

Skokoski's Journey

Service in Three WWII
Special Operations Units

by Troy J. Sacquety

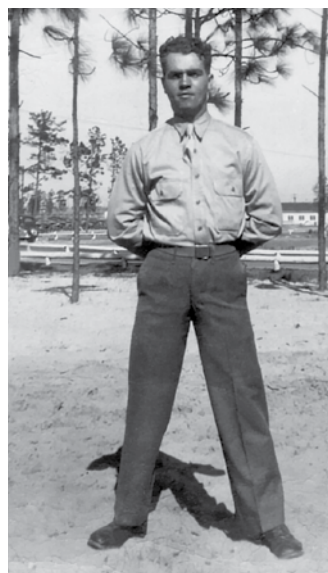
The U.S. created a number of Special Operations units during World War II. While a few of them, such as the First Special Service Force, Merrill's Marauders, and elements of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) are well-known, others have slipped into anonymity. Even within the OSS, there are some units and projects that remain largely unknown. One OSS veteran, former Sergeant (SGT) Frank J. Skokoski, served in three obscure Special Operations elements in WWII. These units, BARDSEA, Operational Group ADRIAN, and the Special Allied Airborne Reconnaissance Force (SAARF), exemplified the inter-allied cooperation needed to rid Europe of Nazi domination. This article illustrates three main points. First, it provides snapshots of the unique units in which Skokoski served. Second, it describes some of the peripheral missions that Special Operations units assumed during WWII, even if they were never fully executed. Third, it emphasizes how, despite the best planning and preparation, the rapid development of events can render some Special Operations missions unnecessary.

Skokoski followed an indirect route into Special Operations. Born in 1924 in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, to Polish immigrants, Skokoski grew up speaking his parents' native language at home and English outside. A week after finishing high school in 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army.¹ His first assignment was as a medic in the 79th Infantry Division, but Skokoski did not find that duty very exciting. He volunteered for the paratroopers, admitting later that he did "not even know about the extra pay."² In August 1943, after completing the Basic Airborne Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, Private Skokoski received an assignment to the 541st Parachute Infantry Regiment at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. In December 1943, he participated in the Knollwood Maneuvers in North Carolina that tested the viability of a division-sized airborne force.³ Then, early in 1944, he left the 541st and deployed by ship to Northern Ireland as an airborne replacement.

The twenty-day voyage was not pleasant because German U-Boats still roamed the Atlantic and had sunk hundreds of Allied ships during the previous two years. As



Sergeant Frank J. Skokoski, right, a member of both the Special Operations (SO) and Operational Groups (OG) Branches of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), served in three special operations units in WWII.



Private Skokoski while at Camp MacKall, NC.

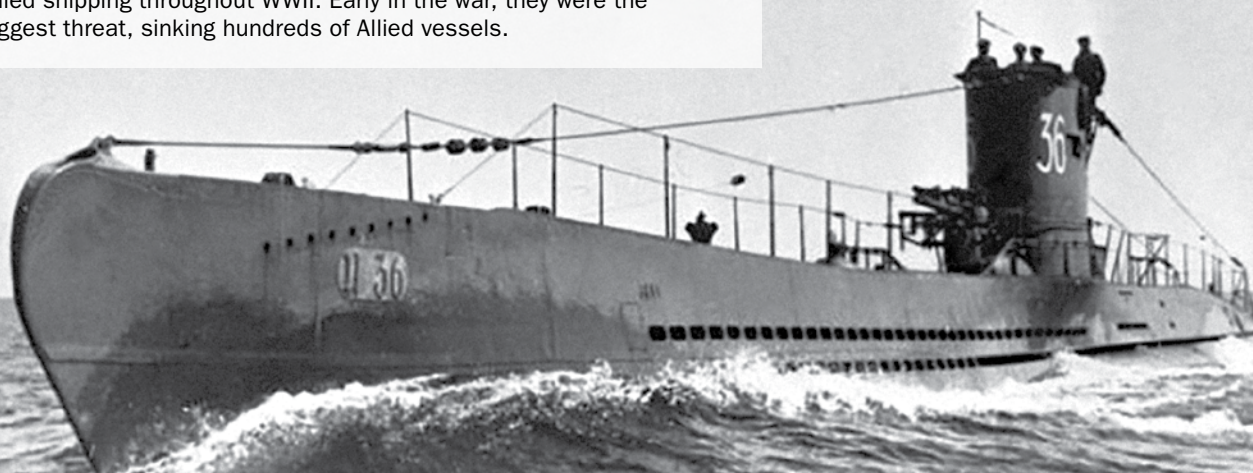


79th Infantry Division
SSI



541st Parachute
Infantry Regiment
Patch

German submarines, or *Unterseeboot*—shortened to U-Boat, preyed on Allied shipping throughout WWII. Early in the war, they were the biggest threat, sinking hundreds of Allied vessels.





The main body of the BARDSEA contingent were Polish soldiers that had escaped from the German occupation. Notice the distinct Polish beret and badge, collar insignia, and airborne wing.



Proposed OSS BARDSEA Area (inset) within the MONICA Area of Operations.



a counter-measure to torpedoes, Skokoski's ship zigzagged the entire way to Ireland. That resulted in a longer voyage through choppy North Atlantic seas that made many passengers seasick. The unappetizing fare on board compounded their misery. "They gave us horsemeat" to eat, remembered Skokoski.⁴

After safely arriving in Ireland and being sent to a replacement depot, Skokoski was surprised when he was approached by OSS recruiters who asked "Do you speak Polish?" Answering "yes," the recruiter then asked "How would you like to jump behind the lines?" After again answering in the affirmative, the OSS then tested Skokoski's language ability. "They took us to London where a whole bunch of [ununiformed] English and Polish officers questioned you."⁵ The volunteers were told to converse completely in Polish. Those who passed the language test were accepted into the OSS Special Operations (SO) Branch, the element charged with conducting sabotage and providing liaison to resistance movements.⁶

The OSS needed Polish speakers because of a complicated geopolitical situation that had arisen in Europe after decades of German aggression. Although it emerged victorious from World War I, France lost a significant percentage of its working age male population to combat losses. Postwar France turned to immigration to keep its coal mining industry functioning. Seeking a better opportunity, thousands of Poles immigrated to work in the mines in northern France.

But, the post-World War I peace did not last. On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany and its allies, the Soviet Union and the Slovak Republic, invaded Poland. The country fell in a month, but a Polish Government-in-Exile managed to flee to London, England. Then, on 10 May 1940, Germany attacked France. In six weeks, most of France was under German occupation.⁷

Thereafter, the Allies tried to regain contact with the continent so that they could foster intelligence networks and resistance elements. In late 1942, the Polish Government-in-Exile established clandestine contact with the Polish community living in north France. The nearly 200,000 Polish expatriates represented a potential source of friendly manpower that the Allies could not ignore.⁸

The British equivalent of the OSS, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) assumed the task of exploiting this human resource.⁹ SOE reasoned that it could organize the Poles in France into resistance cells. Code-named MONICA, SOE's plan called for recruiting 2,500 Polish cell leaders. The cell leaders would then each recruit "5 men sworn to take part in any task given to them." In theory, MONICA would result in a resistance movement of about 15,000 members centered on the towns of Armentieres, Bethune, Arras, Cambrai, Blanc, and Misseron.¹⁰ The Polish Government-in-Exile had overall authority for the project and conceptually hoped to have a division-sized resistance element in Northern France. This would augment the nearly 195,000 men that had escaped from German-occupied Poland and who were then fighting under British command.¹¹

In 1942, SOE and the Polish Government-in-Exile established the BARDSEA Project to help accomplish MONICA.¹² BARDSEA consisted of thirty teams (five or six men each) that were to function much like the more well-known Jedburgh Teams.¹³ The BARDSEA teams would help train and arm the activated Polish resistance in France, ambush targets of opportunity, and serve as a communications link between the local MONICA cells and SOE.¹⁴

However, the Polish Government-in-Exile, given overall authority as to when to implement BARDSEA, proved reluctant to insert the teams. The London Poles correctly reasoned that if the French Poles began conducting overt resistance acts too early, they would become easy targets for German reprisals. Therefore, the Polish Government-in-Exile decided that it would only commit the BARDSEA units when conventional Allied forces could reach the teams in less than 72 hours.¹⁵

The OSS became involved in the project in early 1944 when the command and control of OSS SO and SOE operations in northwest Europe were integrated under the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). The OSS SO Branch provided fourteen personnel to BARDSEA.¹⁶ Supplemented with one Polish radio operator, the OSS BARDSEA contingent was divided into three five-man elements, designated as the DODFORD, DUNCHURCH, and DACHET Groups. Skokoski was assigned to DACHET.¹⁷

SOE had overall responsibility for the BARDSEA training program, but the Polish Government-in-Exile supplied some of the instructors. First, the OSS contingent went through British airborne training, which included a parachute jump from a tethered balloon.¹⁸ This was finished by the end of April 1944, after which the Americans trained with the entire BARDSEA contingent.¹⁹ Skokoski recalled that the BARDSEA personnel trained in demolitions, communications, how to operate German weapons, and studied French geography. A four-week portion of their program showed that the BARDSEA contingent trained

in weapons, compass and map reading, Morse code, and parachute techniques.²⁰ When the Normandy Invasion occurred on 6 June 1944, Skokoski thought that “it won’t be long till we go over.”²¹

However, team DACHET did not deploy. The mission was scrubbed only four hours before its scheduled launch in early September.²² SGT Skokoski recalled that “We were ready to go, but it started raining real hard, so they canceled it. It was that close.”²³ According to a later report, “the extremely swift advance of the Allied Armies in France and the Low Countries towards the German frontier rendered the [BARDSEA] operation purposeless.”²⁴ This was the first time in Skokoski’s brief service that successful conventional operations rendered his special operations mission unnecessary. Despite the cancellation, the OSS was reluctant to give trained operatives back to the Army. The SO Branch transferred SGT Skokoski and the majority of the OSS BARDSEA contingent to the Operational Groups (OG) Branch.

Although composed almost entirely of detailed U.S. Army personnel, and the most Army-like of all the OSS Branches, the OGs were not a U.S. Army element. The OG Branch served as a “separate military unit within OSS of organized uniformed commandos or guerrilla troops who were experienced in and spoke the language of their target territory.”²⁵ In contrast to the much-smaller SO teams, OG teams served as separate uniformed military elements capable of acting with or independently of guerrilla/resistance forces.

On paper, an OG group consisted of thirty-four men composed of four officers and thirty enlisted men.²⁶ However in practice, the group typically split into two sections of fifteen men (two officers and thirteen enlisted). The section could be further divided into two squads if needed.²⁷ According to historian Alfred H. Paddock, early Special Forces modeled its “organization, training, and job description,” after those of the OGs.²⁸



The BARDSEA operation was comprised of British, Polish, and American personnel organized into thirty, five-to-six-man teams. Here is the entire contingent in formation.



All operational elements under SFHQ wore the Special Force wing. This included BARDSEA, the Jedburghs, and the OGs.

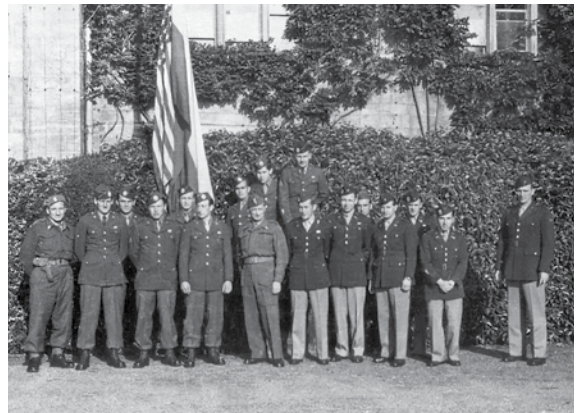


The OSS BARDSEA contingent as it is awarded the Polish airborne wings and certificate. SGT Skokoski is second from right.

The award document for the Polish airborne wings along with the badge.



BARDSEA personnel, likely the OSS contingent, practice with their weapons in the field. The soldier on the left uses an OSS-issue 9mm United Defense M42 while the one on the right has a 30.06 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).



This is the entire OSS BARDSEA contingent along with two Polish personnel and one other. At only fourteen personnel, the U.S. contribution was augmented with Poles.



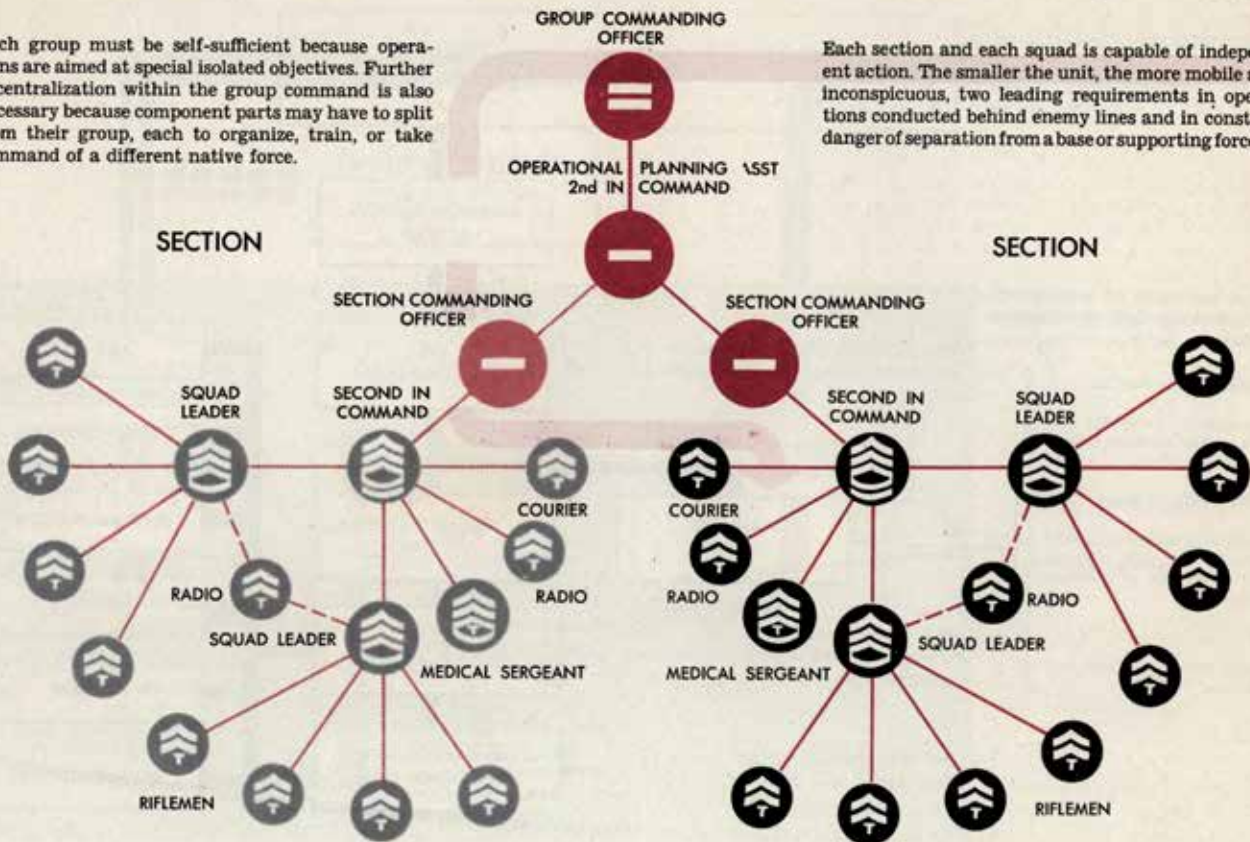
BARDSEA personnel practice fire and maneuver. Notice the signal smoke at the right of the photo and the 'umpire' in the right front.

Operational Groups Branch

THE OPERATIONAL GROUP IS THE BASIC FIELD UNIT

Each group must be self-sufficient because operations are aimed at special isolated objectives. Further decentralization within the group command is also necessary because component parts may have to split from their group, each to organize, train, or take command of a different native force.

Each section and each squad is capable of independent action. The smaller the unit, the more mobile and inconspicuous, two leading requirements in operations conducted behind enemy lines and in constant danger of separation from a base or supporting forces.



OSS chief Major General William J. Donovan believed that America's 'melting-pot' provided an ideal source of soldiers with language and cultural skills. After rigorous training in Unconventional Warfare, these soldiers of the Operational Groups (OG) Branch were inserted as teams into enemy-occupied territory.¹ Their mission was to "organize, train, and equip resistance groups in order to convert them into guerrillas, and to serve as the nuclei of such groups in operations against the enemy as directed by the theater commander."² A typical OG was comprised of four officers and thirty enlisted men. However, they often operated independently in sections half that size.³

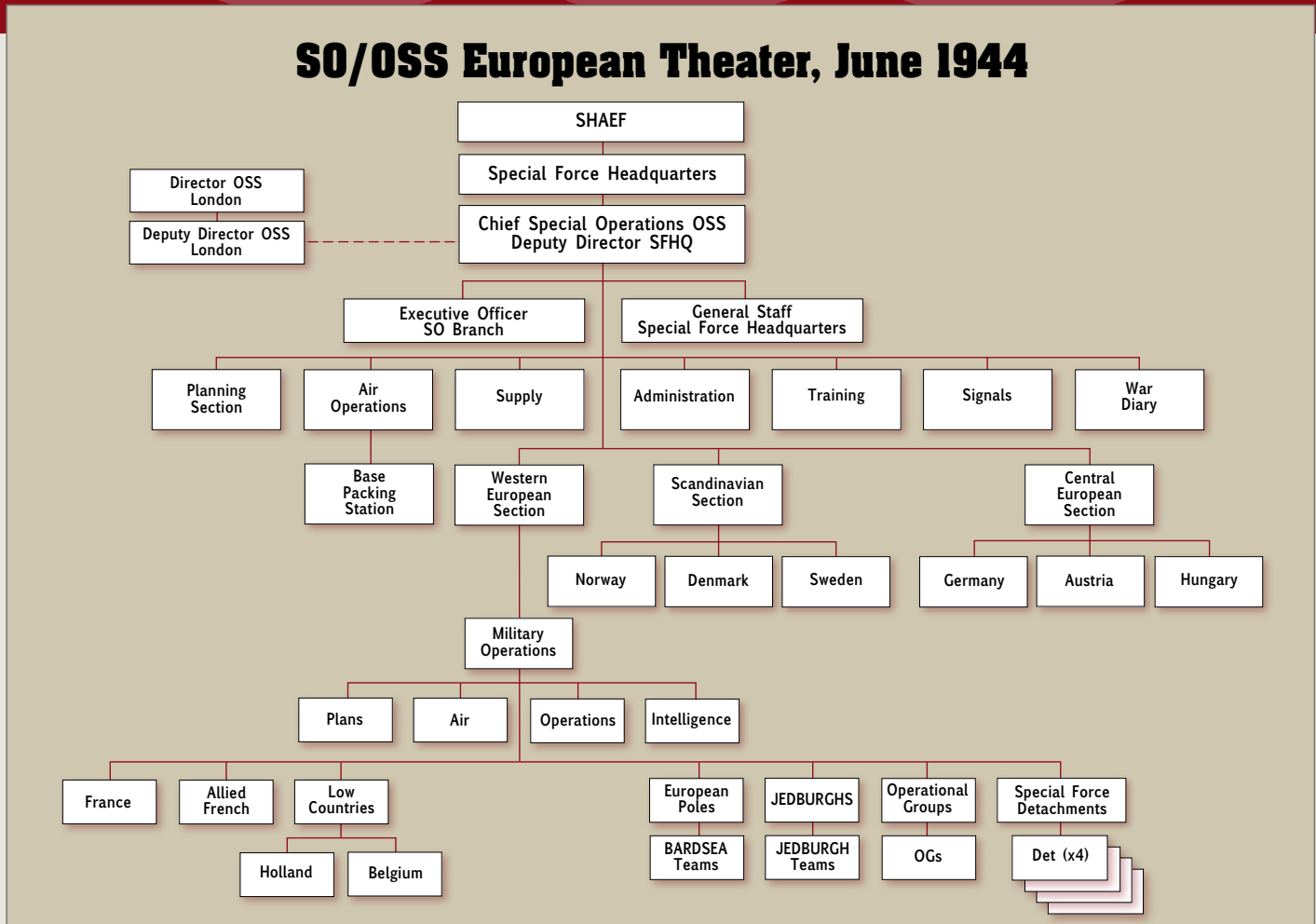
Doctrinally, the OGs also made an impact. Colonel Russell W. Volckmann used the OG model when he wrote Department of the Army Field Manual FM 31-21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerilla Warfare*, the Army's first manual for the operation and

employment of Special Forces in guerrilla warfare. "Operational Groups" would be "composed of specially qualified military personnel, in uniform, organized, trained, and equipped to operate as teams within enemy territory."⁴ These self-sustaining elements would take "enough equipment and supplies to maintain themselves and to establish communication nets within their projected area of operations."⁵ Once infiltrated into enemy-occupied territory, they would operate just like the OGs had done in WWII.⁶

The OGs left a lasting legacy. Although not a U.S. Army unit, OG sections provided an organizational and functional model for early Operational Detachment A Teams (ODAs) when Special Forces was created in 1952. As historian Alfred H. Paddock, Jr. relates: "In terms of organization, training, and job description, the OGs presaged the basic operational detachment adopted by the Army's 10th Special Forces Group on its creation in 1952."⁷

Special Operations Branch and Operations In France

SO/OSS European Theater, June 1944



In January 1944, the OSS Special Operations (SO) Branch integrated with SOE as a “full partner”¹ The combined organization, designated as the Special Force Headquarters (SFHQ), had responsibility for “coordinating all underground resistance in France in direct support of the forthcoming Allied invasion.”² It was placed under the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF).

Including BARDSEA, SO supported other projects. It provided personnel to SOE ‘circuits,’ that established and organized cells to supply, train, and direct resistance forces.³ The circuits paved the way for other elements to follow, such as the JEDBURGH teams, a joint and combined Allied program with personnel from SO, SOE, and the French *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d’Action*. In total, 103 French, 90 British, 83 American, 5 Belgian, and 5 Dutch personnel served on ninety-three JEDBURGH teams that parachuted into France and eight in the Netherlands.⁴ The

JEDBURGHs helped organize and arm the resistance, arranged supply drops, procured intelligence, provided liaison between the Allies and the Resistance, and took part in sabotage operations.⁵ Ideally, teams consisted of one French, one British, and one U.S. soldier, but in practice the only consistency among each two-to-four-man team was an officer and a radio operator. SO also supported Inter-Allied missions which worked at a higher political level among the French Resistance than the JEDBURGHs.

In addition, Special Force Detachments served at the Army-level attached to the G-3. They advised conventional forces on the utility of the resistance; provided intelligence; served as the conduit to SFHQ for intelligence requests or aid to the resistance; and recovered agents or OSS personnel whose area of operations had been overtaken by the conventional forces.⁶ They served as the rough equivalent of today’s Operational Detachment ‘C’ Teams.

The OGs were active in combat operations in German-occupied France beginning on 9 June 1944.²⁹ Skokoski became a member of ADRIAN, which parachuted into France on 9 September 1944. As such, ADRIAN was the last OG mission inserted into France. By then, the section discovered that the strategic situation in France had drastically changed since early June.

Following the Allied landings in Normandy (6 June 1944) and Southern France (15 August 1944), German forces struggled to hold France. Unable to halt or contain the Allied forces, the largely non-motorized German military withdrew slowly towards their border to regroup and form defensive positions. Meanwhile, mechanized spearheads from the two Allied invasion forces raced to meet at Dijon to cut off the retreating German forces. This pincer formed a bottleneck that channeled retreating Germans. Therefore, unlike most of the OG and Jedburgh missions dispatched to France to harass German forces trying to stem the Allied advance, ADRIAN's mission was to target retreating enemy forces to prevent their escape.³⁰

Because of the rapidly developing tactical situation, the OG Command quickly brought each team "up to maximum strength by the addition of any O.G. personnel left" in the UK.³¹ For ADRIAN, this meant that men from the Norwegian OG contingent training in the UK were added to the former BARDSEA personnel.³² ADRIAN was an *ad hoc* element with thirteen officers and eighteen enlisted men, and did not resemble the size or structure of a standard OG.

ADRIAN's mission was to support the efforts of OG mission CHRISTOPHER and Jedburgh team DESMOND that had been dropped together into the Poitiers area on the night of 3 September 1944.³³ DESMOND was a three-man element led by Captain (CPT) William H. Pietsch, Jr., with the mission of establishing contact and liaison with the French Resistance.³⁴ CHRISTOPHER was a fifty-seven man element led by CPT Melvin J. Hjeltness. It had the mission of harassing, "or, if possible, stopping," German

forces from retreating through the area.³⁵ Like ADRIAN, CHRISTOPHER was also task organized and composed of men from different groups, in this case the French and Norwegian OGs. Unknown to the men of ADRIAN, there were already problems in the field.

Prior to insertion, team DESMOND was placed under the command of the commanding officer of CHRISTOPHER.³⁶ DESMOND's mission was to make contact with the resistance and recommend courses of action for CHRISTOPHER. CHRISTOPHER, however, was under no obligation to accept or act on that advice.³⁷ This arrangement did not work in the field.

Once on the ground, DESMOND contacted the French Resistance. CPT Pietsch told its leader, using the *nom de guerre* of 'Colonel Claude,' that the OGs were not "organized as an infantry unit" and as such "were to be used for hit and run work." However, Colonel Claude wished to use the OGs to showcase the presence of uniformed U.S. soldiers because the "Germans would surrender to Regular soldiers," vice the Resistance.³⁸ In effect, CHRISTOPHER allowed itself to be subordinated to DESMOND. These orders reflected the desires of the French Resistance, and were not conducive to OG combat operations. After missing several opportunities to attack the Germans while they waited on CPT Pietsch to organize transportation and supporting forces, CHRISTOPHER's officers "decided all this chasing around was getting them nowhere," and took the operational initiative.³⁹ By the time ADRIAN inserted, the other two OSS elements were barely coexisting together.

On the night of 9 September Skokoski and his thirty-one-man OG team boarded seven B-24 Liberator bombers modified for parachute operations.⁴⁰ ADRIAN was inserted into the Cotes D'Or area, about 35 kilometers northwest of Dijon.⁴¹ The first plane started dropping ADRIAN at 2345 hours, and finished at 0100.⁴² However, not all went according to plan.

The day after their parachute insertions into France, the men of OG CHRISTOPHER ready for operations in the village of Is Sur Tille.





OG Team ADRIAN prepares to jump into Northern France. SGT Skokoski is on the left.



OG ADRIAN utilized numerous pieces of British equipment, including parachutes, helmets, and Dennison jump smocks.



A close up shot of the British parachute used by OG ADRIAN. Unlike U.S. parachutes, the British ones featured a harness quick release in the front. No reserve chutes were worn.



This photograph of OG ADRIAN illustrates the kind of insignia worn. Under and over the SF wing are U.S flags to identify the team clearly as American personnel. In order to be treated as combatants if captured, OG personnel always wore uniforms in the field.

At 55 men, Operational Group CHRISTOPER was one of the largest OGs employed in the field. Here, about half of the group poses on 4 September 1944, the morning after their parachute jump into German-occupied France.



The first member through the B-24 Liberator ‘joe hole’ (bottom machine gun ball turret removed) was the commanding officer of ADRIAN, CPT Joseph J. Kielbowicz. While under canopy, CPT Kielbowicz was killed instantly by a falling supply canister. ADRIAN reported: “Capt Kilbowicz [*sic*] jumping first out of number one plane was struck in mid air by container filled with mortar shells. Mortars exploded and caught [the] container and his chute on fire.”⁴³ In addition, First Lieutenant Stanley Konieczka suffered a broken foot,

Second Lieutenant John W. Haag a sprained knee and pulled muscle, and Staff Sergeant Edmond S. Porado two sprained knees.⁴⁴

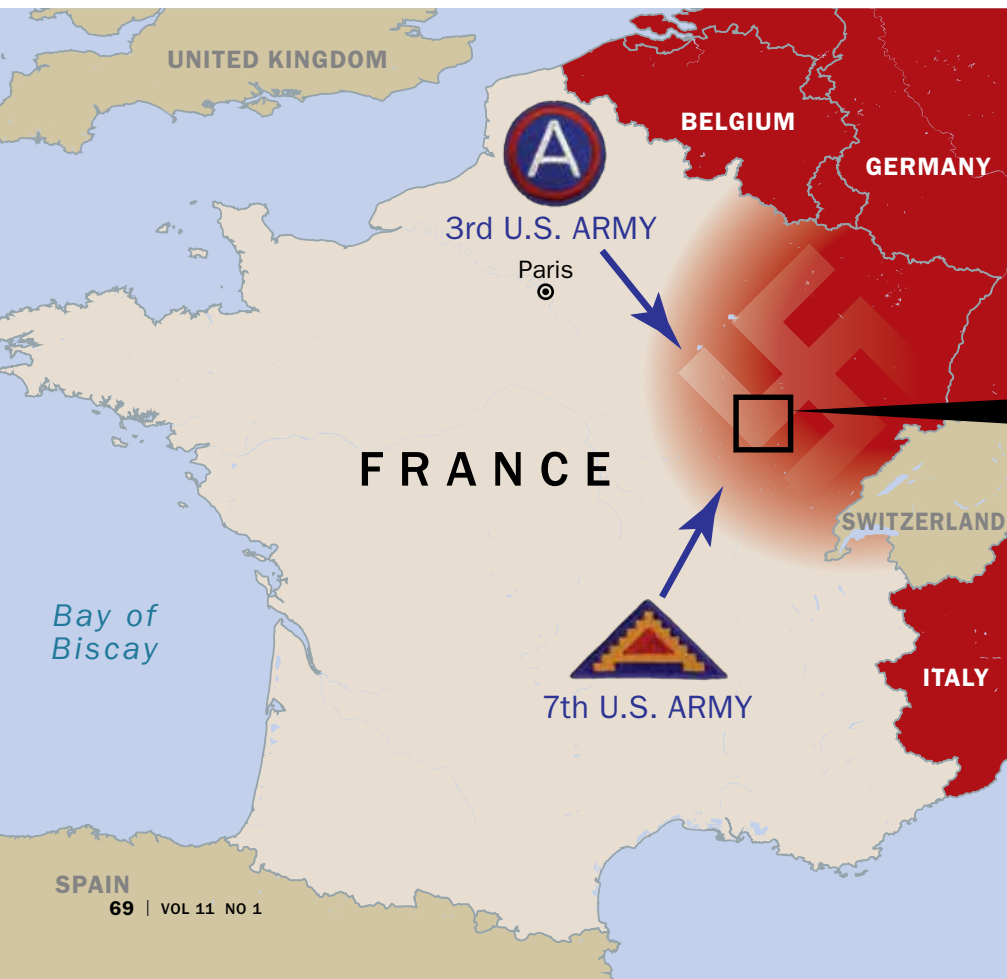
ADRIAN’s mission was not well-coordinated. It appears that neither DESMOND nor CHRISTOPHER knew that ADRIAN was scheduled to join them.⁴⁵ They expected a supply drop, not another OG. The command and control problems on the ground were compounded by the death of CPT Kielbowicz. CPT Orleans A. Pitre, a last-minute add-on who was only supposed to “act as an observer for the group,” but “not to be officially attached to it,” reluctantly assumed command of ADRIAN.⁴⁶ Since their radios were smashed in the drop, ADRIAN communicated through the radio operator assigned to DESMOND.

Like CHRISTOPHER, ADRIAN was instructed by HQ to cooperate with DESMOND but that it was to “remain under the direct command of headquarters.”⁴⁷ On 10 September, CPT Pietsch of DESMOND met with CPT Pitre to share intelligence. CPT Pietsch told ADRIAN to “organize its operations as they saw fit.”⁴⁸

On that same day, Major (MAJ) Gerald W. Davis of Special Force Detachment #11 also met with CPT Pitre. OSS Special Force Detachments were assigned to the Army level to conduct liaison between resistance movements, OSS missions with the conventional forces, and to recover OSS personnel once their areas had been taken by regular forces. MAJ Davis asked ADRIAN to “patrol the road Pellerey/Is-Aur-Tille [*sic*] until bypassed by the Seventh Army.” In addition, MAJ Davis instructed CPT Pitre to “join his group with Group [CHRISTOPHER] and to take charge of the whole group.”



Captain Joseph J. Kielbowicz, center, was the commanding officer of OG ADRIAN. He was killed during his combat jump when a container struck him in mid-air.



Area where ADRIAN and French Resistance ambushed retreating German troops just ahead of the 7th U.S. Army.





Is-sur-Tille, France.

Confusion plagued Command and Control on the ground. CPT Hjeltness (CHRISTOPHER) refused to subordinate his command because he “had been given charge of his group from London and decided not to relinquish this command until receiving further orders. At a meeting that night of 10 September, all the officers of OG [CHRISTOPHER] decided to carry on their operations alone under Captain Hjeltness’ direction.”⁴⁹ CPT Pitre, like the commander of CHRISTOPHER, decided it would be better to “work with his group as a separate unit.”⁵⁰

Fortunately, ADRIAN landed thirty miles in front of the U.S. Seventh Army in an area with a lot of French Resistance to provide security and knowledge of the enemy dispositions. Their movements were relatively safe. After meeting with local resistance leaders, CPT Pitre moved the OG into an ambush position. Their targets were elements of two enemy divisions retreating through the area. They were “all that remained of the [German] occupation forces of southern France.”⁵¹ At this point, ADRIAN got lucky.

Led by a light armored car, four large trucks filled with German troops entered the ambush zone. Two American Second Lieutenants (2LT), Edward A. Provost and Reed Pelfrey, used a bazooka to trigger the ambush. They stopped the armored car with the first round and the rest of the column halted in the kill zone. Skokoski and Team ADRIAN fired at will, killing or wounding up to 200 German troops. The approach of a second enemy convoy forced the OG to withdraw before they could search the vehicles or verify the extent of the damage. ADRIAN decided to melt back into the countryside rather than engage any reinforcements without the element of surprise.⁵²

ADRIAN soon enjoyed more success, although the stakes were smaller. A group of British Special Air Service (SAS) troops operating in the area told the OGs that the Germans were evacuating Dijon.⁵³ ADRIAN, reinforced by French Resistance members, ambushed a number of German troops on the Dijon to Is-sur-Tille road. They succeeded in “killing a considerable number.”⁵⁴ The next



This Bill Mauldin cartoon depicts the reality that many OG teams faced in France. German troops were far more willing to surrender to American troops than to the French Resistance, for fear of reprisals. Copyright by Bill Mauldin (1944). Courtesy of Bill Mauldin Estate LLC.

day a third ambush destroyed three vehicles at Courtivron and killed about ten German troops.⁵⁵ But, it was not all combat for ADRIAN.

They got to experience some French hospitality. On 13 September as the “First American troops to enter Couitivron [*sic*] and Posjieuil [probably Poiseal-les-Saulx] this morning. [They were] greeted with cheers, kisses, and flowers.”⁵⁶ ADRIAN’s four-day war was over because they were uncovered by conventional forces.

French troops had bypassed Dijon and no more Germans remained in ADRIAN’s operating area. The French 1st Armored Division liberated Dijon on 10 September.⁵⁷ It was also near Dijon that the U.S. Third and Seventh Armies met to link the invasion forces from Normandy and Southern France.⁵⁸ Its mission over, ADRIAN made its way to Paris. There, CPT Pitre reported to the OSS Special Force Detachment #12, with the U.S. Ninth Army. By 20 September, Skokoski and the rest of ADRIAN were back in the UK.⁵⁹ Lacking further opportunities in Europe, the OSS shipped the Polish-speaking men of OG ADRIAN to the United States.

Once back home the OSS sent the soldiers to Area F, the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland. It was where the majority of OG personnel had trained prior to going overseas.⁶⁰ The OSS held the OGs at Area F while they decided what to do with them. Like many who had served in France, Skokoski recalled that he thought he would be sent to the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater.⁶¹ However the OSS asked him and three other Polish speakers if they would like to go back to England.⁶² All agreed.

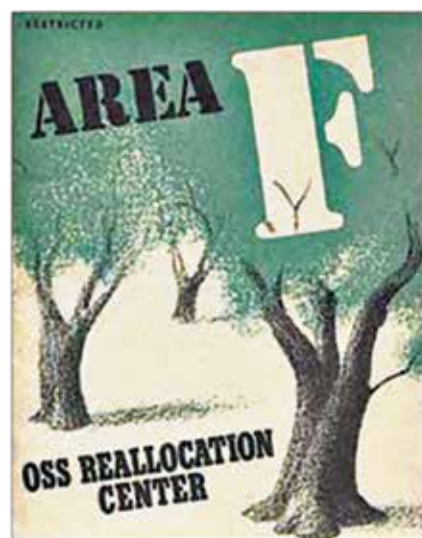
When they got to England, the OSS men were told their assignment. Skokoski was to become part of the short-lived Special Allied Airborne Reconnaissance Force (SAARF), a relief effort to protect and mitigate the conditions of Allied Prisoners of War (POW) in German camps.⁶³ Activated in March 1945 by SHAEF and headquartered in Wentworth, England, SAARF was a task-organized multinational unit commanded by British Brigadier General John S. Nichols.⁶⁴ In the waning days of the war in Europe, SHAEF wanted a unit capable of acting in the event that the Germans decided to take reprisals against Allied Prisoners of War (POW) before they could be liberated. SAARF teams were



OG team ADRIAN, like these men from OG CHRISTOPHER, reported to Paris prior to being sent back to England.



A halftrack from a French armored division passes OG troops near Dijon. With the arrival of the French conventional forces, the OSS mission was over.



During WWII, the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, was leased to the OSS as a training area for the OGs. This booklet gave new arrivals a brief look at the training area.



This photo details part of the multi-national makeup of SAARF. From left to right are French, U.S., and Polish personnel. The U.S. personnel wear the SAARF wing on their lower right sleeve.



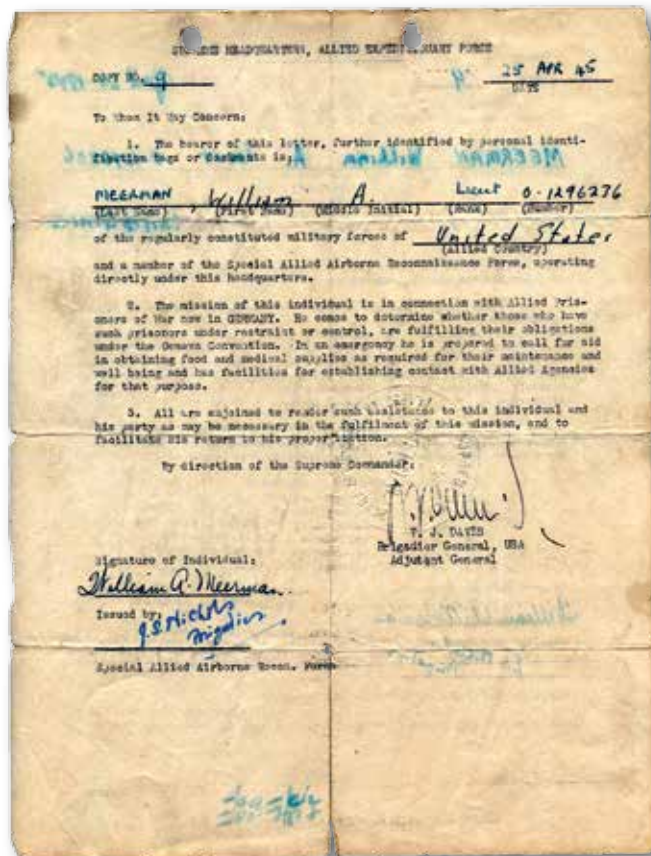
SAARF Wing



SAARF Tab



SHAEF SSI



The SAARF teams carried a letter, printed on one side in English and German on the other. The letter identified the individual and his mission and asked the reader to provide assistance.

to parachute near POW camps, establish contact with the German guard personnel and advise them not to harm the Allied prisoners. Then the teams would provide for the medical and nutritional needs of the prisoners after radioing for air-drop supplies.

The three-man SAARF teams consisted of two officers and an enlisted radio operator. Initial plans were to form 120 teams made up of British, American, French, Belgian, and Polish soldiers.⁶⁵ The use of multiple Allied contingents meant that they could deal with the different nationalities in the camps. But, unlike the combined Jedburgh teams, the three man SAARF teams were composed of soldiers from a single country. The majority of the American personnel came from U.S. Army Airborne units and the OSS.

Since the SAARF teams were formed rapidly to meet the emerging requirement, the soldiers had little time to train. Those few who were not already parachute-qualified attended British airborne school. However, since the OSS contingent were already airborne qualified, Skokoski recalled that "There wasn't much training." Instead, the contingent exercised to keep fit.⁶⁶

The first six SAARF teams parachuted near Altengrabow, Germany, on 25 April 1945 as Operation VIOLET. Their mission was to assist in the liberation of Stalag XI-A. VIOLET was SAARF's only airborne operation, and the last parachute jump of the war in Europe, since the Germans surrendered on 8 May. Other SAARF teams were individually assigned to the U.S. Seventh Army, 6th Army Group, 12th Army Group, and 21st Army Group (British), but all entered their operational areas by vehicle.⁶⁷

Once the SAARF teams contacted the German guards or Allied POWs, they established a 'baseline' of camp conditions. SAARF personnel estimated the requirement for medical or food supplies and verified the number of prisoners of each nationality at each camp. Then, because of their proximity, conventional Allied land forces supported the POW needs until the camps were under Allied control. Afterwards, the SAARF teams assisted in evacuating the Western POWs (U.S., UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium, etc.). Per prior agreement, POWs from the Soviet Union, Poland, or Italy were often turned over to the Soviets for final disposition. SAARF teams also performed another important, if unforeseen, function: interviewing POWs to uncover Germans masquerading as prisoners looking to escape.

The collapse of German resistance, along with the SHAEF decision to disband the unit rather than send it to the Far East, limited the SAARF potential. It disbanded on 1 July 1945.⁶⁸ For the third time, the advancing conventional forces rendered Skokoski's special operations mission unnecessary. For his part, Skokoski never deployed with a SAARF team and returned to the United States on 30 May 1945.⁶⁹ Following his discharge at the Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Pennsylvania, former SGT Frank Skokoski went home to Hazelton, PA, to marry and raise a family.⁷⁰

The three special operations units that Skokoski served in quickly became footnotes in history. In each case, the rapid advance of conventional forces in the European



The British SAARF contingent.

Theater shortened their planned operational window. Skokoski's war is a reminder of just how connected special operations are, and should be, to the actions of conventional forces. Nonetheless, the special operations units in which Skokoski served represented the type of contingencies that the OSS prepared to execute and are evidence of the broad range of missions that were accepted in the war. As such, their missions and accomplishments are worth remembering as part of the rich heritage of today's modern special operations forces. ♣

Thanks to the Skokoski family, Dr. Stephen Kippax, Dr. Jonathan Clemente, and Mr. Les Hughes.

TROY J. SACQUETY, PhD

Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and U.S. Army Civil Affairs.

Endnotes

- 1 Frank Skokoski, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 28 October 2008, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC., hereafter Skokoski interview.
- 2 Skokoski interview.
- 3 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Biographies," p. 255, Roll 10, Target 3, Vol 11, M1623, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 255; for more on the **Knollwood Maneuvers**, see Eugene Piasecki, "The Knollwood Maneuver: The Ultimate Airborne Test," *Veritas* 4:1 (2008), 54-63.
- 4 Skokoski interview.
- 5 Skokoski interview.
- 6 Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS Volume II* (New York: Walker and Company, 1976), 206.
- 7 **According to the terms of the 22 June 1940 Armistice, all of northern France and the Atlantic Coastline was placed under German control. A collaborator and ostensibly neutral French government controlled the rest of France and the colonies that did not side with the separate Free French. With the Allied invasion of North Africa, the Germans occupied the rest of France (Vichy France) on 8-11 November 1942.**
- 8 *OSS Aid to the French Resistance in World War II*, "Poles in France Used by the Resistance," Folder 15, Box 8, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **The Polish living in France were organized under the organization code-named MONICA.**
- 9 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (DF-Section): West Europe," p. 129, Roll 7, Target 8, Book XIII, M1623, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.
- 10 *OSS Aid to the French Resistance in World War II*, "Poles in France Used by the Resistance."
- 11 **Significant numbers of Poles managed to avoid capture by the Germans and fought alongside the Western forces. In addition to a small navy and air force, the Polish ground forces included the Polish 1st Armored Division that saw critical service at Normandy by helping to close the Falaise Pocket. Another is the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade, badly mauled during Operation MARKET GARDEN.**
- 12 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (DF-Section): West Europe: Poles in France," p. 126-27, Roll 7, Target 8, Book XIII, M1623, NARA. **By contrast, the plan to use Poles throughout France was called ANGELICA.**
- 13 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (DF-Section): West Europe: Poles in France," p. 139, Roll 7, Target 8, Book XIII, M1623, NARA.
- 14 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (DF-Section): West Europe: Poles in France," p. 127-130, Roll 7, Target 8, Book XIII, M1623, NARA.
- 15 *OSS Aid to the French Resistance in World War II*, "Poles in France Used by the Resistance."
- 16 *OSS Aid to the French Resistance in World War II*, "Poles in France Used by the Resistance." **Per "Part I Orders (Students)," 26 March 1944, Poland 153, S.O.E, HS4/228, National Archives (UK), London, England, the OSS assigned three naval personnel to BARDSEA on 6 March 1944 and eleven from the Army on 21 March 1944.**
- 17 "BARDSEA Groups," 29 August 1944, HS4-227 "Poland BARDSEA Personnel and reports," National Archives (UK).
- 18 **The BARDSEA Groups used British equipment. Unlike the U.S., the British did not use a reserve parachute. The OSS contingent was awarded both the British and Polish airborne insignia.**
- 19 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," p. 6, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 20 "Block Programme (4 Weeks)," March 1944, HS4-227 "Poland BARDSEA Personnel and reports," National Archives (UK).
- 21 Skokoski interview.
- 22 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (DF-Section): West Europe: Poles in France," p. 141A, Roll 7, Target 8, Book XIII, M1623, NARA.
- 23 Skokoski interview.
- 24 Mikolajczyk to Lord Selborne, "My Dear Lord Selborne," 5 September 1944, HS4-229, S.O.E. Poland 154, BARSEA (*sic*) Polish Plan for France Reports and Training, National Archives (UK).
- 25 Secretariat, Strategic Services Unit, War Department, "The Office of Strategic Services On VE Day—VJ Day," 11 March 1946, released by the Central Intelligence Agency, found on the internet at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80R0173R003600080001-8.pdf, accessed 17 September 2014.
- 26 OSS, "Operational Groups Field Manual-Strategic Services (Provisional)," 25 April 1944, p. 6, Folder 4, Box 128, Entry 99, Research Group 226, NARA.
- 27 Office of Strategic Services, OG: *Operational Group Command* (Washington DC, OSS, 1944); Alfred T. Cox, *Operational Report: Company "B" 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion Separate (Prov.)*, (Grenoble, France, 20 September 1944), 1; OG TO&E found in Folder 52, Box 12, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Caesar J. Civitella, interviewed by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 9 September, 2013, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 28 Alfred H. Paddock, Jr. *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 35.
- 29 **The first of thirteen North Africa-based sections, code-named EMILY, parachuted near Limoges early in the morning of 9 June 1944. Another eight OG sections jumped into France from England.**
- 30 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," (ADRIAN Operational Report), p. 138, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.

- 31 "E.M.F.F.I. Operation Order No. 45," 1 September 1944, Folder 31 OG Teams "CHRISTOPHER" and "DESMOND" Ops Plans and Reports, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 32 **ADRIAN has the distinction of being the only OG with Navy personnel.** Both Raymond J. Filipokoski and Adolph R. Nowalowski were sailors recruited into the BARDESA program. Ordinarily, the OGs only recruited from the U.S. Army. The Norwegians were also training in the UK.
- 33 "Report of Jedburgh Mission-DESMOND," and "Report of Operational Group CHRISTOPHER," both located in "OG Teams Christopher and Desmond, Op Plans and Reports," Folder 31, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 34 "E.M.F.F.I. O.G. Operation Brief No. 6," 1 September 1944, Folder 31 OG Teams "CHRISTOPHER" and "DESMOND" Ops Plans and Reports, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 35 "E.M.F.F.I. O.G. Operation Brief No. 6," 1 September 1944, Folder 31 OG Teams "CHRISTOPHER" and "DESMOND" Ops Plans and Reports, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 "E.M.F.F.I. Operation Order No. 45," 1 September 1944, Folder 31 OG Teams "CHRISTOPHER" and "DESMOND" Ops Plans and Reports, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **CHRISTOPHER was under the direct command of and reported to the *Etat Major, Forces Francaises de l'Interieur* (EMFFI—a tripartite staff of French/British/Americans within Special Force Headquarters in London).**
- 37 "Report of Jedburgh Mission-DESMOND," 1, located in "OG Teams Christopher and Desmond, Op Plans and Reports," Folder 31, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 38 "Report of Jedburgh Mission-DESMOND," 4., located in "OG Teams Christopher and Desmond, Op Plans and Reports," Folder 31, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 39 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG CHRISTOPHER," p. 124, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 40 "Allocation of Personnel, Containers and Packages," [September 1944], Ian Sutherland Collection, Folder OSS Europe Jedburgh Team "Adrian" Air Supply Support Personnel and Equipment, Box 7, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **The B-24s were from the 'Carpetbaggers' of the 492nd Bombardment Group (Heavy). A TO&E OG was 32 men that could be further split into two sections. However, most deployed as sections, not as entire OGs. At 31 men, OG ADRIAN was one of the largest OG missions to go into German-occupied France. It did not resemble the normal mix of officers and enlisted men, such as the OG sections parachuted into France from North Africa.**
- 41 *OSS London War Diary*, "Operational Groups," p. 138-140, Roll 9, Volume 4A, M1623, NARA.
- 42 "Data from original mission reports, microfilm roll A5688, participants and researchers-September 1944," found on the internet at <http://www.801492.org/Agents/09-JoesAll44.htm>, accessed 9 September 2013.
- 43 "From ADRIAN," 12 September 1944, in "ETO ADRIAN," contained in Ian Sutherland Collection, Folder OSS Europe Jedburgh Team "Adrian" Mission Report, Message Traffic, Box 7, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 44 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 141, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 45 "Report of Jedburgh Mission-DESMOND," 12., located in "OG Teams Christopher and Desmond, Op Plans and Reports," Folder 31, Box 7, Ian Sutherland Collection, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 46 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 140, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 47 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 139, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 48 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 141, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 49 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG CHRISTOPHER," p. 128-129, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 50 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG CHRISTOPHER," p. 129, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 51 William D. Goddard, ed., *Report of Operations: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944-1945* [Germany, 1947?], 252.
- 52 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 142, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 53 **An SAS group was the British equivalent of an OG. Having been cross trained and instructed in parachute and amphibious insertions generally made the OGs more versatile.** Thanks to UK researcher Stephen Kippax.
- 54 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 142, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 55 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 143, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 56 "From ADRIAN," 13 September 1944, in "ETO ADRIAN," contained in Ian Sutherland Collection, Folder OSS Europe Jedburgh Team "Adrian" Mission Report, Message Traffic, Box 7, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 57 William D. Goddard, ed., *Report of Operations: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944-1945* [Germany, 1947?], 271.
- 58 Goddard, ed., *Report of Operations: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944-1945*, 271.
- 59 *OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Operational Groups," see "Operations, OG ADRIAN," p. 143, Roll 9, Target 1, Volume 4-A, M1623, NARA.
- 60 **For more on the OSS training areas, read John W. Chambers II, *OSS Training in the National Parks and Service Abroad In World War II*, (Washington DC: U.S. National Park Service, 2008), found on the internet at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/oss/index.htm, accessed 6 August 2013.**
- 61 **The majority of the French OG personnel went to China to train Chinese Airborne units known as the Chinese Commandos. Some Greek, Norwegian, and Arakan Field Unit (Southern Burma) OG personnel also served in that mission.**
- 62 Skokoski interview.
- 63 **SAARF went under the code-named Operation VICARAGE.**
- 64 Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets: War Report of the OSS Volume II* (Washington DC: Carrollton Press, 1976), 352; W.B. Smith to J.S. Nichols, "Airborne contact and reconnaissance teams," 21 March 1945, Ian Sutherland Collection, Box 7, Folder "Vicarage" Mission Evacuation of Allied POWs by Recon Teams, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 65 SHAEF FWD to EXFOR MAIN, 24 April 1945, Folder 322, Box 38, Entry 1, Research Group 331, NARA.
- 66 Skokoski interview.
- 67 "SAARF Progress Report," 3 June 1945, Folder 1242, Box 283, Entry 190, Research Group 226, NARA. **The SAARF teams carried letters printed in English and German. The letters asked readers to assist the SAARF team, and read in part "The Mission of this individual is in connection with Allied Prisoners of War in GERMANY. He comes to determine whether those who have such prisoners under restraint or control, are fulfilling their obligations under the Geneva Convention. In an emergency he is prepared to call for aid in obtaining food and medical supplies as required for their maintenance and well being and has facilities for establishing contact with Allied Agencies for that purpose." H.R. Bull, "Special Authority of SAARF Teams," 12 April 1945, Folder 322, Box 38, Entry 1, Research Group 331, NARA.**
- 68 SHAEF FWD to EXFOR MAIN, 20 May 1945, Folder Operation VICARAGE, Box 94, Entry 268, Research Group 331, NARA. **In the same file, see also MG H.R. Bull to Commander, SAARF (Main), "Disbandment of SAARF," 20 May 1945.**
- 69 "Orders" 29 May 1945, Skokoski collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC
- 70 **With the post-WWII drawdown, the U.S. deactivated all of its special operations units. This included the OSS, which President Harry S. Truman disbanded by Executive Order 9621 on 1 October 1945.**

OSS Operational Groups Branch Sidebar Endnotes

- William J. Donovan, "Memorandum to the War Department: Sabotage Operations and Guerrilla Warfare," 11 May 1942, F 1464, B 140, E 136, RG 226, NARA.
- Office of Strategic Services, "Operational Groups Field Manual," 25 April 1944, p. 14-15, scanned copy of the original found on-line at <http://www.soc.mil/OSS/assets/operational-groups-fm.pdf>, accessed 1 October 2014.
- OG Operational Group Command, p. 5-6.
- Department of the Army Field Manual FM-31-21, Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*, October 1951 p. 39-40.
- Department of the Army Field Manual FM-31-21, Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*, October 1951 p. 43.
- The only WWII unit in the lineage of Special Forces is the combined U.S. and Canadian First Special Service Force. As an independent unit under the direction and supervision of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the OSS is not in the lineage of any Army entity even though its concepts and service influenced the organization and mission of Special Forces when it was created in 1952. As an example of the official lineage, see Department of the Army, Lineage and Honors, 1st Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces Regiment, found online at <http://www.history.army.mil/html/forestruc/lineages/branches/sf/001sfgrp1sf.htm>, accessed 26 September 2013.**
- Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 35.

OSS Branch Operations in France Sidebar Endnotes

- Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets: War Report of the OSS Volume II* (Washington DC: Carrollton Press, 1976), 191.
- Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets*, 191.
- OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch (F-Section): West Europe, [May 1945?], p. 12, Roll 6, Target 4, Volume 3, Book II, M1623, National Archives and Records Administration.
- Will Irwin, *The Jedburghs: The Secret History of the Allied Special Forces, France, 1944* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2005), 248-78
- Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets*, 199.
- OSS London War Diary*, "Special Operations Branch: Army Staffs (1st and 2^d Qtrs)," [May 1945?], p. i-ii, Roll 9, Target 2, Volume 5, Book 1, M1623, National Archives and Records Administration.