction of playwright Robert E. Sherwood, to prepare and distribute “white” or factual propaganda across Europe and the Pacific by radio, print, and film. The Research & Analysis (R&A) branch was created next, to evaluate information obtained by COI and distribute reports based on its findings. Other founding branches included the Foreign Nationalities branch, to interview arriving foreign immigrants; the Field

Five members of OG Team “Donald” beside the “Carpetbagger” B-24 that will drop them over Brittany in August 1944. They wear the British X-type parachute routinely used for clandestine night drops. OSS personnel who successfully completed British parachute training were entitled to wear British parachute wings; the man on the far left displays them below his SF wings. (NARA)

Photography Division; and a Special Activities section for spying, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare. After observing the damaging rivalry between Britain's separate SIS and SOE over the demarcation of responsibilities, Donovan decided to split Special Activities into a Secret Intelligence (SI) branch for intelligence-gathering, and a Special Operations (SO) branch for subversive operations, with the goal of better coordination with the respective British agencies while still operating under a single clandestine organization. Since COI was still getting itself established and directing its efforts towards Europe, it was not involved in the intelligence failure that preceded the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

With America now in the war, Donovan realized that unconventional warfare conducted by COI needed support from the newly established Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Sherwood was concerned that putting COI under military control would hinder the ability of the civilian-staffed FIS to operate effectively. By contrast, Donovan believed that both "white" and "black" propaganda (designed to subvert the target audience by any devious means possible) were best employed under the direction of the military.

President Roosevelt settled the issue by signing Executive Order 9128 on June 13, 1942; this removed FIS from COI and placed it under the new Office of War Information. What was left of COI became the OSS, which would fight an entirely different type of war, and not just with guns and explosives.

ORGANIZATION

The OSS expanded from around 1,000 staff in 1941 to a peak of over 13,000 personnel by late 1944, and at least 24,000 people worked for the OSS at one time or another during its brief existence. Members from all the military branches served in the OSS, and it provided the USMC its few opportunities to engage in operations against the Germans. Civilian staff worked as clerks, analysts, scientists, engineers, and even behind enemy lines. About 4,000 women worked for the OSS either as civilians or in uniform, performing clerical roles and helping prepare missions in operational theaters, and some operated behind enemy lines.

The SI branch gathered and reported military intelligence from operational areas by unorthodox means, to include: the location, movement and patterns of activity of enemy units; the strength and capabilities of resistance movements; the location of infrastructure and industrial targets; and the gathering of economic, political, social, and psychological intelligence. This was accomplished by positioning agents in enemy territory, acting in direct liaison with resistance groups, and obtaining tactical intelligence for Allied troops near the frontlines. SI established its Technical Section to review and distribute agent reports pertaining to the German secret weapons program,

and supplied over 2,000 reports on German atomic research to the Manhattan Project. As well as initiating their own operations, SI fulfilled specific requests from the military services, and also obtained reports from the clandestine services of Allied nations.

SI was divided into four Geographic Desks that coordinated operations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East, each being subdivided into sections devoted to specific countries. While most SI operations originated from the Geographic Desks in Washington, control was exercised by overseas field bases for better coordination and response to local situations. Washington did maintain direct control over SI operations in neutral nations, where the primary focus was on infiltrating agents into and obtaining intelligence from bordering enemy-occupied countries.

SI had difficulty finding enough experienced personnel not only to operate behind enemy lines, but also to staff the coordinating field bases. Consequently, many Americans who were recruited as agents in fact became operations officers (handlers) because of their language skills and knowledge of the local culture, while agents to actually operate in enemy territory were recruited from local populations. SI agents reported their findings to their SI handlers by portable radios, through couriers, or in person if they exfiltrated back through enemy lines.

Within SI, a Labor Section obtained industrial intelligence and recruited agents through the labor unions and organizations in different countries. The Ship Observer Unit (SOU), established in December 1942, gathered shipping intelligence from seamen's organizations and from sailors who had recently sailed from ports in neutral or enemy-held countries or in Germany itself. Informal interviews with – or actual agent recruitment among – seamen of neutral merchant fleets yielded information on harbor installations, naval bases, cargoes, and the current situation in occupied territories. Sailors recruited by SOU also obtained foreign publications, and helped infiltrate OSS agents into enemy territory.

The SO branch of the OSS was created to take the war directly to the enemy through unorthodox warfare – the direct sabotage of enemy targets and training local resistance forces in guerrilla warfare. Small SO teams or circuits sabotaged targets of strategic importance such as factories or railway tunnels, or targets of a tactical nature like bridges and supply dumps. SO teams organized, supplied, and trained local resistance groups with Allied weaponry to conduct a sustained insurgency campaign of sabotage and ambush. Since many of these activities were in direct support of Allied operations, SO units came under the authority of their respective Allied theater commanders. Several sections of SO – such as the Operational Groups, Maritime Unit, and Technical Development – later became separate OSS branches in their own right.

Established as a separate branch from SO in May 1943, Operational Groups (OGs) conducted irregular warfare directly against enemy forces – raiding installations,

ambushing supply lines, occupying key infrastructure to prevent its destruction, as well as supplying, training, and operating alongside resistance groups. In contrast to other OSS operatives behind the lines, OGs always fought in military uniform. Uniquely, OGs were formed exclusively with first- or second-generation Americans of Norwegian, Greek, Italian, Yugoslavian, Polish, German, or French heritage. Recruited from US Army infantry and airborne units, each OG had at least several members who could speak the local language fluently. From August 1944, OGs in Europe were collectively identified as 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion (Provisional), which would be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation; Detachment 101 in Burma was the only other OSS unit to be so honored.

The Maritime Unit (MU) separated from SO in June 1943. Its purpose was to use the sea to place OSS operatives behind enemy lines, supply resistance movements, conduct shoreline reconnaissance, and sabotage maritime targets. Because of this unique mission, the MU developed its own special equipment independently of the Research & Development (R&D) branch.

MORALE OPERATIONS

This branch was established in January 1943, to cause disharmony and chaos among enemy troops and civilians by the use of “black” propaganda – lies and deception, spread by radio broadcasts and printed materials – to subvert enemy morale. A key distinction between Office of War Information (OWI) and Morale Operations (MO) propaganda was its perceived origins: OWI material was overtly advertised as coming directly from the Allies, but MO material was crafted to give the impression that it came from resistance movements or from the enemy itself. Although the direct impact of such methods is difficult to quantify precisely, countermeasures such as denials in official publications and the jamming of radio broadcasts proved that MO activities did not go unnoticed. Several instances were noted of rumors and lies that MO had spread behind enemy lines turning up later in Allied reports or the press.

MO transmitted its “black” radio programs into the Reich from stations around its periphery. The first originated from Tunisia in June 1943 and broadcast into Italy; it was called Italo Balbo after the late Italian air marshal. To create divisions between Italians and Germans it played on Italian suspicions that his death in 1940 was connected with his opposition to Italy’s ties with Germany, and called for popular action against the Fascist regime. Italo Balbo ceased after the invasion of Sicily. Another MO station code-named Boston was established in Izmir, Turkey, to target German forces in the Balkans with news of military reverses and events on the German home front. It operated from August to October 1944, when several direct acts of sabotage forced its closure.

One of the most successful black radio programs was a joint effort with Britain's Political Warfare Executive (PWE) called Soldatensender-Calais, which began broadcasting to German forces in July 1944. Masquerading as a German radio station from that still-occupied French port (and renamed Soldatensender-West after Calais' liberation in September 1944), its programs actually originated from Milton Bryant in England. To maintain a captive audience for its subversive messages Soldatensender played popular American songs that were composed, sung, and recorded in German by artists such as Marlene Dietrich. After the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, Soldatensender broadcast the names of alleged conspirators involved in the plot so that the Gestapo would disrupt the German leadership by pursuing these leads. The US 12th Army Group reported that 90 percent of German POWs taken in the summer of 1944 admitted to listening to this station.

As Allied armies reached the German border MO began to broadcast directly into Germany from stations on the continent. Programs such as Westdeutscher Volkssender and Volkssender Drei conjured up fictitious resistance groups within Germany, calling for a popular revolt against the Nazis. MO recruited German POWs to record broadcasts, including a major whose voice resembled that of General Ludwig Beck, the former Chief of General Staff who committed suicide after being implicated in the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. The convincingly impersonated "Beck" blamed Hitler for losing the war and called for an end to the Nazi regime if Germany was to survive. The Nazis' sensitivity was indicated by their very diligent jamming of further broadcasts from "General Beck."

One technological advantage that MO and PWE exploited in January–April 1945 was a 600,000-watt Aspidistra transmitter in Woburn, England; this overpowered and interrupted German radio broadcasts with false news bulletins, anti-Nazi rhetoric, and rebuttal of key points from the program that was being interrupted. The enemy could not jam these interruptions without blocking their own programs sharing the same frequency. When the Allies crossed into Germany, MO black radio announced false Allied movements and German defeats to confuse the Wehrmacht and reinforce the sentiment that further resistance was futile. MO also sent coded messages to fictitious resistance groups in Germany, with instructions to cross out letters of the Nazi party initials "NSDAP" on public display so only the N and the D remained; Allied troops found examples of this on posters and official party signs in the towns they passed through.

In the Far East, MO established a radio station near Chittagong, India, north of the Burmese border, to imitate the Thai-language Radio Tokyo broadcasts in Thailand. To increase plausibility the station broadcast near the same frequency and immediately before the regularly scheduled airtime of Radio Tokyo. Thai agents were used to announce news about Japanese battlefield setbacks, and this material was even printed



Major General William J. Donovan, director of the US Office of Strategic Services from 1942 to 1945. (LOC)

subsequently in Thai newspapers, since they were required to print what Radio Tokyo reported. Even after the Japanese compelled the Thai government to reveal that the MO broadcasts were phony they remained popular with Thai listeners. MO also established a radio station in Kunming, China, which was heard in the coastal areas occupied by the Japanese; these broadcasts encouraged nonviolent resistance and sent messages to fictitious Chinese guerrilla groups. One program based on a Chinese fortune-teller predicted that a major (albeit unspecified) disaster would directly hit Japan in early August 1945.

MO was also able to broadcast directly into the Japanese home islands, recruiting Nissei and Issei personnel to help produce the Voice of the People program in San Francisco; a Japanese POW was used to ensure that colloquial expressions in the broadcasts were contemporary for Japanese ears. These programs were recorded on disks and flown to Saipan, where, from April 1945 until the war's end, they were broadcast into Japan from an OWI transmitter. Ostensibly originating from Japan itself,

these programs emphasized Japan's inevitable defeat, demanded an end to the war, and called on the populace to drive the militarists from power. Except for the first and last two transmissions, however, the Japanese successfully jammed all 124 broadcasts.

MO also produced printed materials to undermine enemy civilian and military morale, such as leaflets, false newspapers, documents, death notices, and poison pen letters. Leaflets were either air-dropped over a large area of territory or distributed by locally recruited agents; MO also provided resistance groups with materials so that they could produce leaflets on their own. In spring 1945 MO initiated Operation *Cornflakes*, where planes from the US Army Fifteenth Air Force attacked trains carrying German mail and simultaneously dropped mailbags full of MO material nearby; these were recovered during the clean-up, and their contents were mailed throughout the Reich.

The attempted assassination of Hitler in July 1944 provided a unique opportunity for a small MO team in Italy to conduct one of the most successful operations of the war. *Sauerkraut* put a small team of trusted German POWs across the frontlines in Italy



This plate shows different elements of secret intelligence. 1) SI agent; Harrington airfield, Northamptonshire, England, spring 1944. OSS agents who jumped into occupied territory wore British one-piece canvas “striptease suits” to protect their clothing from telltale dirt or damage during a parachute drop. 2) Special Force Detachment; HQ US Seventh Army, Southern France, summer 1944. OSS military personnel wore standard uniforms and insignia, depending on the service from which they were recruited. 3) SI agent; Italy, summer 1944. The Hi-Standard .22-cal silenced pistol was the most useful of the special weapons developed for the OSS. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)

to distribute MO leaflets about the assassination attempt in Wehrmacht rear areas. Private Barbara Lauwers interviewed potential agents from a nearby POW camp and 14 reliable men were recruited; a few days later – supplied with German uniforms, rifles, false identities, and cover stories – these agents infiltrated enemy lines near Siena. Each carried 3,000 MO leaflets of a supposed proclamation by the German commander in Italy, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, that he had resigned and that the war was lost. Each agent returned safely (with useful information about military positions) after posting the leaflets on walls, trees, trucks, and in other places where they would draw attention from German soldiers.

This success prompted MO to send a dozen more *Sauerkraut* missions across the lines in Italy before the war ended. On one of these, agents distributed material from the “League of Lonely German Women,” a fictitious organization conceived by Lauwers to weaken the resolve of German soldiers at the front. The members of the League were supposedly German women on the home front who would freely copulate with any German soldier on leave who showed her a pin made with the leaflet’s heart-shaped logo; the purpose of this offer was supposedly to increase the birthrate for the Fatherland. More conventionally, MO in Italy also distributed leaflets and safe-conduct passes to persuade Czech conscripts and Italian soldiers to desert their units, and it was estimated that they successfully instigated the desertion of at least 10,000 enemy soldiers.

Other printed materials that MO employed were fake newspapers from imaginary German underground political parties opposed to the regime. *Das Neue Deutschland*, a newspaper from a fictitious peace party, was circulated among German troops in Italy, and *Der Oesterreicher* was purportedly produced by an Austrian resistance group. An MO team in Stockholm produced “Handel und Wandel,” a newsletter for businessmen who traveled between Sweden and Germany; printed from July 1944 to April 1945, it combined reliable business news with propaganda about the inevitable defeat of Germany. MO also successfully used the Germans’ own propaganda leaflets against them. *Skorpion West* was a Wehrmacht operation in the fall of 1944 to drop leaflets promising final victory to encourage its soldiers to fight on; MO duplicated these leaflets with plenty of black propaganda designed to subvert this message, thus forcing the Germans to terminate this program.

In the Far East, MO was able to mail black messages directly to Japan in the summer of 1944 when a team based in New Delhi, India, came across a pouch of 475 postcards home, already passed by the Japanese Army censors, from soldiers of a Japanese unit that had since been wiped out. With the assistance of Nissei interpreters MO gently erased the original last messages home and replaced them with news of starvation and a sense of abandonment in the jungle. The altered cards were then placed in a pouch and left south of Mogaung in Burma for the Japanese to find and mail back home.

The same MO unit was able to persuade Japanese soldiers in Burma to surrender by the use of forged Japanese Army documents; Elizabeth MacDonald came up with the idea of forging an order from the Japanese high command allowing troops in hopeless battle situations to surrender instead of fighting to the death. A perfect forgery was produced with the help of a Japanese POW; copies were slipped into Japanese-occupied Burma by Detachment 101, and air-dropped by the OWI. In China, MO was able to establish secret bases behind enemy lines to produce leaflets printed on local presses, which were distributed by Chinese agents and air-dropped by the US Army Fourteenth Air Force.

X-2 COUNTERESPIONAGE

Before X-2 was created in June 1943, SI handled all counterespionage matters. In response to a request by the OSS for access to Ultra decrypts, the British agreed on the condition that the OSS established its own self-contained counterespionage branch, which would be given exclusive access to Ultra and their counterespionage files. X-2

R&A branch amassed a large library of German language materials as references for the reports that it produced for the OSS. Here a civilian employee at OSS headquarters in London browses a shelf of German books on law, administration, and politics. (NARA)





As Allied armies advanced up Italy in 1944, OGs were parachuted into the northern half of the country to work with partisan groups against the Germans. Note on the right the “Special Recon Bn” sleeve title above the Fifth Army patch on this man’s tank jacket. (NARA)

used its special status to check the backgrounds of potential OSS agents, reject proposed OSS operations on security grounds, protect OSS activities overseas from enemy penetration, operate directly against enemy operatives in neutral nations, and capture and turn enemy “stay-behind” agents in France and Italy. The operational headquarters of X-2 was established in London, due to its close proximity to Bletchley Park and the other Allied counterespionage services. While X-2 in London directed operations in Europe and the Mediterranean, X-2 in Washington directed counterespionage operations in the Far East.

X-2 in London was divided into geographic sections for Western Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, and the Middle East, each subdivided into desks dealing with specific countries. In March 1945 these desks shifted their focus to branches of the German Abwehr and Sicherheitsdienst intelligence services. Each of these desks collected and collated all available information into a central card registry that kept track of all persons of interest, and by 1945 the registry had over 400,000 entries. They were color-coded by category: pink for Abwehr or Sicherheitsdienst personnel, buff for political traitors and suspected collaborators, white for friendly persons, and blue for

those still unclassified. X-2 focused on the operational procedures and working relationships of the German intelligence services, and on uncovering their plans for intelligence-gathering and sabotage; it was thus able to disrupt these operations directly through the employment of its Special Counterintelligence (SCI) teams (see below). In late 1944, X-2 created the Art Looting Investigating Unit to help in the retrieval of items of value plundered by the Nazis, but its primary purpose was to obtain information on people who might use these ill-gotten treasures to fund Nazi activities after the war.

In the Far East, X-2 was only able to establish itself at Kunming, China, in September 1944. It soon discovered that the Nationalist Chinese counterespionage effort against the Japanese by General Tai Li's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (BIS) was unreliable or nonexistent. To overcome the obstacles of the BIS having sole authority to arrest enemy agents and the obvious limitations of American personnel operating in the field, X-2 recruited local Chinese agents; several networks were established in both occupied and unoccupied China, and successfully uncovered several Japanese spy rings. X-2 then turned this information over to the BIS, who neutralized these threats. The X-2 card file eventually contained 15,000 entries on people, organizations, and places of interest. Despite this success, OSS bases and operations were effectively infiltrated by Communist Chinese agents.

To take rapid advantage of any intelligence-related opportunities during the Allied advance across France, X-2 established SCI teams that were attached to the G-2 of each US army and army group, working in cooperation with Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) personnel. Traveling just behind (or sometimes just ahead of) US units, their mission was to apply counterespionage information to protect Allied assets, neutralize enemy stay-behind agents, garner intelligence from captured enemy agents and documents, and debrief SI agents whom the advance caught up with. One SCI team captured the Gestapo HQ in Rennes complete with its personnel and files; another captured an Abwehr NCO who led them to several hidden caches of sabotage equipment for use against Allied installations.

As the Germans retreated from France they left stay-behind agents equipped with hidden radios to report on Allied movements; SCI units had to race to find these agents, not only to thwart this activity but also to obtain any valuable intelligence they might provide before they were caught and summarily executed by the resistance. X-2 in London provided the intercepts from enemy agents to the nearest SCI teams, who could then apprehend them and convince them that it was in their best interests to cooperate with X-2. A case officer was then assigned to control the turned agent, providing false information to be reported back to Berlin. This ruse was so effective that the Iron Cross was awarded in absentia to three turned agents.

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Donovan believed that academia could play an important intelligence role by using data and analysis to pinpoint enemy weak points. The R&A branch was thus created and divided into primary geographic divisions for Europe–Africa, Far East, USSR, and Latin America, each subdivided into economic, political, and specific geographic sections. R&A employed prominent historians, economists, sociologists, diplomats, and other experts for their intellectual, analytical, and research abilities. Materials from the Library of Congress, university libraries, research institutions, government agencies, and from OSS agents in the field were used by R&A to produce reports either on demand or on its own initiative. These reports were provided to other OSS branches, the military and government agencies; they dealt with the military and economic potential of enemy and Allied countries, diplomatic issues, and supplementary information for the planning of military operations. In the summer of 1942 R&A was informed of Allied plans to invade North Africa; the entire staff worked day and night for several weeks to produce several detailed reports on Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, much to the astonished satisfaction of the military. R&A also produced the *Soldier's Guides* for American troops stationed overseas.

R&A established a Map Division (MD) that produced unique maps incorporating the economic, political, and military situation of a specific country or area; information on these specially prepared maps included transportation routes, communications, industry, natural resources, terrain, and weather. MD also amassed a large collection of foreign maps to assist with OSS operations overseas. The Central Information Division (CID) was created to collate R&A reports and other information for effective access; CID created a vast card catalog system that allowed it to provide extensive information at short notice. By 1945 over three million 3x5 cards, 300,000 captioned photographs, 300,000 classified intelligence documents, one million maps, 350,000 foreign serial publications, 50,000 books, thousands of biographical files, and 3,000 research studies had been compiled.

R&A sent personnel overseas to directly distribute needed information, forward the latest intelligence to R&A headquarters in Washington, and help analyze data obtained in theater. Operating behind the Allied advance, R&A sought out important publications and reported on the economic and political issues in liberated areas. (Valuable industrial, technical, and military information regarding Japan was also uncovered in France and Italy.) R&A also traveled to former battlefields to examine German vehicles and equipment, recording factory markings and serial numbers; analysis of this information allowed R&A economists to estimate with a certain degree of accuracy the current production levels of equipment throughout occupied Europe. (The new location of an aircraft factory was found when R&A noticed that the inscription on a compass from a plane wreck had changed from “Focke-Wulf Bremen”



to “Focke-Wulf Marienburg.”) Such intelligence was passed on to the Enemy Objectives Unit (EOU) based at the American Embassy in London, whose primary purpose was to identify critical targets for the strategic bombing campaign. Other intelligence used by EOU came from air reconnaissance, POW interrogations, and agents operating on the Continent.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Originally the Technical Development Section of SO, R&D became a separate branch in October 1942 in order to facilitate the development and production of special weapons and equipment used by OSS agents. Very few of these items were produced by R&D directly; it arranged for their development through contracts to government, academic, and corporate laboratories. R&D established a working relationship with the National Defense Research Committee (which later became an advisory board to its successor, the Office of Scientific Research and Development), whose Division 19 enlisted the assistance of such laboratories. R&D’s Technical Division observed the

The OSS Air Crew Rescue Unit was formed in summer 1944 to evacuate Allied airmen forced down in either Partisan or Chetnik territory in Yugoslavia. Lieutenant Nick Lalich (left), team leader of the “Halyard” Mission with Lieutenant Mike Rajacich (right), is interviewing a P-51 pilot who was shot down south of Belgrade in September 1944. Their names are a reminder that the OSS sought out Americans of suitable national heritage to operate in particular countries. (NARA)

development of items to ensure they stayed within the bounds of reality, and then tested them to determine if they warranted full production. R&D also obtained special devices from the British that were manufactured and supplied to the OSS. The Documentation Division of R&D was responsible for counterfeiting enemy documents for use by OSS agents in occupied territory. The Camouflage Division ensured that agents and their equipment remained inconspicuous; this included supplying European-style suitcases to carry clandestine radios, clothing suitable to the operational area, and the correct accessories to be carried in pockets.

FIELD PHOTOGRAPHIC

The Field Photographic branch was the brainchild of Hollywood director John Ford, who believed that a specialized unit of skilled cameramen would be a valuable asset in the support of military operations. Unofficially organized as a US Naval Reserve unit in 1939 (Ford had been a US Navy Reserve officer since 1934), it was funded and equipped by Ford himself to document military activities and conduct photographic reconnaissance. Rebuffed by the US Navy, Field Photo did not become operational until it was recruited by Donovan for the COI in September 1941. Field Photo was part of SI when the OSS was established in June 1942, and did not become a separate branch until January 1943. Despite its predominantly naval character, personnel from all the military services were recruited into its ranks.

Field Photo made three types of films: special projects, strategic, and documentary. The first were films specifically requested by the military or government agencies. Strategic photography involved filming and photographing geographical areas that had intelligence value. For instance, the Intelligence Photographic Documentation Project, a joint effort with R&A in 1944, created by means of air photography a large file of high-value military and industrial installations and important geographical areas in Europe and the Far East. The documentaries were training films for OSS recruits that demonstrated weapons, equipment, and techniques, or general instructional films on

RIGHT: REPORTING FROM THE FIELD

1) "Line-crosser"; southeast France, summer 1944. Local civilians and resistance fighters recruited by the OSS provided tactical intelligence such as the location of German positions, units, and supply dumps. 2) Liaison with the partisans; central Yugoslavia, fall 1943. Intelligence from deep within enemy territory was obtained by OSS liaisons with resistance groups such as Tito's Partisans (though the quality of the intelligence was at the mercy of the Partisans who provided it, and who saw it as a form of leverage). This agent has started to prepare a coded message for his SSTR-1 suitcase radio. 3) SI agent; Germany, spring 1945. One advantage enjoyed by OSS agents in Germany during the chaotic final months of the war was the Joan-Eleanor system; Joan was a hand-held transceiver that could communicate with an Eleanor-equipped Mosquito aircraft orbiting up to 30 miles (48km) away. This agent had to hold Joan no more than 3in (7cm) from his mouth, and in the same exact spot to maintain the frequency and direction of the signal. Joan was best used in clear, flat fields or on high rooftops, as nearby metal and concrete structures degraded its performance. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)





It takes a special kind of bravery to operate in enemy-occupied territory, and especially while wearing full USMC uniform. Captain Peter Ortiz is seen here consulting with the local Maquis as part of the inter-Allied "Union" Mission in early 1944. (NARA)

subjects as varied as the identification of enemy uniforms and life on the Japanese home islands. Field Photo also documented OSS and some other military operations worldwide.

COMMUNICATIONS

The small Code & Cable Section left over from COI had insufficient staff and resources to support clandestine operations overseas, and in September 1942 the Communications branch was established to provide training and communication channels for OSS operations. Military personnel and civilian amateur radio operators with the necessary skills were actively recruited. The Communications branch established a Research & Development Division (not to be confused with the separate R&D Branch) to devise special equipment for agents in the field, and developed and maintained the security of the codes and ciphers used by the OSS. The branch managed the radio traffic between field agents, overseas bases, and OSS headquarters in Washington, which by 1944 was receiving 60,000 messages a month.

SPECIAL FUNDS

After its establishment, Special Funds operated under various branches before becoming independent in May 1944. Its role was to finance secret OSS operations with funds that were not officially accounted for, in order to maintain security. Special Funds obtained intelligence on exchange rates, which currencies could or could not be used in particular places, foreign restrictions on the transfer of currency, and the financial situation of areas where agents operated (errors over the type and amount of currency they were provided could jeopardize a mission). Special Funds also paid sub-agents to conduct missions and covered their equipment costs and operational expenses, handled the salaries of civilian employees working in neutral countries, and provided currency to French and Italian resistance groups to finance their operations.

Special Funds obtained foreign currency through banks, brokers, and black market operations in neutral countries and North Africa. It also had to ensure that the money used in clandestine operations was not traceable. The Gestapo would record serial numbers or leave special markings on French francs before sending them into the black market to trap undercover agents; to avoid this, Special Funds examined all foreign currency against a list of all known marked notes. Fresh banknotes brought immediate suspicion upon an agent, so they were dumped on the floor and walked on until they became dirty and worn enough to be convincing. Gold was also obtained to purchase



Special Force Detachments were established in early 1944 to coordinate OSS activities with the operations of each of the American armies in northwest Europe. Here a convoy from SF Detachment 11 is leaving Third Army's headquarters at Chalons sur Marne as the advance continues eastward. Nothing in their uniforms or equipment sets them apart as OSS personnel. (NARA)



One important source of intelligence was German newspapers obtained in neutral countries and sent to R&A branch for analysis. One key benefit of R&A obtaining foreign publications was its ability to produce accurate statistics on German battle casualties, since German families were required to publish in their local newspapers the death notices of relatives killed in action. (NARA)

foreign currency, or as another medium of payment or bribery by agents, and in the Far East silver rupees and opium were also supplied. One of the greatest challenges Special Funds faced was from other OSS branches who believed that it had stockpiles of foreign money ready at a moment's notice; not realizing that considerable time and planning were involved, many OSS officers made requests to Special Funds only hours before their agents were to be dropped behind enemy lines.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Established as an independent branch in January 1944, Medical Services initially focused on ensuring proper medical care for OSS personnel at training areas and overseas bases. It also assessed the health situation of resistance groups and provided them with medical supplies. Through these channels it was able to obtain intelligence about medical conditions in occupied territory, to forewarn Allied forces and relief agencies of any potential epidemics or other health-related concerns in areas soon to be liberated. Medical Services personnel also provided medical supplies to line-crossers as barter for information, and one side-benefit of its efforts was the ability to obtain political and other non-medical intelligence unavailable to other OSS branches. Medical Services examined abandoned German medical facilities and equipment to determine the health

status of the Wehrmacht, and also gathered information on the Germans' potential to conduct chemical and biological warfare.

OPERATIONS

Given the passages above on Secret Intelligence, Special Operations, and Operational Groups, in this chapter repetitive explanations of the exact functions of OSS missions are avoided. The information the OSS gathered behind the lines included the identification and location of enemy units, targets for Allied air power, and the local political and economic situation. Operations against the enemy in conjunction with resistance, partisan, and guerrilla groups were either indirect – through the sabotage of roads, railroad tracks, bridges, and communication lines – or direct, through the ambush of convoys and the harassment of enemy units and outposts. The OSS also organized, trained, supplied, and advised these irregular formations to support Allied operations directly by attacking enemy positions, capturing towns, rescuing downed Allied airmen, and seizing bridges, power stations, and dams before they could be destroyed by the retreating enemy.

The geographical range of OSS operations was exceptional, from the deserts of North Africa to the jungles of Burma, and from the internecine complexities of Yugoslavia to the underground war against the Nazis in occupied France. It also operated in neutral countries such as Switzerland and Spain. Given the breadth of missions, a complete study here is impossible. Instead we will gain insight into the OSS through three of its primary theaters: France and the Low Countries, Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand, and the Pacific), and China.

SPECIAL FORCE DETACHMENTS

SF Detachments were established in January 1944 to coordinate the operations of each US army and army group with OSS teams and resistance forces operating in their areas. The detachments contained personnel from SI and SO who worked under the G-2 and G-3 of each army or army group respectively; they passed on pertinent intelligence received from either agents in the field or the resistance, or forwarded from London. In August 1944, as the US Army approached Paris, SI in London provided the latest locations of German military depots in the French capital 36 hours after the request was received from an SF Detachment. Agents locally recruited by SF Detachments were sent behind the lines either on foot or by parachute to obtain information specifically requested by US Army units, and sabotage and ambushes by the resistance were also arranged to support offensive operations. SF Detachments also debriefed OSS agents and teams and resistance fighters after advancing American forces overran them.



The inter-Allied Jedburgh teams in France used a mixture of US and British equipment. While the American “Jed” in left foreground wears the M42 US paratrooper jump uniform the others are wearing British battledress and 1937-pattern webbing. Team “Ronald,” seen here, operated in Brittany in August–September 1944. (NARA)

FRANCE AND THE LOW COUNTRIES

February 1943 saw the first OSS agent (independent of any particular branch) infiltrate France from the French submarine *Casabianca* to set up a clandestine radio station in the southern port of Toulon. Other radio stations followed, and while they eventually fell under the jurisdiction of SI, the first official penetration into France by that branch came in August 1943 when the “Penny-Farthing” team parachuted in and set up a base in Lyon. As more SI teams landed in southern France, chains of sub-agents were formed, their information being either radioed to OSS headquarters in Algiers or sent by courier across the Pyrenees to OSS stations in Spain. Intelligence gathered by these networks played a key role in the successful Allied landings on the Riviera coast in August 1944.

In the more challenging environment of occupied northern France, SI participated in a joint operation with the British SIS called *Sussex*, whereby two-man teams of an observer and a radio operator were placed near rail yards, road intersections, airfields, and river crossings to report on German movements. The first Sussex teams were parachuted in April 1944 and, by the use of sub-agents, began reporting on the location of German units, supply dumps, and V-1 launching sites; some of these targets were

bombed not long afterwards. After the Normandy landings SI initiated Operation *Proust*, by which agents gathered tactical intelligence at the direct request of US armies. They would rendezvous with the French Maquis to locate the enemy, and the Proust agent would then report to the Special Force Detachment (see feature box) attached to the specific army for which the agent was gathering information.

As the US First Army advanced into Belgium, its SF Detachment recruited resistance fighters from the Belgian Secret Army to scout, gather intelligence, and mop up bypassed German pockets. Despite this accomplishment, the G-2 at US First Army did not hold the SF Detachment in high regard, and obtained its withdrawal in September 1944 – a decision that contributed to the First Army being caught off guard by the German offensive in the Ardennes the following December.

In September 1944 the SI “Melanie” Mission deployed to Eindhoven in Holland to report the intelligence gathered by the various Dutch resistance groups and by line-crossers.

The first SO agents to land in France in June 1943 were instructors and radio operators to provide assistance to British SOE “F-Circuits” already in place. Each F-Circuit normally had an organizer, his lieutenant, and a radio operator, and recruited, trained, and equipped resistance fighters in its region. SO personnel operated in many SOE F-Circuits, and also established several of their own beginning with “Sacristan” in June 1943. Virginia Hall, who had previously worked undercover in Vichy France for the SOE, organized the only SO circuit to be led by a woman. Hall armed over 400 Maquis who conducted ambushes, derailed several trains in their tunnels, and demolished several railroad bridges in the summer of 1944.

Operation *Jedburgh* was a joint effort between SO, SOE, and the Free French to establish three-man teams that could quickly organize, supply, train, and accompany resistance groups in direct support of advancing Allied armies. In contrast to the regionally rooted F-Circuits, Jedburghs could be parachuted anywhere into France depending on the battlefield situation. To avoid alerting the Germans, General Eisenhower forbade the first Jedburgh team from deploying to France until the night



Major Peter Ortiz (second from left) returned to France as head of the “Union II” Mission that landed in the French Alps on August 1, 1944. Weeks later, Ortiz and three teammates were surrounded while fighting in the village of Centron; they surrendered after the Germans agreed to spare the village. (NARA)

of the Normandy invasion, but soon afterwards teams began parachuting across France. (The Jedburghs were also successful in keeping resistance groups of different political loyalties focused on fighting the Germans instead of each other.)

In August 1944 additional Jedburgh teams were parachuted in to protect General Patton's flanks as his troops simultaneously advanced on the port city of Brest and towards the German border, organizing local resistance groups to block and harass German units. However, many Jedburgh teams were unable to fulfill their mission because they were overrun by the faster-than-expected American advance.

In September 1944 Jedburgh teams were attached to the airborne divisions in Operation *Market Garden* in Holland, to recruit the local Dutch resistance to provide assistance and intelligence and to establish a communications link between the airborne forces and SFHQ in London. The Jedburghs landed along with the paratroopers, which did not allow them sufficient time; many of their radios were lost or damaged, and most teams were unable to fulfill their missions due to the incessant German attacks along the airborne perimeters, though Jedburghs near Nijmegen were more successful. The tri-national Jedburgh team "Dudley" was deployed separately in eastern Holland; it conducted intelligence and sabotage operations, but by the end of 1944 its effectiveness had suffered from disunity among Dutch resistance groups and from German countermeasures.

From June to September 1944, OG teams openly engaged the Germans in infrastructure sabotage and ambushes; paradoxically, they also seized hydroelectric plants and dams to prevent their destruction. On some of these missions OG teams operated alongside the British Special Air Service (SAS), inter-Allied Jedburgh teams, and the French resistance, which they also supplied and trained. With help from the Maquis, OG teams were able to exaggerate their size and bluff entire German garrisons into surrendering; this tactic successfully convinced more than 10,000 Germans to surrender out of the belief that the Americans would treat them better than the French.

BURMA

Detachment 101 was the first SO unit deployed overseas, and recruited indigenous tribesmen in Burma for espionage, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare. This irregular campaign helped the Allies reopen the Burma Road to China and liberate the country from Japanese occupation. Detachment 101 established its base at a tea plantation near Nazira in eastern India in October 1942, and trained British, Burmese, Anglo-Burmese, and Anglo-Indian agents in intelligence-gathering and sabotage. The Air Transport Command agreed to drop supplies and personnel behind the lines in return for Detachment 101 helping to rescue downed airmen. The first agents infiltrated Burma in January 1943 to report intelligence, carry out sabotage, and guide Allied bombers to



This plate shows two Detachment 101 soldiers operating in Burma between 1943 and 1945, supported by a Kachin guerrilla (far right). Before the Kachin guerrillas were issued with US military clothing they fought in their native garb, always with their shortswords strapped across their chests. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)



Detachment 404 based in Ceylon sent teams from the Arakan Field Unit on missions to reconnoiter beaches and rivers on the Burmese coast. This OG team prepares to carry its rubber boats down to waiting British landing craft for an amphibious operation. (NARA)

Japanese targets. Some of the bases established behind the lines had rough airstrips used by light planes to bring in visitors and evacuate the wounded. From these bases Detachment 101 recruited the Kachins of northern Burma, who were very familiar with the jungle terrain; once trained, they became effective guerrillas and radio operators. (Kachin loyalty stemmed from their prewar relationship with Christian missionaries, from the medical care provided for them.) Nisei personnel in Detachment 101 interrogated Japanese captured in these operations, and also led Kachins into action, but only after their faces were carefully studied to avoid them being mistaken for the enemy.

In the spring of 1944, Detachment 101 supported Allied offensives into Burma with Kachin battalions scouting ahead of Allied units, providing flank protection, and attacking Japanese lines of communication. The Arakan Field Unit (AFU) – composed of SI, OG, and MU personnel from Detachment 404 – surveyed beaches and rivers along the Burmese coast, dropped off agents and supported several British landings in the spring of 1945. Based in Ceylon, the AFU was absorbed by Detachment 101 in March 1945. The following month Detachment 101, with close air support, began to

single-handedly clear eastern Burma to make the Burma Road secure. It also harassed the Japanese retreat along the Taunggyi–Kentung road into Thailand, and the seizure of several key towns finally severed the road completely in June 1945. With the Japanese forced out of Burma, Detachment 101 was disbanded in July 1945.

THAILAND

As one of the few independent countries in Asia, Thailand formed an alliance with Japan to maintain its autonomy, declaring war on the United States in January 1942. This declaration was not reciprocated, and the OSS recruited agents from the pro-Allied Free Thai movement. Chinese obstruction delayed plans to infiltrate Free Thai agents overland, and those who were finally inserted in June 1944 were either killed or captured by Thai police. Shortly afterwards the pro-Japanese government was replaced by one headed by Pridi Phanomyong, a secret supporter of the Allies. In September 1944 a Free Thai agent was parachuted in to make OSS contact with Pridi, who had one of the captured agents radio his favorable reply. In January 1945 OSS officers Richard Greenlee and John Wester landed in the Gulf of Thailand from an RAF Catalina and reached Pridi's residence undetected, and Pridi agreed to pass on intelligence to be radioed back by SI agents in Bangkok to Detachment 404 in Ceylon. Unfortunately the information supplied was of little value before SI officers shared intelligence-gathering techniques. Free Thai agents also set up a network across Thailand to radio intelligence back to Ceylon. To show support for the Thai underground and to maintain the flow of intelligence, secret bases staffed by SO and MU instructors were established throughout the country, supplied either by parachute or by C-47s landing at hidden airfields. Japan knew of these activities, but could not counter them effectively before the end of the war in August 1945.

OSS plans to penetrate French Indochina directly had little success. The independent Gordon-Bernard-Tan intelligence network provided the only source of information before it was crippled by the Japanese takeover from the Vichy French authorities in March 1945. The following month the SO "Gorilla" Team that had parachuted near a withdrawing French column was itself forced to retreat to the Chinese border after fighting its way out of a Japanese ambush. Attempts by the OSS to recruit French agents to infiltrate Indochina were frustrated by the lack of French cooperation. A viable alternative was found after the OSS received reports of skirmishes between the Japanese and the Viet Minh, the Communist underground movement led by Ho Chi Minh astride Vietnam's far northern border with China. In July 1945 the SO "Deer" Team parachuted in to train and supply the Viet Minh for sabotage operations. Christened the "Bo Doi Viet-My" (Vietnamese–American Unit), it was still training when news of the Japanese surrender arrived on August 15, 1945. Meanwhile

the “Quail” Team, a POW Mercy Mission with OSS personnel, landed at Hanoi’s Gia Lam airport and evacuated Allied POWs without incident.

THE PACIFIC

Although the OSS was not allowed to operate in the Pacific Theater, Admiral Nimitz did accept the transfer of an MU (Maritime Unit) Operational Swimmer Group to help form UDT-10 in Hawaii in June 1944. The US Navy created UDTs after the heavy casualties suffered at Tarawa, where reefs and shallow water forced Marines to wade ashore under fire. UDTs were trained to scout the approaches to landing beaches, demolish any natural or man-made obstacles, and help guide landing craft to the beach. UDT-10’s first assignment became the only UDT mission launched from a submarine during the war, when a five-man team was assigned to the USS *Burfish* to scout the Yap and Palau Islands in August 1944; three men did not return from a nighttime reconnaissance of Gagil Tomil, and their fate remains uncertain. The rest of UDT-10 operated from the transport USS *Ratheburne* when they surveyed beaches and demolished coral for the landings at Anguar and Ulithi Atoll in September 1944. UDT-10’s last wartime missions were scouting landing beaches at Leyte in October 1944 and Luzon in January 1945.

CHINA

The exclusion of the OSS from the Pacific Theater made Donovan look to China as the best opportunity for operations against Japan. Tai Li, who headed the Chinese intelligence service BIS, did not want an American service functioning in China outside his control. He was amicable with Captain Milton Miles, leader of the US Naval Group China that reported on Japanese coastal shipping and the weather in support of US Navy operations in the Pacific. Miles believed that absolute cooperation with Tai Li was the only way to operate successfully in China, so, anxious to establish itself in-country, the OSS joined with Tai Li and Miles to form the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO) in April 1943, with Tai Li as its director and Miles as his deputy. Miles also doubled as the head of both the US Naval Group and the OSS in China. The OSS provided supplies and instructors to SACO, but its plans to gather intelligence independently were thwarted by Tai Li, who wished to conceal China’s actual internal situation from the Americans. Miles, who did not want the mission of the Naval Group jeopardized by another organization that he directed, was unhelpful, and Donovan personally fired him from the OSS in Chungking in December 1943. Although OSS personnel served in SACO for the rest of the war, Donovan believed the OSS would have more freedom of action by joining forces with another American unit in China, the US Army Fourteenth Air Force.



The OSS teams operated in a diverse range of tactical scenarios. Here we see 1) “Camel” Team, southeast China, spring 1945; 2) Jedburgh team, central France, summer 1944; 3) “Union II” Mission, southern France, summer 1944. Note how many OSS personnel in China wore Nationalist Chinese uniforms. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)

General Claire Chennault's legendary status in China as the founder of the "Flying Tigers" was beyond reproach, even by Tai Li. In April 1944 the Air and Ground Forces Resources and Technical Staff (AGFRTS) was formed with staff from both the OSS and Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force. AGFRTS allowed the OSS to gather intelligence independently, and to help Chennault employ his limited air assets effectively. In April 1944 the Japanese launched a series of offensives in central and southern China to seize USAAF bases and a secure land route between Beijing and French Indochina. With nationalist Chinese forces routed, AGFRTS teams conducted a sabotage and ambush campaign in an attempt to slow the Japanese advance, and were forced to demolish several USAAF bases before they could be captured. AGFRTS was fully absorbed into the OSS in April 1945.

In July 1944 OSS personnel participated in a mission to Yen-an to liaise with the communist Chinese and assess their potential as part of the "Dixie Mission." They provided the mission with a communication link with Chungking, supplied the communists with radio equipment, demonstrated demolition techniques, and joined the communists as observers on operations behind Japanese lines. The communists provided information on Japanese units and allowed the OSS to microfilm their collection of

OG instructors use a derelict C-47 fuselage to demonstrate the proper jump procedure to future Chinese Commandos. (NARA)



Japanese documents and newspapers. Not all these interactions went smoothly. The OSS wanted to use Yen-an as a base to infiltrate SI teams into northern China, Manchuria, and Korea, and also to arm and train the communists for sabotage operations against the Japanese. These plans were shelved after the communists demanded a \$20 million loan (which was the total amount of unvouchered funds budgeted to the OSS in 1944). However, the Dixie Mission in one form or another remained in Yen-an until March 1947.

In May 1945 the SO “Spaniel” Team parachuted into northern China to enlist the Chinese for intelligence and sabotage operations, but were detained by the communists, who had not been informed in advance. The communists wanted to maintain their monopoly of providing intelligence, and to prevent any independent contacts that might reveal – contrary to their propaganda – their fairly tranquil coexistence with the Japanese. The Spaniel Team was held incommunicado until the end of the war.

In February 1945 the new CBI theater commander, General Wedemeyer, ordered the OSS to be made an independent command as Detachment 202, in charge of all American clandestine operations in China. This allowed SI to set up independent networks in southern China. The Japanese did not occupy large rural areas but kept their garrisons in the towns, and SO teams exploited this when leading Chinese guerrillas on a sustained campaign of sabotage and ambush. In April 1945 OG personnel started training the Chinese Commando units that became their country’s first paratroopers, and in July, accompanied by their OG advisors, the Commandos supported a Nationalist Chinese offensive in southern China. Deployed by parachute or sampan, they disrupted river and road traffic and helped seize an airfield. Two other Commando units served as the honor guard for the surrender talks at Nanking in August 1945.

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

R&D helped develop special weapons and equipment for the OSS, but most of them either never left the drawingboard, never progressed beyond prototypes, or never found a use in the field. For reasons of space, only those that saw use with the OSS will be mentioned here, and the full range of standard-issue military weapons that formed the bulk of OSS technology will not be considered.

SPECIAL WEAPONS

The OSS issued its own variant of the Sykes-Fairbairn knife, with a thinner blade than that issued to the British Commandos. While this made it very effective for slashing and stabbing, the tip of the brittle blade often broke. One OSS veteran only saw them being



Elements of OSS Research & Development. 1) An engineer is preparing to test-fire the "Big Joe 5" crossbow, designed to silently take out sentries and guard dogs. 2) A member of the Field Photographic Unit. 3) A US-based analyst using a Recordak Model C microfilm reader, which accepted both 16mm and 35mm film and was specifically designed to view microfilmed copies of newspapers, mechanical drawings, and diagrams. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)

used to open ration cans; others believed that the standard issue M3 trench knife was more practical for the field.

The United Defense Model 42 (UD-42) 9mm submachine gun, known as the Marlin after the company subcontracted to manufacture it, was initially produced for the Dutch East Indies forces, but the OSS took over the contract when those colonies fell to the Japanese in 1942. They used it worldwide, and supplied significant quantities to resistance forces. Able to fire at 750rpm, it was noted by OG teams as being handy at close range; two 20-round magazines were clipped together in staggered fashion for fast reloading.

With its suppressed discharge and lack of muzzle flash, the ten-shot HiStandard .22-cal silenced pistol was ideal for eliminating enemy personnel at close range virtually undetected. Its built-in “silencer” reduced the sound of discharge by 90 percent, and out

In the radio hut at Detachment 404 HQ in Ceylon, radio operators wait to receive transmissions from agents in the field. The OSS employed a wide variety of radios, including the civilian RCA receivers seen here. Note the paperback novel beyond the typewriter (center); agents had to memorize a particular line from a specific book to use as the base code when encrypting messages for transmission back to base. (NARA)



of doors the remaining report (similar to snapping fingers) could easily be smothered by everyday background noise. HiStandard also produced a special barrel for the M3 “grease gun” submachine gun that also reduced the sound of discharge by 90 percent; this saw action with Detachment 101 in Burma and SO teams in China.

The Liberator pistol did not originate with the OSS but from the Military Intelligence Service at the War Department. Cheaply made out of seamless tubing and stamped sheet metal, the Liberator was an extremely crude single-shot .45-cal smooth-bore pistol with an effective range of only 10ft (3m). It was shipped in great numbers to Europe and the Southwest Pacific, where it did see action in the Philippines. Plans to drop Liberators to resistance groups in Europe were shelved because of fears that spreading thousands of these un-numbered weapons across the countryside would pose a serious postwar criminal problem. The OSS received a large number of Liberators, but neither OSS personnel nor guerrilla groups were interested in them since vastly more reliable weapons, either Allied-supplied or Axis captures, were readily available. Most of the Liberators that found their way to OSS personnel were kept simply as souvenirs.

SABOTAGE

Many of the sabotage devices employed were improved versions of originally British inventions. Composition C was the primary explosive used by the OSS against infrastructure targets, in designations C-1 through C-3 indicating different combinations of explosive and plasticizing ingredients. The Limpet was designed for maritime sabotage; a waterproof plastic case holding 2½lb (1.1kg) of Torpex could be attached to a steel hull with six Alnico magnets. A variant called the Pin-Up Girl used a pin-firing device instead of magnets to secure itself to a wooden hull. Used on land, the Clam was a plastic case holding a ½lb (0.2kg) plastic charge that could be attached to any metal surface with four magnets.

The firing devices used by the OSS to initiate explosions were (with three exceptions) of British origin, and relied upon a timing device, the pulling out of a pin, pressure, or pressure-release. The US-designed Mole was intended to derail entire trains inside tunnels; its photo-cell eye, normally exposed to daylight, would trigger an explosion when blacked out by the train entering the tunnel. Another sophisticated US device was the Anerometer, a 6in (15cm) cylinder attached to a short fabric tube of plastic explosive. Designed to destroy aircraft in flight, it was initiated by a drop in external atmospheric pressure, normally at 1,500ft (457m) after takeoff.

The Pocket Incendiary was designed to spontaneously combust after a time delay; containing napalm powder and several acids, it would burn by itself for 8–12 minutes after ignition of a celluloid capsule of potassium chlorate by two Signal Relay Incendiary Pencils using regular match-heads. The Firefly was an incendiary device

OPPOSITE: Lieutenant Ray Kellogg of the US Naval Reserve at work photographing wreckage of a German aircraft shot down near Bizerte, North Africa. Kellogg was in charge of OSS operations in this theater. (NARA)



small enough to slip into a vehicle's gas tank or a fuel drum; small holes admitted gasoline, causing two rubber washers to swell, which triggered a small amount of TNT and magnesium.

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

To allow OSS agents to transmit intelligence while operating undercover, in late 1942 the Communications branch developed the Special Services Transmitter Receiver Model No.1 (SSTR-1). This had three components – a transmitter, a receiver, and a power supply – that were all compact enough to fit together in a small suitcase. Various power supply units gave a total weight range of between 20lb (9kg) and 44lb (20kg). The SSTR-1 had a transmission range of 300–1,000 miles (480–1,600km), and messages were tapped out with a telegraph key on a continuous wave; it used interchangeable crystals that allowed it to operate on different frequencies. Unfortunately the SSTR-1 was fragile, and many were damaged during parachute drops. Its power pack proved troublesome due to poor connections, shorts, insufficient insulation, and overheating. The 6-volt battery that powered it had a short life, but could be recharged in the field with portable thermocouple chargers that burned wood or gasoline. The SSTR-1 itself could be powered by a hand-cranked generator, car batteries, or from the electrical current of a building. OSS agents also used SOE communication equipment including the Type 3 Mk II and Type A Mk III suitcase radios; these weighed 32lb (14.5kg) and 39lb (17.7kg) respectively and had a transmission range of at least 500 miles (800km).

OSS agents who transmitted while undercover always risked being located by German radio detection equipment, often operated in mobile vans, and the Joan-Eleanor (J-E) system was invented in response. J-E came in two components: Joan was an SSTC-502 transceiver powered by two 1.5-volt and two 67.5-volt batteries; its signals could be received by an orbiting plane from 30 miles (48km) away and, weighing only 3½lb (1.6kg), its small size made it ideal for undercover work. Joan worked best in clear, open surroundings. Its counterpart was Eleanor, a 40lb (18.2kg) unit consisting of an SSTR-6 transceiver, wire recorder, antenna extension support, manual directional control, dynamotor, and a power supply containing four 6-volt wet cell batteries. Mounted aboard an aircraft, Eleanor could record 60 minutes of transmissions verbatim on a spool of wire. Eleanor was located in the bomb bay of several British-supplied USAAF Mosquito PR XVI's; at 30,000ft (9,144m), Eleanor had to be turned on every half-hour to keep it from freezing. J-E's narrow UHF beam made detection impossible and codes unnecessary. J-E proved successful when it was first used in occupied Holland in November 1944, and was supplied to several teams that parachuted into Germany in 1945. The Eleanor operator and the agent were able



In contrast to other OSS branches, the role of OGs was to engage with the enemy directly; they thus wore conventional uniforms, although they were unlikely to receive the treatment guaranteed by the Geneva Convention if they fell into German hands. Here we see 1) OGs in France, 1944; 2) Greece, summer 1944; 3) Norway, spring 1945. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)

to talk with each other from 10–30 miles away (16–48km), and clarify any details being reported. Special broadcasts by the BBC were used to schedule these rendezvous between the agent and the circling Mosquito.

The OSS also used standard US Army Signal Corps radios for field operations. The 35lb (16kg) SCR–300 was a backpack radio that transmitted voice messages over ranges of 3–5 miles (5–8km). The SCR–694 could transmit voice and coded messages with a transmission range of 15–30 miles (24–48km); it weighed nearly 200lb (91kg), but could be broken down and carried in several components, and SO teams in China powered it with the GN–58 hand–cranked generator. For small unit actions, SO and OG teams used the SCR–536 “handi–talkie” with its 1–mile (0.6km) transmission range. Each SF Detachment was equipped with three jeep–mounted SCR–193 radios and a truck–mounted SCR–399. The SCR–193, with a range of 15–60 miles (24–96.5km), would maintain contact between liaison officers in the field and the SCR–399 at army headquarters; the SCR–399, with a range of 100–250 miles (161–402km), would pass and receive messages to and from SFHQ in London.

CIPHERS

Although “code” is the term generically used, “code” and “cipher” are distinct. Codes have entire words replaced by other words, letters, numbers, or symbols. Ciphers have individual letters in messages replaced by other letters.

OSS agents initially coded their messages with a double transposition system. The agent would select a specific line from a poem, song, or book; this would identify a transmission’s origin and become the agent’s base cipher when preparing messages. For security reasons, only the agent and the headquarters that received the messages knew what the line was. This system proved to be too time–consuming and vulnerable to garbled radio traffic and human error. It was soon replaced by one of the most unbreakable ciphers ever devised: the one–time pad (OTP).

Invented after World War I, this was first supplied by the SOE before the OSS provided its own version. The OTP is a polyalphabetic cipher where any letter in the alphabet can be substituted for any letter in a message without a set key or pattern. The letters on the OTP to code the message were completely random, so two identical letters in one plain text message would have a different cipher letter. The OTP was a tablet of 100 sheets of nitrate rice paper that could easily be burned, dissolved or eaten. Each sheet was glued on top of the next so that only one could be used at a time. Rows of random letters in sets of five were printed on each sheet. The letters of the plain text message would be written under the letters on the OTP. Next, a table of letters printed on a silk handkerchief was used to obtain the needed cipher letters; the cipher letters used in the transmission were where the plain text and the OTP letters intersected on

the table. This process was reversed when an OTP message was deciphered. The agent and headquarters required the exact OTP for this ciphering system to work. Each sheet could only be used once, and each following sheet would provide a coded message dissimilar from the previous one. This meant that if an OTP and its conversion table fell into enemy hands it still could not be used to break other OTP messages because of the randomness of its letters.

UNDERCOVER: CLOTHING, DOCUMENTS, ACCESSORIES

The OSS bought, scrounged, or made civilian clothing for its agents sent into occupied territory. Continental styles were noticeably different from American or British fashions. The OSS at first obtained suits, overcoats, hats, shoes, and other items from European refugees and second-hand shops, but since these only offered a limited supply authentic copies were tailor-made, perfect down to the parallel threading of the buttons. Towards the end of the war the OSS faced a shortage of German-style clothing, so one OSS supply officer followed American troops into Cologne and collected clothing and personal items from abandoned shops before anyone else could loot them. The OSS also obtained German uniforms from POW camps or captured stocks; these were mostly worn by German and Austrian agents who went behind the lines to gather intelligence or spread MO material – one female agent parachuted behind the lines dressed as a German Army nurse. Before going on these missions, some agents actually infiltrated POW camps in German uniforms to gather intelligence and to learn the current colloquial style and mannerisms of German soldiers.

The most important things an agent carried were identity papers and any occupation permits necessary to operate freely. For instance, in France an OSS agent needed an identity card, ration cards (for food, clothing, and tobacco), census card, occupation card, certificate of residence, medical certificate (to excuse the agent from labor or military service), work permit, and birth certificate. Agents operating in Germany required additional papers such as travel permits and police registrations for employment and housing. Depending on an agent's cover, a foreign worker passport or a Wehrmacht pay book would also be issued. R&D forged most of these documents from genuine examples collected by undercover agents; German papers were gathered in captured towns, POW camps, and from dead enemy soldiers. German typewriters, stamps, watermarks, ink, and blank cards and permits were highly sought-after by R&D personnel, since genuine documents that were simply filled out withstood greater scrutiny than those fabricated from scratch. Some documents were difficult to forge, such as German ration cards that were valid for only four weeks at a time. Recently bombed cities or areas were listed as the agent's place of birth or current residence to make background checks of his cover story difficult. Any mistake could doom an agent;

OSS TRANSPORTATION

Royal Air Force Special Duty squadrons based in Britain and the Mediterranean to support SIS and SOE operations also dropped OSS agents into Europe. A Halifax parachuted the first OSS agents into France in June 1943 and Germany in September 1944. SD squadrons of Halifaxes and Stirlings also dropped Jedburgh and OG teams, while Lysanders landed OSS agents individually in France. In the Far East, RAF Liberators, Dakotas, and Catalinas supported OSS operations in Burma and Thailand.

In November 1943 the USAAF established the 801st Bombardment Group (redesignated 492nd BG in August 1944) with B-24 Liberator squadrons that had previously flown patrols against U-boats; their long-distance night flying experience made these aircrews ideal for supporting clandestine operations in Europe. Nicknamed the "Carpetbaggers," they flew their first missions in January 1944 from Tempsford, and later from Harrington. Each glossy black B-24 was specially modified to drop up to eight agents and 12 supply containers. After September 1944, with most of Northwest Europe liberated, a few Carpetbagger squadrons were transferred to Italy, while other Carpetbagger B-24s had their

armament removed to fly supplies into Sweden for the Sepals. Supply missions were also flown for the resistance in Norway and Denmark. Due to the strong anti-aircraft defenses over Germany the slow B-24s only flew over the southwest corner of the Reich, while faster A-26 Invaders were used to drop OSS agents over the rest of Germany. The agent in the A-26 would sit on a hinged plywood floor in the bomb bay; once over the drop zone the agent would fall out when the floor folded from beneath him. The last Carpetbagger mission was flown in April 1945.

Along with Royal Navy MTBs and Italian MAS boats, US Navy Patrol Torpedo boats of RON 15 landed OSS agents throughout the western Mediterranean from 1943 to 1944. RON 2 (2), based at Dartmouth on the English Channel, had three PT boats under the command of Commander John D. Bulkeley; these landed and picked up OSS and other Allied agents along the French coast in the spring of 1944. The PT boats were painted a shade called "Mountbatten pink" that made them almost invisible in the dawn and dusk. All the operations of RON 2 (2) were accomplished successfully without ever coming into contact with the Germans.

one was caught when his work permit was found to have been signed supposedly in two different cities with the same handwriting.

The simplest things carried in agents' pockets could support or jeopardize their cover stories. Before they left for the field they were searched for such obvious items as London theater-ticket stubs. One agent maintained his cover in France by carrying Lotterie Nationale tickets and a letter sent to his Paris address that he had someone write for him. Another agent infiltrating Rome even lined his pockets with Italian tobacco shavings.

Cameras were issued to OSS agents, the Minox miniature camera being the ideal. Manufactured in Latvia, the Minox remained scarce despite a nationwide search by the OSS. To make up for the shortage the OSS developed its own miniature Matchbox camera (this came with German, Swedish and Japanese labels to make it look like a simple box of matches, hence its name). It could take 34 pictures on 16mm film, but could only be reloaded in the dark. Agents knew that a camera would be incriminating if discovered during a search, so many either did quick sketches of important targets or just committed them to memory.



Here are early (1) and later (2) models of the LARU, a self-contained underwater “rebreather” device designed to allow OSS Maritime Unit swimmers to conduct maritime sabotage undetected. We also see UDT-10 (3), operating in the Central Pacific, summer 1944. Although no longer part of the OSS, most of the personnel of UDT-10 were swimmers from the Maritime Unit. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)



Detachment 404 also dropped off agents on coastlines throughout the Indian Ocean, although P564 – an 85ft (26m) Air Sea Rescue launch – was limited by its short 500-mile (805km) range to infiltrating agents along the Burmese coast. (NARA)

In the event of capture, OSS agents were supplied with the rubber-coated potassium cyanide “L” (for lethal) pill for a quick suicide. One female agent used one in 1945 after being shot by a German patrol while attempting to cross into Switzerland from Germany.

MARITIME EQUIPMENT

Invented by Dr Christian Lambertsen, the Lambertsen Amphibious Respiratory Unit (LARU) was adopted by the OSS after it was demonstrated to them in a swimming pool in November 1942; the LARU came in four different models, weighing 28–35lb (10.5–16kg). This self-contained apparatus allowed a diver to stay undetected for several hours underwater at depths of 50–100ft (15–30m) by preventing any telltale bubbles escaping. Pure oxygen at a pressure of 2,000lb (909kg) per square inch flowed from a cylinder attached to the diver’s chest into his face piece and a rubber “lung” on his back. The exhaled air went through a canister of lime above the lung that absorbed the carbon dioxide before being breathed again by the diver. Divers had to discipline

themselves to breathe slowly and evenly for the CO₂ to be completely absorbed; breathing too quickly overloaded the LARU and caused discomfort. The diver was also supplied with oxygen from the lung, which was replenished from the cylinder when necessary. The LARU proved its worth in July 1944, when Operational Swimmer Group 2 used them to swim undetected through the antisubmarine nets at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Despite this success, the LARU was never employed on missions against the enemy.

The surfboard was a pneumatic rubber floatation device that could be inflated in minutes with a compressed air cylinder. It was 10ft 6in (3.2m) long, 3ft (0.9m) wide and weighed 310lb (141kg), and could carry two men and their equipment to a total of 900lb (409kg). It was propelled by a silent electric motor at 5 knots (9km/h) with a range of 15 miles (24km). It was successfully used by the MU on the Adriatic coast of Italy in the summer of 1944. The MU also employed a two-man kayak for coastal operations; this had a plywood frame fitted together with metal pipe and covered in rubberized canvas, and was propelled by two collapsible double-bladed paddles. Carried in two backpacks weighing 50lb (22.7kg) each, the 16ft 6in (5m) kayak could be assembled in five to ten minutes, weighed 104lb (47.3kg) and had a carrying capacity of 800lb (364kg). It was widely used by MU teams for reconnaissance along the Burmese coast in early 1945.

The OSS were a breed apart during World War II, true “cloak and dagger” operatives that would, in the Cold War, evolve into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as well as inform the tactical development of several other secretive special forces units. For when the war ended in September 1945, the wartime elites, whatever their nature, faced the inevitable cutbacks and restructuring. Yet the idea of elite troops, dedicated to special-purpose operations, was now well established at the heart of the US military. It would take the Cold War to cement that idea in more permanent units and formations.