

Bona Fides

by Troy J. Sacquety

ÉTAT FRANÇAIS
CARTE D'IDENTITÉ N° **1863** A 43

Nom *Brugnion*
Prénoms *Albert Jean*
Domicile *Lyon, 5 rue Comfort*
Profession *cuisinier*
Né le *10 octobre 1918*
à *Paris* Dép' *Seine*
fils de *Ernest*
et de *Marie Blanchard*
Nationalité *française*
Signature du titulaire: *H. Brugnion*

Emprunte digitale

15 FRANCS

IMP. CHAIX 19, CNE VITTON LYON

SIGNALLEMENT

Taille *1 m 61*
Visage *ovale*
Teint *mat*
Cheveux *châtains*
Moustaches *4*
Front *moyen*
Yeux *gris*
Nez *rect.*
Bouche *moyenne*
Menton *zond*
Signes particuliers *rien*

Changements de Domicile

3 mai 1942

R. Brucker

VILLE DE LYON
LE DEPT SEINE
PERRACHE
VILLE DE LYON

This Identity Card was issued to 2LT Herbert R. Brucker in the alias of Albert Jean Brugnion. Because Brucker jumped into occupied France in civilian clothes, he needed a solid cover story to explain why he was there, to include the supporting personal documents.

The National Archives II recently opened the personnel files of the WWII Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to researchers at College Park, MD. These have disclosed many new aspects about the organization. A very interesting file is that of Special Forces pioneer Major Herbert R. Brucker, a 10th SF Group plank holder. While in the OSS Special Operations Branch (SO), Brucker participated in operations in Europe, Burma, and China. Second Lieutenant (2LT) Brucker, code-named *Sacha*, jumped into France in civilian clothes to reestablish the HERMIT network, an Allied command and control element organizing resistance fighters around Vendôme. Life for an undercover agent was much more complex than that of a uniformed Jedburgh or Operational Group operative. They had to eat, speak, and act like natives to blend in with the population. An agent had to have a plausible cover story that would stand up to interrogation. This article briefly describes the OSS preparations to ensure an agent had the best chance to survive.

Although the British equivalent, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) helped considerably, OSS developed a capability to supply their agents with the accoutrements of daily life. This included clothing and identity documents. The correct paper, stamps, and typewriter fonts had to be as exact as possible as those used on *bona fides* in enemy-occupied territories. Two OSS branches supplied these

items; Censorship and Documents (CD) and Research and Development (R&D).¹

The CD Branch was created on 3 November 1943. Its Document Intelligence Division was responsible for collecting "all possible sources of personal documents and identity papers and similar documentary material."² R&D was created on 17 October 1942. It was best known for creating special weapons and devices for covert and clandestine OSS missions. However, R&D's Document Division was responsible for creating forged documents to "authenticate agent cover in enemy and enemy-occupied territory."³ 2LT Brucker's cover story had to be plausible and simple so that he could memorize the details and live that identity without thinking.

The cover story had to explain why a military-age civilian man was either not being held as a prisoner of war or being used as a laborer by the Germans. 2LT Brucker was to become "Albert Jean Brugnion."⁴ Brucker was told to treat his new alias as "private and confidential."⁵ Albert (close to his own name, Herbert) Brugnion was born in Paris on 10 October 1918. Since his father was killed in the First World War, his mother, a cook, raised him. Brugnion learned to cook from his mother and worked in that profession until 1939. In that year, he was called up for service in the French Army. He was captured by the Germans when they invaded France in mid-1940. While



Four of the documents forged for “Albert Jean Brugnion.” At left is the release from Stalag XVII-B, including the forged Nazi stamp, detailing the reason for his discharge, in the middle-top is one of his inaccurate ration books; middle-bottom is his permit to work at “Taverne du Lion D’or,” and on the right is his demobilization paper from the French Army. The documents had to have an aged look to reflect the appearance of having been carried for some time.

interned in a German Prisoner of War (POW) camp, *Stalag XVII-B* at Krebs, Austria, he developed a gastric ulcer (there was no easy way to verify this medical condition). After being repatriated and demobilized on 7 December 1942 at Lyon, France, Brugnion found employment as a cook.⁶ Although he had several close calls, Brucker, alias Brugnion, had a successful mission despite some problems with his cover and documentation.

2LT Brucker jumped into rural France in St. Viatre on 28 May 1944 wearing a three-piece wool business suit. Neither he, nor the OSS realized, that the average French worker in the country only owned one suit for church or funerals. Brucker had to scramble to get denim clothing like that worn by the local farmers. Another problem was that his OSS-issued ration cards were out of date and on the wrong colored paper. Despite careful preparation on the part of the OSS forgers, they could not keep up with changing conditions on the ground. Seemingly minor slip-ups could easily have proven fatal.⁷

The closest that Brucker came to being captured was when he and his French bodyguard, Raymond Compain, inadvertently “bumped into” a 30-man German checkpoint. Coming around a blind corner on their tandem bicycle, the two were surprised when three German guards stopped them. While the two got out their papers, the Germans patted Compain down and felt the hard outline of his concealed pistol. Compain grabbed the rifle muzzle of the first enemy soldier and the pistol of the second. Responding rapidly, Brucker pulled out his .32 Colt automatic pistol, shot the third

German and then those wrestling with Compain. The pair fled before the rest of the German platoon could react. Brucker was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor in enemy-occupied France.⁸ †

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 Special Operations Units in Vietnam.

Endnotes

- 1 Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets: War Report of the OSS Volume II* (Washington, DC: Carrollton Press, Inc, 1976), 161-162.
- 2 Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS* (New York: Walker and Company, 1976), 202.
- 3 Roosevelt, *War Report*, 156.
- 4 “Operation Instruction No. F. 138,” 24 May 1944, F Brucker, Herbert, B 0088, E 224, RG 226, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
- 5 “Lt. Brucker,” 19 April 1944, F Brucker, Herbert, B 0088, E 224, RG 226, NARA.
- 6 “Cover Story,” [early 1944], F Brucker, Herbert, B 0088, E 224, RG 226, NARA.
- 7 Brucker recounts his mission in Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, “Major Herbert R. Brucker-SF Pioneer Part IV: SO Team HERMIT in France,” *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2007, 3-16.
- 8 2LT Herbert Brucker, “Activity Report of Herbert Brucker,” [late 1944], F Brucker, Herbert, B 0088, E 224, RG 226, NARA.