

# The OSS

## *A Primer on the Special Operations Branches and Detachments of the Office of Strategic Services*

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**CONSIDERED** as a legacy unit of the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) has assumed almost mythical stature since World War II. Several OSS veterans, among them Colonel Aaron Bank, Lieutenant Colonel Jack T. Shannon, and Majors Herbert R. Brucker and Caesar J. Civitella brought unconventional warfare (UW) tactics and techniques to Special Forces in the early 1950's. It should be remembered, however, that the short-lived OSS (1942 to 1945) had two basic missions: its primary one was to collect, analyze, and disseminate foreign intelligence; its secondary one was to conduct unconventional warfare. The first, executed primarily by the Research and Analysis branch (R&A), was considered the most important during the war.

It is the second mission of UW, however, that has received the most attention since WWII. It was this element of the OSS that provided the most exciting stories and which was cloaked by an aura of secrecy and mystery. These UW missions have become the subject of numerous books and several films. This article is designed to serve as a primer on the UW elements of the OSS. It is not an exhaustive look at the OSS, nor does it address every OSS function or branch. Its intent is to provide the reader with a basic understanding of what missions the separate OSS branches had, what the main operational efforts were, and where they took place geographically.

*Although never made official, the "spearhead" is regarded as the symbol of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services.)*

## FROM COI to OSS: The Beginning, 1941-1942



*MG William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan was the head of the COI and the OSS. Both the COI and the OSS, like the later CIA, were civilian organizations.*

On 11 July 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Coordinator of Information (COI). Its mission was to collect, analyze, and disseminate foreign intelligence. William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, a WWI Medal of Honor recipient and a prominent lawyer, was selected by the president to head the COI.

The Research and Analysis (R&A) branch was the most visible element of the COI. It used notable historians, economists, geographers, anthropologists, and subject matter experts to research and prepare reports for senior policy makers. Walt W. Rostow, Ralph J. Bunche, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. served in R&A. Covert intelligence collection was also done to support potential paramilitary actions. Another COI task was to conduct overt and covert psychological warfare. As a civilian agency with access to unencumbered funding, the COI could operate more freely than the military services. After America entered the war in December 1941, COI established groups to collect intelligence and conduct sabotage in North Africa and Burma. These expanded capabilities provided better, more up to date information for strategic planners and helped to formulate propaganda campaigns. This done, special operations teams would be inserted behind enemy lines to advise and assist in the formation, equipping, training, and employment of guerrilla groups. Commando raids would then help conventional forces gain a foothold in enemy territory. This was a new way for the U.S. to conduct warfare.



In June 1942, COI was disbanded. Responsibility for overt propaganda was assigned to the newly created Office of War Information (OWI), which also took control of the COI-created radio broadcast "Voice of America." Covert activities were assigned to the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Although the earliest contributions of OSS were intelligence gathering and analysis for senior policy makers, the paramilitary operations have garnered the most interest in our time. The following sections offer a brief look into the special operations of the OSS, which influenced the formation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Army Special Operations Forces today.

*One of the most significant contributions of the COI and OSS was the work of the Research and Analysis branch. This element compiled intelligence and information to provide the executive branch and other intelligence consumers with current products, such as this one on the Japanese government.*

# SECRET INTELLIGENCE

The Secret Intelligence (SI) branch of OSS, an original part of the Coordinator of Information (COI), was to obtain “by secret means information which cannot otherwise be secured and which is not elsewhere available.”<sup>1</sup> In practice, this meant intelligence collection performed by agents, known as human intelligence (HUMINT) today. Although not as well known as the direct-action SO elements in OSS, SI agents faced incredible danger. Small SI teams gathered information by espionage. They established “nets” of local informants or spies to collect specific information, such as enemy military unit locations.

SI personnel operated alone or in two to four person teams in enemy-controlled and neutral countries. They were particularly active in France, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and French Indo-China (now Vietnam). Twenty-nine SI teams under the SUSSEX program were sent into occupied-France. Only three of the SUSSEX teams—COLERE, FILAN, and SALAUD—were captured and executed by the Germans. Forty-one agents under the PROUST program went into occupied France; they only lost one person. One of the most remarkable SI successes was achieved by Allen W. Dulles, who later directed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). On 2 May 1945, he arranged the separate surrender of German forces in Italy. Although this occurred just six days before the surrender of Germany, Dulles’ effort saved many Allied lives.



*OSS SI station chief Allen W. Dulles operated in neutral Switzerland. He was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from 1953-61.*



*Suspected Chinese collaborators await interrogation by Team BUICK, China 1945.*



*In this painting by Jeff Bass, SI agent Virginia Hall transmits in France, 1944. She was later decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for her extraordinary heroic efforts.*



*SI agents board P-563, a Maritime Unit fast-boat, off the Burma Coast in 1945. The SI agents of OSS Detachment 404 had successfully infiltrated the Japanese-held coast.*

# SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Set up as the American equivalent to the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Special Operations (SO) branch was to "effect physical subversion of the enemy," in three distinct phases: infiltration and preparation, sabotage and subversion, and direct support to guerrilla, resistance, or commando units.<sup>2</sup> After the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, OSS Chief William J. Donovan wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, stressing the need for a special operations element able to function "as an essential part of the strategic plan," that could sow "the dragon's teeth in those territories from which we withdraw ... that the aid of native chiefs be obtained, the loyalty of the inhabitants cultivated ... and guerrilla bands of bold, and daring men organized and installed."<sup>3</sup> This was to be done with "men calculatingly reckless with disciplined daring, who are trained for aggressive action ... it will mean a return to our old tradition of the scouts, the raiders, and the rangers."<sup>4</sup>

Based on Donovan's vision, the OSS developed an SO branch, clearly modeled on the British Commandos, to increase "the enemy's misery and weaken his will to resist."<sup>5</sup> SO operatives became the first OSS personnel to conduct combat operations beginning in North Africa

and Burma in 1942. SO personnel and elements later served in China, France, Greece, Italy, Scandinavia, Thailand, Yugoslavia, and other locations. In German-occupied France, SO worked with the British SOE. Prior to the Normandy Invasion, the country had been blanketed with SO and SOE operatives. Once dropped into an occupied area, SO personnel linked up with resistance groups, identified their operational needs, arranged drop zones, and then radioed for supply drops. The OSS/SOE supply effort for Europe was massive. The SO resupply center at Area H in England packed more than 3,335 tons of supplies, including 75,000 small arms and 35,000 grenades, into aerial delivery containers for resistance groups in Belgium, Denmark, France, Poland, and Norway.<sup>6</sup> Many of these night airdrops were made by the 492/801st Bomb Group or "Carpetbaggers," a U.S. Army Air Forces unit whose mission was to support covert operations in Europe. In France alone, some 300,000 resistance fighters were armed by airdrop before D-Day.<sup>7</sup>

The SO branch was the genesis for many other branches of OSS: Research and Development (R&D), the Maritime Unit (MU) and the Operational Groups (OG).<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the best known SO endeavors were in the Allied Project JEDBURGH, and Detachment 101, which began as an SO mission in Burma. The Special Operations branch of OSS pioneered many of the Unconventional Warfare (UW), Counter-Insurgency (COIN), and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) tactics and techniques used by today's U.S. Army Special Operations Forces.



*Top Right Photo: 1LT Herbert Brucker is decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on Team HERMIT in France, 1944.*



*Top Left Photo: Personnel at the Area H, the SO packing station, prepare aerial delivery containers for loading. Area H was in Holme, England, and among other teams, supplied SO, Jedburgh, and Operational Groups in German-occupied Europe.*

*Photo to Left: CPT Robert L. Ford and his interpreter, "Peter," in German-occupied Greece, 1943-1944.*

*Below: CPT Walter R. Mansfield of Team MUSKRAT instructs Chinese troops on the use of the Thompson sub-machinegun, China 1945.*



## JEDBURGHS: D-Day 1944 and Beyond

The mission of the Jedburgh teams was to supplement existing SO/SOE "circuits," to help organize and arm the resistance, arrange supply drops, procure intelligence, provide liaison between the Allies and the Resistance, and to take part in sabotage operations. Project Jedburgh was a joint Allied program, with the OSS Special Operations (SO) branch, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the French *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA) involved. Eighty-three American, 90 British, 103 French, 5 Belgian, and 5 Dutch personnel were extensively trained in paramilitary techniques for Jedburgh missions. Ninety-three Jedburgh teams parachuted into France and eight went into The Netherlands.<sup>9</sup> A model team consisted of one French, one British, and one American serviceman. Every team had at least one officer and a radioman, but team sizes varied from two to four men.

So as not to alert the Germans to the exact invasion date, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, did not permit Jedburgh teams to parachute into occupied-France until the night of 5/6 June 1944. For the next three months thereafter, Jedburgh teams were extremely successful in supporting attacks on enemy lines of communication and reducing destruction of key infrastructure by the retreating Germans. Their actions, like those of the OSS Operational Groups (OG), forced the Germans to divert significant military assets away from major battlefronts. As Allied forces overran the Jedburgh areas of operations, their missions were terminated.

Like many OSS veterans, several former Jedburghs had successful post-war careers. William E. Colby, who



*Members of Team RONALD prepare to jump into occupied France on 4 August 1944. LT Shirley R. Trumps (in foreground) and T/SGT Elmer B. Esch (behind Trumps) were Americans, while Lieutenant Georges Deseilligny, facing the camera, was French.*

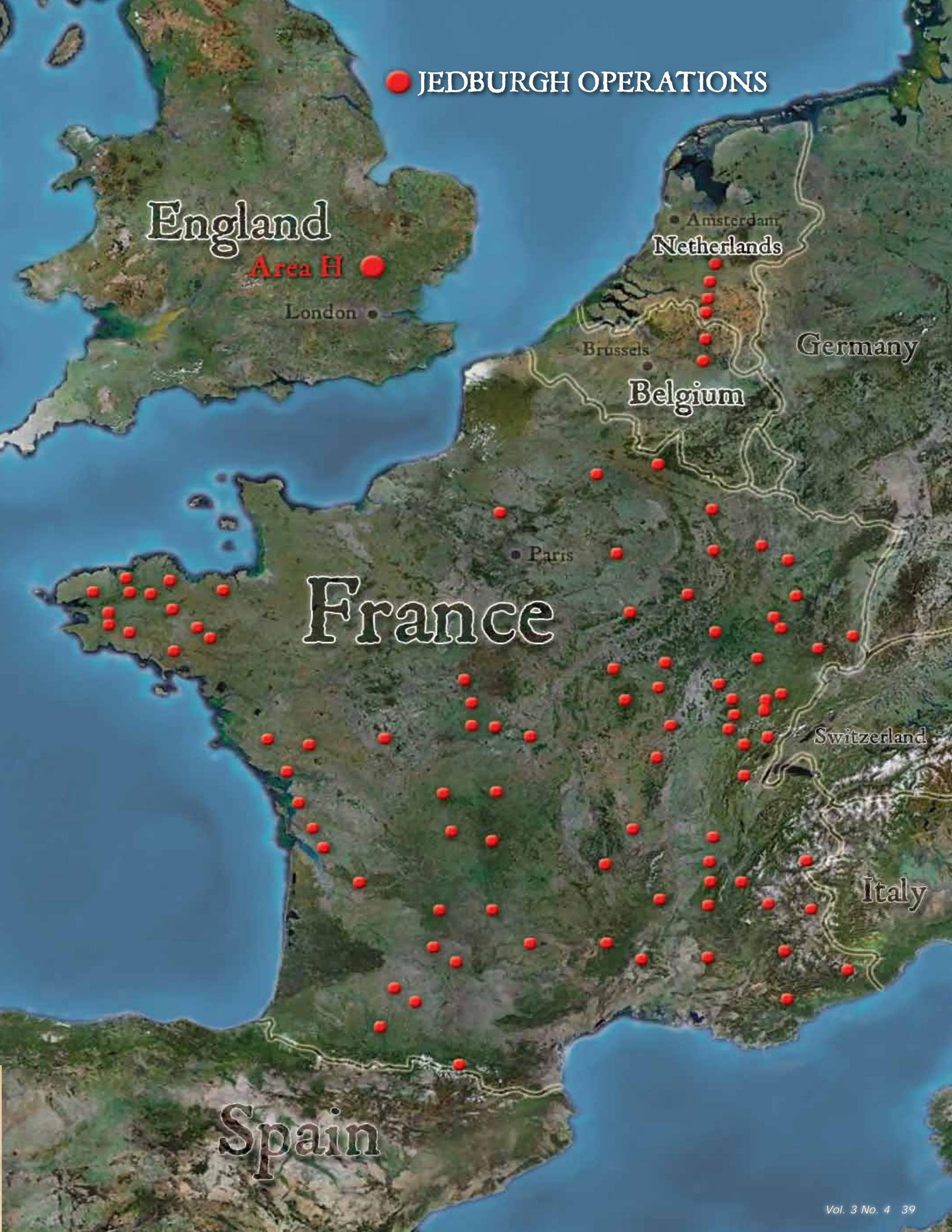
also commanded the Norwegian OG, served as the CIA Director from 1973-1975. Major General John K. Singlaub led the Studies and Observation Group (SOG) in Vietnam from 1966-1968. The Jedburgh with the closest connection to Army Special Forces was Colonel Aaron Bank, first Director of Special Forces (SF) and Commander of the first operational SF group, the 10th SFG. Many of the tactics and techniques used by Jedburgh teams were adopted for training early Special Forces in the 1950s.



*The unofficial Special Force wing was worn by the Jedburghs. This insignia was also worn by some Operational Group (OG) Teams in France.*

*Jedburgh teams suit up in England prior to boarding a "Carpetbagger" B-24 Liberator drop aircraft, August 1944.*

● JEDBURGH OPERATIONS



England

Area H ●

London ●

Amsterdam  
Netherlands

Brussels

Belgium

Germany

Paris

France

Switzerland

Italy

Spain

## OPERATIONAL GROUPS

The multi-faceted mission of the Operational Groups was to organize, train, and equip local resistance organizations, and to conduct “hit and run” missions against enemy-controlled roads, railways, and strong points, or to prevent their destruction by retreating enemy forces. Major General William J. Donovan believed that qualified soldiers with language skills and cultural backgrounds could be found among ethnic



*Members of Greek OG Group IV coordinate with Bulgarian soldiers in Macedonia in October, 1944.*



*OG Team LAFAYETTE in August 1944. Many of these men later served on the SEWANEE mission in North Italy, March-May 1945. Caesar J. Civitella, an original member of U.S. Army Special Forces, is in the middle row far right.*



*Chinese paratrooper trainees and their OG instructors prior to their first mass tactical jump, China 1945.*

groups in the United States. These soldiers could then be inserted as a team into enemy-occupied territory and successfully operate as small guerilla bands. Unlike OSS Special Operations (SO) teams, the Operational Groups (OGs) always operated in military uniform. They were trained in infantry tactics, guerilla warfare, foreign weapons, demolition, parachuting, and had attached medical personnel. A country-specific OG had four officers and thirty enlisted men. But in practice, sections sent into the field were often half that size.

OGs were active in Burma, China, France, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Yugoslavia. In the Mediterranean Theater, the OGs were controlled by the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional) and were divided into regional sections. The OGs were first employed in Italy in September 1943. Eventually thirty teams were sent into occupied Italy. In Greece, eight OG teams operated from April to November 1944. OG teams also conducted operations against the Dalmatian coastal islands from January to October 1944. OGs, like the Jedburghs, were not dropped into occupied-France until after D-Day, 6 June 1944. Twenty-one OG teams supported subsequent Allied landings at Normandy and the invasion of Southern France. Two OG teams served in Norway from March to June 1945. In the Far East, OG personnel were parceled out to Detachment 101 teams, or worked with the OSS Maritime Unit conducting OG operations along the Arakan coast of Burma. Many OG personnel were sent to China in 1945 to organize and train the first of twenty Chinese airborne units, called “Commandos.” Although the war ended before all the units could be trained, several Commandos with their OG “advisors” conducted operations against the Japanese before the final surrender.

The OGs accounted for thousands of enemy killed and captured, destroyed numerous bridges, locomotives and rail lines, and caused the diversion of large numbers of enemy troops. The 2671st and its OGs received a Presidential Unit Citation. Detachment 101 in Burma received the only other one awarded to the OSS. The lasting legacy of the OGs is found in Operational Detachments Alpha (ODA) of today’s Special Forces.



*2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional) Tab*



*Unofficial patch worn by the Greek Operational Group. In the Mediterranean Theater, the OGs of the 2671st were divided into “companies.” Company A was the Italian OG, Company B was the French OG, while Company C was composed of two separate elements; the Yugoslav OG and the Greek OG.*

# ● OG OPERATIONS IN EUROPE

## NORWEGIAN OG



## SPOKANE



## SOLTA ISLAND RAID



## CHRISTOPHER



## PATRICK



## GREEK GROUP IV





## MORALE OPERATIONS

The OSS Morale Operations (MO) branch produced and disseminated “black” propaganda to destabilize enemy governments and encourage resistance movements at the strategic and tactical levels. OSS Director William J. Donovan believed that “persuasion, penetration, and intimidation” were modern day counterparts to “sapping and mining in the siege warfare of former days.”<sup>10</sup>

MO designed and printed leaflets, spread false rumors, and produced radio broadcasts aimed at Axis and enemy-occupied countries. Radio broadcasts against the Germans supposedly came from a clandestine station in France, but actually originated in England.

The broadcasts were designed to be entertaining in order to get enemy soldiers to listen. The propaganda was interspersed throughout the programs. The “entertainment” portion included popular songs in German, such as “Lili Marlene,” recorded for MO by Marlene Dietrich.<sup>11</sup>

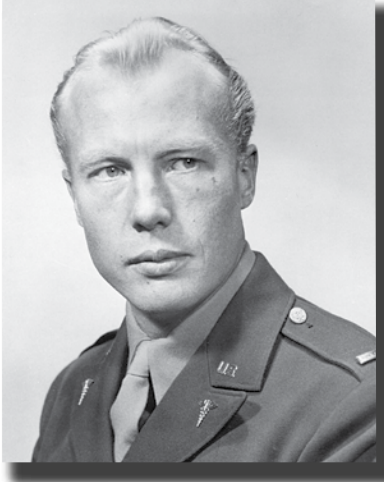
Operation SAUERKRAUT was highly successful. Released prisoners of war agreed to slip behind their lines in German uniform to disseminate MO leaflets and false rumors in north Italy. One leaflet announced that Field Marshal Albert Kesselring [the German Commanding General], was resigning his post because he believed the war lost. Kesselring had to formally deny the announcement. Operation CORNFLAKES filled German mailbags with personal letters containing MO propaganda. These decoy mailbags were dropped by Allied aircraft during attacks on enemy rail yards. The hope was that the Germans would think the scattered mailbags were real and put them through their postal system. MO was so effective in Italy that an estimated 10,000 enemy troops surrendered or deserted.<sup>12</sup> For these and other efforts, MO is a part of today’s Psychological Operations legacy.

*Morale Operations produced pamphlets with anti-Japanese and German messages.*

*MO members clown for the camera in their printshop, China 1945.*



# MARITIME UNIT



*CPT Christian J. Lambertsen invented the LARU and other devices for MU. Dr. Lambertsen had a distinguished post-war career in environmental medicine, a field he pioneered after WWII.*

The Maritime Unit's mission was to infiltrate agents and supply resistance groups by sea, conduct maritime sabotage, and to develop specialized maritime surface and subsurface equipment and devices. The Maritime Unit (MU) grew out of the Special Operations (SO) aquatic training requirement when it became apparent that the OSS needed a specialized amphibious capability. Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Navy, and Army personnel helped MU pioneer a special operations maritime capability.



*The LARU underwater rebreather*

The Maritime Unit operated in several theaters. In the Mediterranean, a fleet of hired Greek wooden fishing vessels—called *caiques*—covertly supported OSS agents in Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia. After Italy surrendered, the MU and the San Marco battalion, an elite Italian special operations naval unit, operated against the Germans. In the Far East, the MU operated in conjunction with an Operational Group to attack Japanese forces on the Arakan coast of Burma. They jointly conducted reconnaissance missions on the Japanese-held coast, sometimes penetrating several miles up enemy-controlled rivers.

The MU was a special operations pioneer. In addition to being an early maritime warfare force, it developed or used several innovative devices, including an inflatable surfboard, a two-man kayak, and limpet mines that attached to the hull of a ship. Dr. Christian J. Lambertsen, then a U.S. Army captain, developed the Lambertsen Rebreathing Unit (LARU), an early underwater breathing device. The Lambertsen unit permitted a swimmer to remain underwater for several hours and to approach targets undetected because the LARU did not emit telltale air bubbles. The LARU was later refined, adapted, and the technology used by the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and NASA. The Army Special Forces Underwater Operations School at Key West, Florida, the home of Special Forces maritime operations, draws its roots from the Maritime Unit and Dr. Christian Lambertsen is remembered as the "Father of Military Underwater Operations."



*An MU swimmer negotiates anti-submarine concertina wire nets during underwater training.*

*The P-564, an MU fastboat under the command of 1LT Walter L. Mess.*



## RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

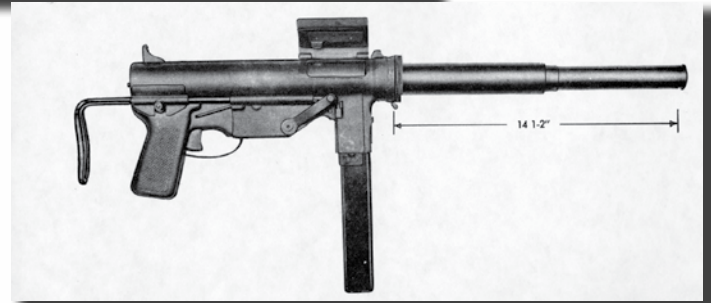
The mission of the Research and Development (R&D) branch was to develop devices to help undercover OSS agents, enhance intelligence gathering, or to facilitate sabotage operations. Like “Q” in the James Bond movies, the OSS R&D branch developed or contracted for the fabrication of special weapons and devices. The branch cooperated extensively with the British, and in many cases refined their clandestine issue items. These specialized items were primarily used by members of the Secret Intelligence and Special Operations branches.

The most critical items developed by R&D were special explosive and incendiary devices to destroy enemy equipment, vehicles, and infrastructure. These products ranged from limpet mines to sink ships to exploding candles and an explosive flour. “Aunt Jemima” flour could actually be baked and eaten in an emergency. R&D also developed chemical and pressure activated firing devices and clock timers that enabled an agent to set an explosive charge, and leave knowing that it would later activate.

R&D branch products ranged the gamut. They included the infamous cyanide-filled “L” capsule, which an agent could bite if captured to avoid revealing information under torture. Other “spy” items included a miniature camera that looked like a matchbox and a lock picking kit folded up like a small pocketknife. As one would expect, several weapons had silencers—the High Standard .22 pistol and M3 submachine “Grease” gun. Some of these were later used by Special Forces in Vietnam.



*The OSS “Dog Drag” was designed to confuse tracking dogs. When crushed, the glass vial emitted a noxious odor.*



*The silenced M3 submachine “Grease” gun was used primarily in the Far East during WWII and later by U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam.*



*Designed to resemble a common box of matches, the OSS Matchbox Camera was supplied to operatives working behind the lines.*

*Research and Development experimented with underwater technologies before that mission was assigned to the Maritime Unit in 1943.*



## COMMUNICATIONS BRANCH

The mission of the Communications Branch was to recruit and train military and civilian radio operators at OSS training camps and to develop radios and communications devices tailored to specific assignments. The branch had its genesis in the COI period, but did not become a separate OSS entity until 22 September 1942.<sup>13</sup> Mastering the technical aspects of OSS-unique clandestine communications equipment, developing training programs focused on operating, maintaining, and repairing this equipment in the field, and supporting specific needs of the operational branches required an element specifically dedicated to OSS communications requirements.

The Communications Branch trained personnel in a ten-week program that included radio maintenance, Morse code, cryptography, and communications procedures and security. OSS communicators were trained at OSS Areas C [Prince William Forest Park, VA], M [Camp McDowell-Napierville, IL], and on Catalina Island, CA. Trainees at these camps were Communications Branch recruits and designated radio operators from the SI, SO, and OG branches. The Communications Branch was also responsible for providing communications and radio familiarization training at other OSS training camps operated by the OSS Schools and Training Branch. Subsections of the Communications Branch researched and developed mission-specific communications devices, such as the SSTR-1 Transmitter-Receiver. The SSTR-1 was popularly known as the "suitcase" radio because of its most common method of concealment. Another item was the SSTC-502/SSTR-6, popularly known as the "Joan-Eleanor." The SSTC-502 ("Joan") was a 3 1/2 pound hand held radio that ran on compact long-life batteries, eliminating the need for a heavy charger. The SSTR-6 ("Eleanor") was emplaced in an aircraft. This revolutionary system, developed late in 1944, allowed the ground operator to talk with OSS personnel in an aircraft thousands of feet up and miles away from their location, greatly reducing the chances of detection.

The communicators were the "unsung" members of the clandestine service, providing critical command and control nodes. They worked in every theater that the OSS operated in and operated the radios for groups and teams. Communications to elements behind enemy lines was critical. Radios were used to arrange resupply, coordinate field operations, and transmit time-sensitive intelligence. Radio personnel staffed twenty-six OSS message centers in fifteen countries. These centers served as the OSS information clearing houses, receiving messages from the field teams, relaying them to commanders and OSS headquarters, and issued orders and instructions to groups in the field. U.S. Army Special Forces realized the critical need for communications specialists with advanced training at all levels—ODA, ODB, ODC, and the Group. The SF communications sergeant, MOS 18 Echo designation, fills that need.



*A Communications Branch instructor demonstrates a radio to an OSS recruit at Area C.*

*1SG Berent Friele sending a message at SO Team JACKAL, China, 1945. Friele had previously been the radio operator of Jedburgh Team GERALD in France 1944.*




*The Communications staff of OSS Detachment 101 in Burma, 1945.*





*Communications personnel coordinated supply drops to the field, such as this one in north Burma in 1944.*


# The OSS in Asia


*OSS operations in the Asia covered a huge geographic area with dramatically different climate and worked with numerous indigenous groups. The OSS in the Asia was unique in that it was separated into Detachments, unlike OSS in Europe.*

 **Detachment 101** was established under the OSS predecessor, the Coordinator of Information (COI) in 1942 at Nazira, India. Detachment 101 was the OSS element that conducted operations in Burma, and was so named because the COI did not want the British to know that it was the only existing unit of its type at the time. Detachment 101 primarily worked in north Burma for the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC). Other OSS elements in the Asia followed an incremental numbering scheme starting with Detachment 101.

 **Detachment 202** based in Chungking, was the main OSS element coordinating operations in China and northern French Indo-China (Vietnam) after late 1944. China had several other OSS units, including the Sino-American Special Cooperative Agreement (SACO), a joint command with the U.S. Navy Group, China and Chinese intelligence, and the 5329th Air and Ground Forces Resources and Technical Staff (AGFTRS), an intelligence group that assisted the U.S. 14th Air Force.

 **Detachment 303**, based in New Delhi, served as an administrative base for the OSS in the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC). The OSS operational element in SEAC was Detachment 404, based in Kandy, Ceylon.

 **Detachment 404** was responsible for operations in southern Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Andaman Islands, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and southern French Indo-China.

 **Detachment 505**, originally a supply, administrative, and personnel base for Detachment 101, became separate in early 1945. Detachment 505 also serviced Detachment 202 in China.





Mongolia

China

Bhutan

Nazira

Chungking

Kunming

Burma

Rangoon

Thailand

Bangkok

French Indochina

Saigon

## OSS DETACHMENT 101: 1942-1945

Detachment 101's mission in Burma was to collect intelligence on enemy order of battle, find targets for the 10th Air Force, rescue downed Allied aircrews, and to recruit native troops—mostly ethnic Kachins—to serve as guerillas. Activated on 22 April 1942 under the command of Colonel Carl F. Eifler, Detachment 101 was the first Special Operations (SO) unit formed by the Coordinator of Information (COI), the predecessor to the OSS.<sup>14</sup> Detachment 101's operations supported a combined operations campaign that earned the unit the reputation as "the most effective tactical combat force in OSS."<sup>15</sup> For its distinguished contributions to the war in the Far East, Detachment 101 was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

Burma was in the resource-starved China-Burma-India area of operations, a backwater compared to other theaters. OSS observers recognized, however, that "the Burma Campaign is probably not going to be the big show, but it is the 'going' show."<sup>16</sup> In 1943, Detachment 101 launched a series of long-range penetration operations by airdrop—the first done by OSS. However, it was their highly successful overland penetrations behind Japanese lines that enabled them to expand their operations. In 1944, led by Colonel William R. Peers, Detachment 101 established themselves firmly in the CBI by conducting "all operations which they [conventional forces] are not prepared to undertake."<sup>17</sup> Detachment 101 was a force multiplier in the first major Allied success in northern Burma, the capture of Myitkyina. They cut enemy lines of communication, ambushed Japanese troops, and provided scouts and guides for Merrill's Marauders and the British Chindits. Detachment 101 then assisted Allied units, like the MARS Task Force, as they advanced south. A sub-element, the Arakan Field Unit (AFU) supported the British 14th Army in its campaign to recapture the Burmese coast enroute to Rangoon. After the fall of the Burmese capital, Detachment 101 elements from north Burma were tasked to perform a more conventional role. As the only U.S. ground forces, they used their guerillas to clear the Shan States and to block the flight of Japanese forces to Thailand.

At the end of its operations in July 1945, Detachment 101 was credited with 5,500 known Japanese killed. Fewer than 30 Americans and 184 native soldiers were killed, and only 86 native personnel were captured or missing in action. At its busiest time, Detachment 101 had nearly 9,200 guerillas under arms.<sup>18</sup> Detachment 101 is the OSS element that most closely mirrors the mission and capability of today's Army Special Forces Group.



COL Carl F. Eifler commanded Detachment 101 until December 1943.



COL William R. Peers succeeded Eifler. He retired in 1973, as a LTG.



CPT Zachariah Ebaugh (left) jokes with indigenous troops. Detachment 101, and the OSS, had to foster good relations with the locals in order to survive.



A Stinson L-1 of Detachment 101's "Red Ass" Air Force, which supported combined operations in Burma.



Unofficial silver Burma Campaign Bar worn by some Detachment 101 personnel.



China-Burma-India Theater SSI



Unofficial Detachment 101 patch worn by U.S. personnel. The term "Jinghpaw" is another name for Kachin.

## DETACHMENT 404: 1944-1945



*A Detachment 404 commander briefs the next mission, Burma 1945.*



*CPT Erik J. Anderson of the Arakan Field Unit MU section leads a rubber boat team down a chaung (tidal creek), Burma, 1945.*



*Lord Louis Mountbatten was the British commander in charge of the Southeast Asia Command. He is on the left talking with Cora DuBois, the OSS Detachment 404 Research and Analysis (R&A) chief.*



*Southeast Asia  
Command SSI*

Detachment 404 was formed to help coordinate intelligence collection and operations of covert organizations like the OSS and British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in the Far East. Detachment 404 also recruited indigenous personnel from enemy-controlled areas to be reinserted as trained agents via submarines. In addition, it established coast watchers to gather meteorological and topographical shoreline data, record tide tables, report on Japanese shipping, and arrange for the rescue of downed Allied pilots.<sup>19</sup> Located in what is now Sri Lanka, Detachment 404 worked with Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's predominately-British Southeast Asia Command (SEAC).

Detachment 404's area of responsibility was huge—the Andaman Islands, India, Indonesia, Malaya, Sumatra, Thailand, and parts of Burma and French Indo-China (Vietnam).<sup>20</sup> Thailand, an occupied and unwilling Japanese ally, offered the most potential for OSS operations. High-ranking Thai politicians enabled Special Operations (SO) and Secret Intelligence (SI) teams to infiltrate in late 1944. These teams collected volumes of intelligence and trained a guerrilla force, but the war ended before they could be employed. The OSS support generated such positive feelings towards the U.S. that President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed William J. Donovan to be his Ambassador to Thailand in 1953.

The Arakan Field Unit (AFU) of Detachment 404 was a 175-man element that contained SI personnel, Operational Groups (OG) and the Maritime Unit (MU). It was employed along the Burma coast to assist the XV Indian Corps of the British XIV Army. In February 1945, Detachment 101 assumed operational control of the AFU. OG and MU personnel jointly conducted reconnaissance missions along the Arakan coast and up its numerous inlets and rivers. While helping liberate Rangoon, AFU elements collected considerable intelligence. These accomplishments in a highly political environment demonstrated how the OSS persevered and adapted to accomplish all missions.



*Members of the Arakan Field Unit Operational Group section, MAJ Lloyd E. Peddicord and CPT George H. Bright, plan operations in Burma, December 1944.*



## DETACHMENT 202: 1944-1945

Detachment 202 collected intelligence and supported Chinese forces in order to tie down as many Japanese troops as possible.<sup>21</sup> The OSS began operating in 1943, in conjunction with the U.S. Navy Group, China, and Chinese intelligence, under the Sino-American Special Cooperative Agreement (SACO). Although the OSS conducted several successful operations, SACO's isolation, lack of supplies, bureaucratic obstacles, and Nationalist Chinese demands to control all operations prevented it from reaching its potential. Fortunately, in late 1944 the U.S. Army theater commander for China and French Indo-China (Vietnam), Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, pulled the OSS under his command as an independent agency. This enabled the newly created Detachment 202 to operate outside of SACO and away from Chinese influence.



*Annamese troops of SO Team DEER patrol in French Indo-China, late 1945.*



*Chinese Commandos receive instruction on how to jump from a C-47 drop aircraft. The OG instructors used a crashed C-47 as a mock-up.*



*A member of SO Team LEOPARD cranks a generator to power the team's radio, China, 1945.*

The Operational Groups (OG), Special Operations (SO), and Secret Intelligence (SI) branches of Detachment 202 immediately began exercising their capabilities. The OGs were directed to train twenty company-sized paratrooper elements. Despite the lack of full Nationalist Chinese cooperation, the OGs formed six fully trained commandos and had begun to conduct operations by the end of hostilities. These Commandos were the first paratroop units in the Nationalist Chinese Army. SO had the mission to create, arm, train, and lead guerrilla forces. By the end of the war, a few SO groups were leading guerilla forces 500 miles behind enemy lines.<sup>22</sup> These SO guerilla groups, some as large as 1,500 men, cut roads and rails, blew up road and train bridges, and killed thousands of Japanese troops. Although on a smaller scale than OG or SO operations, SI established several teams in French Indo-China and southern China. These teams reported Japanese naval and air traffic and meteorological

conditions. Although the Japanese surrender ended combat operations, these Detachment 202 elements demonstrated the capabilities of the OSS in China.

One of the most important successes in China took place immediately after the atomic bomb was dropped. "Mercy Mission" teams parachuted into Japanese prison camps to prevent further harm to Allied POWs. The OSS contributed the bulk of the personnel, although several other organizations participated as well. This was done at great peril because many Japanese commands were not aware that the war was over. Eleven "Mercy" teams from OSS China arranged for food, medical care, and the evacuation of POWs to Allied camps.



*Chinese Commando Patch*



*OSS Agent Identification Badge. These serial numbered pin-on insignia were used in China to help OSS personnel identify one another.*

## AN ENDURING LEGACY: 1945-PRESENT

At the end of WWII, the OSS evaluated its wartime operations. For more than three years, the organization had been involved in combat and intelligence collection worldwide. At its peak in December 1944, OSS employed 13,000 personnel, 7,500 of whom served overseas. In terms of numbers, the OSS was smaller than a U.S. Army infantry division in WWII.

The special operations branches were not compatible with a post-war world. Major General William J. Donovan, knowing that the OSS would be disbanded, sought to preserve the covert branches by incorporating them into a peacetime intelligence agency. Donovan reasoned; "It is not easy to set up a modern intelligence system. It is more difficult to do so in time of peace than in time of war."<sup>23</sup> Despite Donovan's best efforts, President Harry S. Truman ordered him to dissolve the OSS by 1 October 1945.

Research and Analysis (R&A), universally recognized as the most valuable OSS function, was transferred to the Department of State. The War Department assumed responsibility for the remaining OSS assets, under the Strategic Services Unit (SSU). Intelligence collection, like that conducted by Secret Intelligence (SI) and X-2, the OSS counter-intelligence branch, was retained at a reduced level. The paramilitary branches: Special Operations (SO), Operational Groups (OG), Maritime Unit (MU), and Morale Operations (MO), were dismantled.

In February 1946, President Truman created the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), as an interim agency. The National Security Act of 1947 converted the CIG into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although there was a two year gap between the demise of the OSS and the creation of the Agency, the CIA views Donovan as its "founding father." Likewise, the Special Operations community benefited from OSS. Colonel Aaron Bank, a former Jedburgh, formed the U.S. Army Special Forces in 1952. Bank recruited WWII combat veterans of airborne units, the First Special Service Force, and the OSS, for Special Forces. In 1989, the newly formed United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), at Fort Bragg, NC, chose the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger, carried by some members of the OSS, to be the centerpiece of its insignia. To demonstrate its connection to the OSS, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) wears an adaptation of the unofficial OSS spearhead insignia as its shoulder patch. 📌

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### Endnotes

- 1 Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS* (New York: Walker and Company, 1976) 179.
- 2 Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS*, 206; 70.
- 3 OSS Special Operations branch history, "This Phase of SO," F 4, Box 101, E 99, RG 226, NARA.
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- 5 OSS Special Operations branch history, "This Phase of SO," NARA.
- 6 OSS London War Diary, "Special Operations Branch: Supply, Roll 10, Vol. 10," 13,17; OSS London War Diary, "Special Operations Branch: Air Operations, Roll 9, Vol. 6," 7.
- 7 Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets* (New York: Walker and Company, 1976), 179.
- 8 Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS*, 206.
- 9 For an excellent reference on the Jedburghs visit Arthur Brown's history which has been archived at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060429014554/http://freespace.virgin.net/arthur.brown2/short+history.htm>
- 10 Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS*, 211.
- 11 Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets*, 299.
- 12 Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets*, 99.
- 13 Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS*, 135-143.
- 14 [Brief Chronology of OSSSU Detachment 101], F 74, B 42, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 15 **Although Detachment 101 was the first COI/OSS unit of its type, one of the early SA/G (the predecessor name of OSS SO) chiefs, Lieutenant Colonel Garland Williams, did not want to reveal that to the British. He chose the name "Coordinator of Information Special Unit Detachment 101" to imply that the unit was one of many.** Thomas N. Moon and Carl F. Eifler, *The Deadliest Colonel* (New York: Vantage, 1975) 53; Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets*, xvii..
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- 21 Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets*, 415; 428-430.
- 22 Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets*, 446.
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OSS Patch



CIA Seal



USASOC SSI



SOCOM SSI