

# The Gubbins Lectures

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Major General Sir Colin Mcvean Gubbins  
K.C.M.G., D.S.O. M.C.

**Introduction by Steven Kippax**

## Introduction by Steven Kippax

Colin Gubbins did not speak often to public audiences about Special Operations Executive, indeed he was perhaps the prophet without honour in his own country, however he was highly regarded in resistance and special forces circles. These lectures show the success that S.O.E. had in clandestine warfare, building up an infrastructure to support resistance and making it a force multiplier, and most importantly committing the resistance to action at the right time. Here are two lectures given by Colin Gubbins the first at RUSI in 1948 and the second at the University of Manchester in 1967.

Colin McVean Gubbins (1896 – 1976), was a regular Artillery Officer who won an MC during W.W.1. He was the last head (CD) of Special Operations Executive having been involved in its operations from its inception. During W.W. II he rose in rank from lieutenant-colonel to major-general.

Gubbins had a long experience of guerrilla warfare, firstly as ADC to General Ironside during the British intervention in Russia in 1919. Then in Ireland from late 1919 to 1922. He went on a Russian interpreter's course at King's College, London. He was then a GIII Int doing Russian translations. Posted to India he was also involved in intelligence activities there.

Recruited to MI(R)<sup>i</sup> by its head Major Jo Holland in early 1939, Gubbins was tasked with writing manuals for use by partisan and guerrilla forces – in this he started with a clean slate and wrote three manuals which were used during the war.<sup>ii</sup> One might say he 'wrote the book' on irregular warfare! With war clouds gathering Gubbins was involved in Czechoslovakia, France, Rumania, The Baltic States and Poland, making contacts which would come in useful later in the war. He was involved with the MI(R) mission to Poland in 1939 and with the Independent Companies<sup>iii</sup> in Norway. After the fall of Norway and France, he headed the Auxiliary Units<sup>iv</sup> before being recruited to the infant Special Operations Executive in the rank of Brigadier. S.O.E. was an amalgamation of Section D of SIS, MI(R) and Electra House. Gubbins job was to set up the training section. He would also be Director of Operations. As the war progressed and S.O.E. grew to maturity so Gubbins responsibilities grew eventually becoming its head in early September 1943 after Charles Hambro was replaced.

Post war in civilian life Colin Gubbins was a founder member of the Bilderberg Group. He also was involved in the founding of the Special Forces Club whose aim was to 'foster the spirit of resistance' by in the early days maintaining contact with former operatives. He was also involved in various committees that studied resistance.

<sup>1</sup> MI(R) – Military Intelligence (Research) was a ‘Think-Tank’ that enabled a Grade I staff officer to spend time researching a subject of interest to the Army Council. In October 1938 LtCol J F C (Jo) Holland DFC, RE was appointed to this post with the remit of studying guerrilla warfare. This was to be carried out in co-operation with Section D of SIS.

<sup>2</sup> *The Partisan Leaders Handbook, How to Use High Explosives and The Art of Guerrilla Warfare.*

<sup>3</sup> The Independent Companies were the predecessors of the Commandos they saw action in the Norwegian Campaign. Several Independent Company officers became famous Commandos and SOE operatives later in the war.

<sup>4</sup> The Auxiliary Units were a secret organization organized to provide well equipped stay-behind parties, resistance forces and intelligence cells in the case of Britain being invaded by the Germans. The AU’s were stood down in 1944, many of the officers and men moving to S.O.E. or the S.A.S.

# **RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN THE WAR**

**By**

**MAJOR-GENERAL SIR COLIN GUBBINS, K.C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C.**

**On Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1948 at R. U. S. I.**

**Field-Marshal Lord Wilson of Libya, G.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.**

**In the Chair**

THE CHAIRMAN : Our Lecturer this afternoon is General Gubbins who ran the Special Operations Executive which, during the War, developed into a world-wide organization for producing resistance movements to the Axis, I think he is known to everybody who worked in the campaign for the work he did, and I am certain that what he is going to tell us will be very interesting.

## **LECTURE**

I have only a short time in which to deal with a wide subject, involving nearly twenty separate countries, covering the creation of a new and complicated weapon of war, and to explain how its operations were co-ordinated with the operations of the three fighting Services. I am forced, therefore, to deal with the subject rather generally and must take one country as an example when I come to detail. I have selected France, for this owing to its military importance and geographical position and because all types of S.O.E. operations took place there at various times.

In June 1940, the British Empire stood alone against the armed might of Germany whose triumphant forces had overrun Western Europe from the North Cape to the Pyrenees and were poised for what seemed the *coup de grace* – the destruction of Great Britain, and so the elimination of the final obstacle to German world domination. The shock was profound.

Three things were stark clear:-

- (a) We were “up against it” and the result would depend alone on what we could do;

- (b) Germany was waging total warfare in every sense of the word;
- (c) Her success had been greatly assisted by subversive methods long prepared and practiced.

We *were* “up against it” and the only answer was total warfare too, to fight back with any means we could find. And so the story of Resistance which, with the entry of Japan into the War, was to become a world-wide factor in the struggle against totalitarianism. But remember always that “Resistance” could never have begun if the great bases of our strength – primarily these islands, then Malta and Gibraltar, the Middle East, India and Australia, had not been kept inviolate and secure by the action of the three fighting Services.

As I have said, the shock of initial German success was profound, particularly in the occupied territories of Western Europe. France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway lay as if stunned; only the Poles, toughened by centuries of oppression, were spiritually uncrushed. Yet in all these countries there were hundreds of thousands individuals who refused to accept defeat and who prayed for the means to continue the struggle.

The British Commonwealth was on the defensive and it was clear that it would be years before invasion was possible; what could, however, be done in the meantime was to attack the enemy by unorthodox methods: attack his war potential wherever it was exposed and at least create some running sore to drain his strength and disperse his forces and, finally, when invasion of the Continent did take place to give the maximum of assistance to the forces of liberation. To undertake this task, and organization – Special Operations Executive, was created which combined the elements of various Government Departments that had been studying on these lines.

Here was the problem and the plan, then: to encourage and enable the peoples of the occupied countries to harass the German war effort at every possible point by sabotage, subversion, go-slow practices, *coup de main* raids, etc., and at the same time to build up secret forces therein, organized, armed and trained to take their part only when the final assault began. These two objects are, in fact, fundamentally incompatible : to divert attention from the creation of secret armies meant avoiding any activity which would attract German attention; to act offensively entailed attracting the attention and efforts of the Gestapo and SS and the redoubling of vigilance on their part. Not an easy problem, but somehow the two had to be done.

In its simplest terms, this plan involved the ultimate delivery to occupied territory of large numbers of personnel and quantities of arms and explosives. But the first problem was to make contact with those countries, to get information of the possibilities, to find out the prospects of getting local help, and an even more immediate task was to find someone suitable and willing to undertake the first hazardous trip, then to train him and fit him for the job and ensure communication with him when he had landed.

Us pain 1940, so the first man to go back to any country had to be parachuted “blind” as we say, i.e. there was no one waiting to receive him on the dropping ground, no household ready to give him shelter, conceal his kit, and arrange his onward passage, provide false papers, etc. He just went “blind” and had to use his native wit to establish himself safely and open up communication. His raining was, therefore, of the utmost importance.

And so the first organizational steps were taken – the search for suitable personnel, the setting up of training schools, the establishment of research stations for the production of specialized equipment and weapons, of wireless sets capable of being carried by one man, the production of identity papers, ration cards, demobilization papers, etc.; the provision of foreign currency, research into the methods of the Gestapo, experiments in dropping of specialized stores from aircraft, and so on. A whole host of preparations had to be initiated before the first man could be dropped and research and development continued throughout the War.

The personnel employed for active operations, whether men or women, came almost entirely from the armed forces of the Allies with, of course, a high proportion of British officers and other ranks and men from the Dominions. They were paid at ordinary Service rates plus parachute pay; many of the British had been rejected for the Services on account of age or minor infirmities. Signallers had the rank of corporal or higher. This method of recruitment largely obviated the risks of German penetration and subsequent treachery, and of enlisting unsuitable personnel who could not stand the strain. But as an extra safeguard, all personnel were given a month's preliminary course under very special supervision before even knowing what they were required for, so that if dismissed they would not be a potential danger.

The training course lasted from three to four months, including parachute training, with an extra two to three months for signallers, concluding with a specialized course on German methods, security precautions generally, "cover" and such-like technicalities. This was the programme for a man already trained as a soldier.

## **CONTROL AND PROCEDURE**

The Special Operations Executive was the responsibility of a specially nominated Cabinet Minister, but for all its activities of a specifically military nature or which might bring military repercussions, it was operationally under the Chiefs of Staff. This operational control was decentralized concurrently with the appointment of Supreme Commanders so that S.O.E.'s activities could be closely and properly co-ordinated in any theatre with those of the three Services by the theatre commanders concerned. This was not as simple as it sounds and there were many complications but these were sorted out as experience was gained. As an example of the complications France remained operationally under the Chiefs of Staff long after the conquest of North Africa and the invasion of Italy, but an S.O.E. base was established alongside Eisenhower's Headquarters in Algiers from the outset, primarily for work into France, though it also dealt with Corsica which was in General Eisenhower's theatre and with Italy, which later came into his sphere too.

On C.O.S.S.A.C.'s appointment in 1943 to cover the Western European theatre, S.O.E.'s operations therein came under that Headquarters (later, of course, S.H.A.E.F.) and so remained until the end of the War except that Norway eventually was dealt with by Scottish Command and S.O.E. conformed organizationally.

Below the Headquarters of Supreme Commanders and when offensive land operations began, co-ordination was achieved by the employment of Special Force Detachments (S.F. Detachments as they were called) at Army Group and Army Headquarters. By this means it

was possible to correlate the action of Resistance groups behind the enemy's immediate front with the tactical operations of the armies, and carry out the Army Commander's requirements, e.g. for the demolition of bridges or the prevention of demolitions by the enemy. These detachments were on a normal war establishment, but of course had to have special wireless equipment. Time does not allow of going deeply into these arrangements, but the methods and procedures have all been recorded and are available for study if required. The problem is not simple.

## **POSITION OF ÉMIGRÉ GOVERNMENTS**

I want you to consider for a moment the position of the émigré Governments who sought refuge in this country and the Middle East during the War, because they were of the greatest importance in all S.O.E. work. Above all other considerations, of course, the British Government and people had a high moral obligation towards these occupied peoples. Beyond that, it was clear from the start that the maximum results could be obtained only by maximum co-operation with those Governments, particularly where they still retained and could continue to retain the confidence of their peoples.

Denmark and France are special cases. Denmark after token resistance, which was all her weak forces could offer, was made a base for German forces but was not occupied in the same sense as Holland and Norway. The Germans wanted an example of a country which had joined the "New Order;" in Europe and was profiting by it, and so the King was allowed to continue to reign and Parliament to rule, no requisitioning of food or buildings was allowed; everything was normal. This was an intolerable situation to the majority of Danes and to the Allies as well, and had to be changed. It was not however, until August, 1943, that sabotage under British guidance and with the willing co-operation of the Danes had risen to such heights that the Germans were forced to take over the country, banish the King to his country residence, evict the Government, transport the whole police force to German concentration camps and appoint a German Governor, From that time on sabotage increased a hundredfold. Denmark had joined the war against Germany.

I must deal with France in some detail owing to her special position, due first to her supremely important place, geographically and politically, in Western Europe and her probable selection as the battleground for the most critical phase of the War. Complications arose, due to the original division of the country into Occupied and Unoccupied Zones, the maintenance by the United States of diplomatic relations with Vichy, and the fact that outside France there was no French Government but only a single man trying to rally all Frenchmen and French Territories to his flag. And so it remained for a very long time.

As far as clandestine operations in France were concerned, the main result of this complex situation was that the British Government retained direct responsibility for operations in France. This position was maintained until the invasion of Normandy, when all clandestine forces in France, whether led by the British, or built up by General de Gaulle under the guidance and control of the British, were placed by General Eisenhower under the command of General Koenig, a very right and proper arrangement, That was the proper culmination of French Resistance – the resurgence of France as a great Power and her open participation in the War – factors of immense importance for the future.

Thus from the moment of the fall of France and the commencement of total warfare against Germany, British officers and others, after due training, were parachuted into occupied territories to start the organization of resistance. As regards France, no one knew, no one could tell, how many Frenchmen were for de Gaulle or how many for Vichy and subservience; but we knew that thousands would help the British and waited only for the chance to fight the aggressor and harass wherever possible, and so we went ahead. Information gradually obtained showed that de Gaulle had a strong following, and soon he was given facilities for beginning the creation of a secret army – a process that was to continue for three and a half years with varying turns of fortune but steadily improving position.

For over-riding reasons of operational security, the control of signals traffic and of the training and despatching of personnel remained with S.O.E., and the teams in the field were organized as far as possible on the British model into close water-tight compartments each with its specific area and specific targets, whether for sabotage or for the day of invasion. And so S.O.E. had two sections in France – for the British “circuits” as they were known, and the other directing and checking the creation of a secret army that would follow de Gaulle, and in which quite a number of British officers took part. So much for France at the moment.

## **SABOTAGE**

How did all this work progress? You will remember that the general plan, altered in detail from time to time by the Chiefs of Staff according to the change of circumstances, directed the greatest possible hindering of the German war effort consonant with the building up of secret armies to take the field in open revolt when required.

The work went ahead as rapidly as physical circumstances permitted, i.e. the availability of recruits, the provision of necessary aircraft, the production of reliable portable wireless sets, and so on.

Sabotage is generally a useful term which has a hundred special facets. The picture that springs to mind is of a railway blown sky-high, of a motor-car exploding mysteriously in the street, or of a telegraph line somehow out of order, but there is much more in it than that. Germany had occupied Western Europe with all its wealth of manpower, industry and raw materials which she readily harnessed to her war effort – iron ore mines in Norway, munitions works in France, ship-building yards in Denmark, aircraft factories in Holland, armaments in Czechoslovakia, coal in Poland, etc. Her war effort was, therefore, open to attack at every point of her war economy.

Attacks were duly delivered. Targets were not picked at random, but after full examination and discussion with the Government Departments concerned, chiefly the Service Departments, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, Chief of Combines Operations, etc. In France and Belgium, in Denmark and Norway, in Greece and Yugoslavia, constant destruction was wrought against vital points in the German war economy, but I have time only to give you a few scattered examples, some carried out by local groups, some by *coup de main* parties from home.



## ***France***

- (a) The destruction of the Ratier Air Screw factory at Toulouse;
- (b) The destruction of the power supply arrangements for Le Creusot – the biggest armament works in France;
- (c) The demolition of the Gigny barrage on the Saône, holding up German E-Boat traffic to the Mediterranean for five critical weeks. This operation was repeated the following year;
- (d) The demolition of Radio-Paris, used for jamming and propaganda;
- (e) Innumerable power stations and transformers;
- (f) Continuous rail attacks, particularly against supply trains carrying oil to submarine bases.

## ***Belgium***

- (a) Power stations and transformers destroyed;
- (b) Demolitions of locks, etc., on main waterways between Belgium and France;
- (c) Destruction of high tension cables and pylons.

## ***Denmark***

- (a) Shipyard sabotage, particularly the yards of Burmeister and Wain;
- (b) Fourteen ships sunk in harbour in nine months preceding the invasion of Norway;
- (c) Attacks on railways.

## ***Norway***

- (a) Demolitions at Orkla pyrite mines and destruction of plant;
- (b) Demolition of torpedo and submarine oil stocks at Horten;
- (c) Destruction of Skefco ball-bearing works in Oslo;
- (d) Destruction of the heavy-water factory and stocks at Rjukan.

## ***Greece***

- (a) Destruction of the Gorgopotamos railway bridge;
- (b) Rail and road demolitions in June, 1943, as diversion for Allied invasion of Sicily;
- (c) Kidnapping of General Kreipe from Crete;
- (d) Sinking of German shipping in Pireaus.

## ***Malaya***

Sinking of 37,000 tone of Japanes shipping in Singapore harbour.

Sabotage as well as being violent can also be “go-slow,” can be faulty work so that parts do not fit, or parts not delivered; but this is traceable and may be fastened on particular workers, and so is unpopular, especially among piece-rate workers. Sabotage can be the misdirection of railway goods wagons by the simple expedient of changing the destination labels in the marshalling yards – this can produce much chaos. Sabotage can take the form of encouraging “malingering” in the German armed forces, which met with some success; or the encouragement of desertion provided the means are given to effect it.

## **SECRET ARMIES**

The object of forming secret armies was to produce at the moment required open armed opposition to the enemy behind his lines, aimed at his most vulnerable points, i.e., his lines of communication, particularly roads and railways; his communicational systems whether telephone, telegraph, W/T or despatch rider, his depots and repair organizations – in fact all the services whose efficient functioning is essential if the troops in the line are to fight with the best ability. A further object frequently stressed in all directives was to provide an armed and disciplined force to maintain order when the Allied invading troops had passed on, and extremely important function.

The timing of action of these secret armies was eventually decided on as follows by the Supreme Commanders concerned:-

***Normandy*** – To come into operation just before zero hour on D-Day except for such forces reserved to assist the later invasion of France from the South under Field-Marshal Lord Wilson.

***Belgium, Holland and Denmark*** – as the Allied forces approached the frontiers.

***Norway*** – to coincide with the arrival of British troops.

***Italy*** – on the opening of what proved to be the final offensive.

***Malaya*** – to coincide with the landing of the invasion forces, but I will revert to the Far East later.

## **FRANCE**

I have tried to explain the particular difficulties in dealing with France – the absence of any recognized authority outside France, the initial division into two zones – Occupied and Unoccupied, and so on. On the other hand there were many physical and concrete advantages which France possessed. First there was the wide extent of the country, which is relatively not highly populated, so that the finding of suitable dropping grounds was not very difficult and even pick-up operations by aircraft at night were fairly simple once the technique had been evolved. Secondly, the run for aircraft was comparatively short, so that maximum container loads were almost always possible. Thirdly, France could be approached from both North and South, i.e. from bases in England and Algiers, so that even on the shortest summer

nights there was practically no point that could not be reached, though the short summer nights in the Western theatre were always a problem. A further factor helping French operations was that, compared to Holland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia or Poland, it was relatively easy to get selected important people back to this country for consultation: there was the aircraft pick up method; there were land frontiers and the long coast lines facing England and North Africa.

The invasion of North Africa brought about, of course, another simplification France was no longer divided into two zones – Occupied and Unoccupied, Two peoples – one suffering under Occupation and the other suffering only under Vichy, became totally Occupied and French resistance by that time much hardened and crystallized.

The history of the building up of the secret armies in France, as in other West European countries though to a lesser degree, was studded with sudden arrests of key men, with the discovery of our W/T sets and setbacks of all kinds. But the work was gradually accomplished in spite of a tendency towards centralization and the building up of a military hierarchy, the dangers of which in warfare of this kind are obvious; if the head of a zone is caught with his executive records, tremendous damage will ensue; this happened more than once. Numbers to be built up were decided more by the availability of aircraft to deliver equipment and arms than the numbers willing to serve, the governing factor was not the available supplies but the rate and volume with which they could be delivered.

From February, 1944, until the end of the first phase of the Allied invasion, special efforts were made for France, using not only aircraft allotted for S.O.E. work but additional aircraft from Bomber and Transport Commands. From February to May alone arms for 60,000 men were safely delivered throughout the length and breadth of France, but mostly to the *Maquis* of the central and South-East, and then after May to the Northern sectors which had such an immediate bearing on the Normandy invasion. The weather played an important role in the selection of delivery points. In March alone, there were 200 successful sorties to the *Maquis* – a formidable total.

As 6th June approached, so the pressure for deliveries grew, and so also grew the need for precision both as regards time and place in what was being done. The invasion planned for Normandy and all Resistance plans had to be aimed at giving the maximum assistance to the initial landing and then to the build-up. Therefore plans had to be sent in advance to France in the shape of micro-films. Whether they concerned railway sabotage, destruction of telephone and W/T communications, or whatever they might be, it was imperative that their possible capture by the Germans should not in any way prejudice the security of operations – in fact, that the most minute examination of those plans should not give any indication as to whether the action was to be mounted across the narrow straits, or on Dieppe and so to Calais, or West of the Seine. i.e. Normandy or Bordeaux, or the Flemish coasts and Antwerp. So all operational directives were worked out with S.H.A.E.F. to cover these points and to maintain the secure aspect of “locality of invasion.”

But what of time? If Resistance were to help, it must be synchronized, and if the Germans could not deduce place, the deduction of “time” would be of some advantage to them. To cover this point, a relatively simple “stand by” code was evolved which if picked up by the Germans would tell them nothing, but conveyed to the “Field” that they should be on the look-out for the “Action” messages. Remember that by 1st June all sort of things had

happened giving clear indications to the Germans that invasion was imminent. And so the “Action” messages went off on 5th June, calling French resistance to commence action that same evening.

For S.O.E. this was the most critical point of the War – had this job of primary importance been done? To date this could only rest on faith or conjecture. The weapons, the organization, the plan were all there ready – our one thought was how it would go on the day. The answer is a matter of history. The “PLAN VERT” – the green plan, for railway demolition started at once. Within the first week of the invasion, 960 railway demolitions out of a planned 1,055 had been well and truly carried out; similarly with communication and road demolitions, and the fighting behind the lines began. By August, 668 locomotives had been destroyed and 2,900 attacks on railways carried out in France alone. Our embarrassment was then to prevent a premature *levée en masse*, a rising of the French people. In this we were not wholly successful, particularly with certain groups in the South of France who fought too early and suffered heavy casualties before the launching of the operation under Field-Marshal Lord Wilson from North Africa. This swept like a wind through Southern France and up the valley of the Rhone to the German frontier and which hemmed in once and for all the German forces struggling to escape from Bordeaux and Toulouse and the South-West of France, before the net should finally trap them all, as it eventually did. The French Forces of the Interior came out into the open; thousands flocked to join and there was no way of stopping them.

This began the bloody battles in the Corrèze, in Vercors and in Savoie which at first involved heavy losses to the French though producing a valuable diversion from Normandy, but which three months later saw the F.F.I. still unconquered. In June 1944, the Germans were employing 5,000 men against Corrèze, 11,000 with artillery against Vercors, and on 20th July the 11<sup>th</sup> panzer Division wanted in Normandy was still in Dordogne.

The organized risings, worked out on S.H.A.E.F. instructions were so immediately effective that on 25th June the first daylight drop of arms in direct support of overt resistance was carried out – 76 Liberators, a diversion from the main battle front which was judged by General Eisenhower to be warranted. This was followed on 14th July by a daylight sortie of 400 Liberators and feeling in France rose to fever height. After that there was no stopping them.

What did all this achieve? Remember that its object was directly to assist the landings in Normandy and the eventual break-out, i.e. (i) to delay the arrival of reinforcements and (ii) to divert troops that might otherwise be used as reinforcements.

I will quote first from an extract from a S.H.A.E.F. paper of 1944:

“The action of the resistance groups South of the River Loire resulted in an average delay of 48 hours in the movement of reinforcements to Normandy and often much longer. The enemy was facing a battlefield behind his lines.”

I would like to quote further and extract from a personal letter from General Eisenhower in May 1945:

“While no final assessment of the operational value of resistance action has yet been completed, I consider the disruption of enemy rail communication, the harassing of German road moves and the continual and increasing strain placed on German war economy and internal security services throughout Occupied Europe by the organized forces of Resistance, played a very considerable part of our complete and final victory.”

The final military conclusions on the subject were:

“Militarily, organized Resistance helped the main operations of the Allied Expeditionary Force as follows:

- (a) By sapping the enemy’s confidence in his own security and flexibility of internal movement.
- (b) By diverting enemy troops to internal security duties and keeping troops thus deployed dispersed.
- (c) By causing delay to the movement of enemy troops:
  - (1) Concentrating against the Normandy beach-head.
  - (2) Regrouping after the Allied break-out from the beach-head.
- (d) By disrupting enemy tele-communications in France & Belgium.
- (e) By enabling Allied formations to advance with greater speed through being able to dispense with many normal military precautions, e.g. flank protection and mopping up.
- (f) By furnishing military intelligence.
- (g) By providing organized groups of men in liberated areas able to undertake static guard duties at short notice and without further training.

“The widespread and continuous sabotage (3,000 confirmed rail cuts between 6th and 27th June) in this field, however, caused an effect outside the capabilities of Allied air effort unless it had been concentrated on railways to the exclusion of other priority tasks. . . . It succeeded in imposing more or less serious delays on all the divisions moved to Normandy from the Mediterranean and forced extensive and intricate detours. The stimulation of resistance in Brittany also delayed moves from that area . . . . An outstanding example was the delay to the 2nd SS Panzer Division which took two weeks to reach the bridge-head at a critical time. The main line Toulouse – Tours was virtually closed to German traffic from D-Day onward. Both main lines up to the Rhone valley were closed a good part of the time, the route on the right bank at one time for twenty consecutive days by the destruction of the Doux bridge at Tournon. Resistance action in Belgium which began on 8th June, 1944, completed the wide encirclement of the beach-head. Sabotage to the principal rail routes imposed delay not only on troops moving from that country, but on all reinforcements and stores passing through it from Germany. Constant interruptions were caused on all other lines in France, particularly those capable of carrying heavy tanks, with the consequence that many Tiger tanks from the South finally had to be moved by road and arrived in the battle area too late and not in fighting condition. Troops likewise arrived in a state of extreme disorganization and exhaustion.”

The story of the Southern invasion of France was the same – a constant battlefield behind the lines. In all, between Normandy and the Côte d’Azur, between ten and twelve German divisions hopelessly cut off and blocked, surrendered, to French Resistance. The cost to the French was considerable, 24,000 men killed, but France had regained her soul. Some 300,000 of her citizens in organized formations had responded to the call of arms.

The battle of Normandy extended, as far as S.O.E. was concerned, from Norway to the Pyrenees, i.e., the whole of German occupied Western Europe. From the Allied point of view, the immediate objective in 1944 was clear – the final destruction of German forces in the West. S.O.E.'s directive from S.H.A.E.F. covered not only the *levée en masse* in France, but sabotage on the Belgian railways to isolate the battlefield, destruction on the Danish railroads to prevent the passage of reinforcements southwards, sabotage of Norwegian railways to force the Germans on to the sea routes to become targets of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Action went on in an ever mounting crescendo: the railway administration building in Oslo was tottered to the ground; the liner "Donau", fully loaded, was wrecked in Oslo Fjord; in Aarhus and Esbjerg frog-men were busy with their limpets against shipping; in Denmark every railway was wrecked in a dozen places nightly; in Holland block ships were sunk at their moorings. The great port of Antwerp, essential for the supply of the advancing Allies was saved almost 100% from German demolition, only three cranes out of 602 being destroyed – an operation due primarily to one gallant Belgian reserve Lieutenant employed in Port Administration who had, under a general directive, worked out a tactical plan of amazing efficiency.

## **SCANDINAVIA**

The results as they affected the movement of German reserves from Scandinavia to the battle front were striking. From Norway, there was a reduction in the rate of movement from four divisions to less than one division a month. From Denmark, the move of two divisions, urgently wanted on the Western Front, were very seriously delayed. During the week 4th to the 11th February, over a hundred successful attacks were made against the transport provided for these divisions. By the end of the week more than half the 44 trains involved were held up in Denmark and six had been derailed.

## **BELGIUM**

In Belgium, as the Allied armies approached, the secret forces were called from sabotage to open guerrilla warfare. During June they had already carried out 153 successful operations, mainly against rail and road communications, and in July this activity was increased to over 800 definite rail cuts, 42 train derailments and the destruction of 65 road and railway bridges. Now they came out openly to harass the German retreat, then to guide the Allied armies, to provide flank guards, to free Antwerp and to help in every way their own liberation and the destruction of the German armies. They played their part well.

## **ITALY**

Before concluding, I must turn for a moment to other theatres. In Italy, from the moment of the Armistice in 1943, every effort had been made to create and stimulate the partisan movement in Northern Italy. British and American officers and other ranks, and Italians too, were trained and briefed and dropped by parachute to organize and lead the thousands of Italians who were seeking to help in the liberation of their own country. When Field-marshal

Alexander's final offensive was launched, there were 65,000 Italian partisans organized, armed and equipped to take part, and they were allotted their tasks by the Supreme Commander. They seized Milan, Turin, Genoa and other towns as the Allies advanced, and opened the way for the lightning advance to the Swiss frontier and the total surrender of Kesselring's forces. They saved from demolition by the retreating Germans the power stations and factories of the Lombardy plain, prepared for that purpose by special German squads; they fought gallantly and well in a common cause.

## **FAR EAST**

The operations in the Far East deserve a chapter to themselves but there is no time today except for an inadequate résumé. Things began on the fall of Singapore when a small group of officers and men went inland instead of evacuating and fought the Japanese on their lines of communication while their stores lasted and then took to the high mountains to organise resistance. In Burma it started when one or two individuals "stayed behind" when the Japanese in their first triumphant advance overran the whole country. From these small beginnings in those impenetrable jungles, separated by vast distances from the air bases in India and Ceylon, great things eventually came. By incredible efforts of personal sacrifice and human endurance, an army of several thousand Karens, whose people were the victims of unspeakable Japanese cruelty, was gradually built up by British officers and other ranks parachuted in to organize, equip and train them. When in 1945, the Fourteenth Army was racing to the capture of Rangoon, it was the Karen Resistance now grown to 16,000 strong, with a hundred or more British officers and other ranks, which held up the Japanese 17th Division for two critical days. And in that fighting behind their lines and in attempting escape across the Sittang River, 16,000 Japanese were killed and counted by Resistance alone. The wheel had truly turned full circle.

In Borneo it was the same. In this farthest flung theatre in which the British fought a little group worked alone among the head-hunters, training and leading them successfully against the invader, their sole link with the outside world being a tiny wireless set.

This, then is the story of Resistance, a little spark that flickered and was almost extinguished at its birth, but which by careful tending and nourishing grew into a flame that eventually swept like a prairie fire. In the build-up years of 1941 and 1942, a few specially allocated aircraft covered Europe by night as best they could, dropping here a man or two, there a ton or two of stores. In 1944, thousands of special sorties were being flown throughout the World and arms and stores for tens of thousands of men were safely delivered against the great day. And when that day came, the Allied forces were reinforced by secret armies who turned the enemy's rear into theatres of chaos and unbelievable turmoil and saved many thousands of Allied lives.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to give you just a few reflections in conclusion. The late War was the first in which organized resistance in occupied territories was created, directed and supplied from outside in any appreciable degree. The reasons are clear, i.e., the inventions of the aeroplane and of wireless telegraphy, their particular application to this method of war, and the vast areas of occupied territory.

Resistance was a factor which stretched the German Army and its security services far beyond what their High Command had ever contemplated. Judging by initial German strategy in 1940 i.e., the occupation of the Western Sea borders from the North Cape to the Pyrenees, it would seem they had read the lesson of history aright and realized that their failure to defeat us in the 1914-18 War was primarily due to the Royal Navy, particularly to its defeat of the German U-Boat campaign, which was then handicapped by the forced passage of the narrow seas before reaching the Atlantic hunting grounds. It may well be that their occupation of this long coastline in 1940 had as its main object the establishment of submarine bases where blockade would be impossible. Undoubtedly also they hoped to enslave the people and the industries to the full support of their war effort. In the end, though this strategy may have helped them initially, they were to pay a terrible price for their violation of all the laws of man, their unprovoked aggression of defenceless peoples, for their unimaginable cruelties, practiced on men, women and children alike. They could not prevent sabotage for all their efforts. They could not prevent the organization of secret armies though they knew it was going on.

The story of Resistance is well enough known in all the countries that were occupied though practically unknown here at home; in all those countries arose a great wave of gratitude to the British who were actively giving them the chance to take part in the war for freedom and to lift their heads in pride again when the final victory came, in which they had played their part. The presence of British officers, British other ranks and British women among these peoples showed them that the British were prepared to take the same risks as they were being asked to run themselves. We owe the conception and direction of this task to the vision and humanitarianism of our great war leaders.

I should like to mention particularly the British other rank W/T operators, all of course volunteers, who kept their schedules with "base" from the icy mountains of Yugoslavia or the rain sodden jungles of Malaya and Burma – always cheerful, always giving of their best. When large parts of Europe were liberated, they were brought home for refurbishing and rest; many had been two years in enemy territory. But when their leave was up, they volunteered as one man for the Far East and within three weeks of reaching India they had parachuted again into Burma, or Malaya, or Siam, back on the job. Some eighty officers, their task in France completed, also went East.

Lastly, I should like to say that what Resistance actually entailed through the long years of dreadful night in occupied territories was a day-to-day battle with the Gestapo, the Quislings and the Japanese secret police, one continuous struggle, with torture and unbelievable suffering and death waiting around every corner at every moment. Yet there were countless thousands who undertook the task, to whom all that mattered was their own eternal spiritual indestructibility. They dedicated themselves to a cause they knew to be higher than self.



## DISCUSSION

**THE CHAIRMAN** : In the book *Operation Victory* it is stated that British intervention in Greece had little or no effect upon the start of resistance movements either in that country or in Yugoslavia, and I should be glad if the Lecturer would say that this was the case or otherwise.

**THE LECTURER** : The two things are really interlocked, but the most important thing of all was the establishment of contact in Greece and the making of preliminary arrangements during the presence of British forces there. As I pointed out, in 1940 when British forces were evacuated from Western Europe there was not a single contact of any kind in occupied Western Europe until somebody was dropped back there. In Greece it was different, the British Army fought there and contacts were made. If we could have had the same facilities in Western Europe as there were in Greece we should have made a quicker and better start. Obviously, the presence of British Forces in Greece greatly encouraged Yugoslavia to fight and not to accept the German terms.

**COMMANDER L. L. M. McGEOCH, R.N.** : As a result of the experience of S.O.E. during the War what is now considered to be the status of a man fighting behind enemy lines under such an organisation as S.O.E.? There must, to my mind, be some difference between his status as a fighting man and an agent pure and simple who, in international relations, is regarded as fair game if caught.

**THE LECTURER** : If you are operating behind the enemy's lines and if you are not wearing any badge of distinction to show that you are a member of some armed force, you can, I believe, by international law be shot if captured. It is only if you are wearing a distinguishing mark and are part of an organized body with a hierarchy of some kind that you are entitled to be treated as a prisoner of war.

When the invasion of Normandy began, General Eisenhower proclaimed to the Germans that the French Forces of the Interior were to be accorded recognition as properly constituted military forces and were not to be treated as spies. They had an organization, they all wore arm-bands, and they were fighting – openly in the War. Beyond that there is no distinction that I know of. Of course, there was no status for anyone in the eyes of some Germans, if they wanted to shoot anybody they did so without regard to status; they actually executed certain men of the Regular forces captured in Normandy.

**Lieut.-Colonel B.W. TOBIN** : Did the people that met members of S.O.E. on the spot receive any pay, or were they self-supporting?

**THE LECTURER** : On the whole a limited number had to live in complete clandestinity, and if you live that way you cannot as a general rule earn a livelihood. By and large they got nothing until they came into the regular forces. The problem of feeding was, of course, an extremely difficult one. The Germans knew that the *Maquis* were getting food from villages, but they were never sure which village it was. Besides dropping arms we dropped a great deal of food, as well as boots and uniforms, the last two items, of course, not always requiring parachutes.

**MAJOR J.R. HARE** : What would you say was the total number of resistance people involved throughout the whole world?

**THE LECTURER** : A total in all countries of something like 500,000 is possibly a reasonable figure. As I said, it was not a shortage of supplies which held up the largest possible force, but it was the delivery of those supplies at the right time and place.

### **THE CHAIRMAN**

I am sure we all agree that we have had a most interesting lecture on the Special Operations Executive. As you know, its scope is so big that General Gubbins could really only touch on one portion, but that portion was the most important and one which we all know.

If it should unfortunately become necessary to start such an organization again in the future, one wonders whether it should be run by a Minister in Great Britain who is not in the War Cabinet. It was run in the last War by the Minister of Economic Warfare and my own experience was that in the early days there were a lot of heated bearings, because so many people were implicated in what was called "putting it across". First of all there was the Air Force who were very much interested in it because aircraft had to be taken off other jobs to do the work, although there were never enough to go round; then S.O.E had its own Executive which wanted certain things; the Foreign Office also had its own ideas, which were often contrary to the ideas of S.O.E.; and then the Chiefs of Staff Committee in the Middle East had their strategy to carry out. So there were times when there were many heated bearings upon which oil had to be poured. I feel that if the necessity should arise in the future, it would be well worth considering whether or not the whole organization should come under the Minister of Defence. I think that would ease the situation.

Another matter which has to be considered in this movement is the question of information. The Lecturer mentioned émigré Governments, and it struck me during the last War how the lessons to be learnt from the French Revolutionary Wars of 150 years ago concerning émigré governments were forgotten. We appear to forget that their information fails in many cases to be objective, and you may get distinct political bias in information which may lead you into pitfalls. One feels that information with the object of raising Resistance movements must be treated as operational or technical and not be confounded with information from other sources, and I think that we, as opposed to the United States, were right in keeping the two things separate.

It is always easy to get a show going when you are winning, and I do think that we owe a token of commendation to those who started this movement before we were winning. It is to those early people who went in unknown and blind into those countries that the credit must go for being the pioneers of a very fine show.

From 1943 onwards I think the movement worked very well with the strategical and tactical picture. The first thing I did when I took over in 1943 was to insist that and S.O.E. staff officer attend the Commander-in-Chief's daily conference so that day to day information would be available, and I also saw that he was in with the Director of Military Operations in the study of all plans.

There is a point upon which the Lecturer doubtless would have said more if there had been time, and that is the important question of the control of outbreaks, and how important it is to

ensure that there is no premature explosion. The D-Day operations and those which took place on 14th August in the South of France were admirably controlled from the point of view of outbreaks, but on the other hand you have the tragic outbreak in Warsaw where the resistance movement arose within the city with the result that most of the inhabitants were eliminated. This of course was no concern of S.O.E. but was purely a Polish affair, directed locally. Also, on the Axis side, you have the premature explosion in Iraq in 1941 – which turned out to be a squib that went off too soon because the Germans could not support it. Resistance has to be kept well in hand until the time is appropriate to let it off.

From the Army point of view, the thing which struck me was the degree of excellence achieved by the signallers, particularly in the Balkan operations, and the way they managed to keep their wireless sets going at long distances and in very bad weather conditions. They managed to get their reports through with extraordinary accuracy, and I do not think they were ever picked up by the enemy. That part of the S.O.E. organization certainly deserves commendation. The training received by those signallers and the way in which they were taught to look after their sets in rough conditions added to the success of the movement.

It now only remains for me on your behalf to thank the Lecturer very much for coming here and giving us such and interesting talk. (Applause)

**THE LECTURER** : Thank you very much indeed. I should like to thank Lord Wilson for what he has said today, and also to thank him for all the help he gave me during the War.

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# SOE and the Co-ordination of Regular and Irregular War

## Major-General Sir Colin Gubbins

The title of my lecture may seem to embrace a somewhat wider sphere than can be dealt with in the time available, for I shall attempt to cover, not only the actions and operations of subversive and para-military warfare vis-à-vis those of the established armed forces (the Army, the Navy and the Air Force), but also those of other Government departments closely involved with the conduct of the War (notably the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Ministry of Supply, the Board of Trade and even the Treasury) with whom SOE was to have increasing contact and relationship as the war progressed. I can, however, dismiss most of these in just a few words as our dealings with them in subversive matters were of a relatively straightforward nature, if you can accept the implied contradiction. They required co-ordination only on the working level. Thus SOE co-ordinated with the Ministry of Supply, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and the Board of Trade, on such matters as the procurement from neutral countries (e.g. Sweden and Switzerland) of ball bearings and scientific instruments, and also on such matters as the interdiction from these countries to Germany of such essential ores such as Chrome and Wolfram. Matters of this nature if handled properly, would not be liable to provoke violent arguments or repercussions. We can thus confine our attention to the more complex problems of co-ordinating SOE's plans and operations. On Japan's entry into the war these plans became literally world-wide, and had to be co-ordinated with Allied strategy as a whole. Here I stress that this strategy itself was based on a combination of political and military factors which could only be resolved at the very highest level. On the next lower scale, if I may put it in that way, SOE's sabotage, para-military and, guerrilla warfare activities required to be tied in with the plans of the various Supreme Commanders and their lower echelons where they affected, or would affect, the eventual operations of armies in the field in the various theatres of war.

Let us now look at the beginning of things; the original establishment of the Special Operations Executive. After Dunkirk and the fall of France, in that desperate summer in 1940 when we were left to fight alone, the War cabinet were grasping at any straw which might appear to give some hope. The outstanding successes achieved by the Nazi Fifth Column techniques were at last beginning to be appreciated. To cut a long story short, it was decided by the War cabinet to enter, this new field of warfare wholeheartedly, but secretly, and give it official status. A Paper put to the War Cabinet in July 1940 and signed by Chamberlain himself, was to the following effect, 'A new Organization shall be established forthwith to, co-ordinate all action by way of sabotage and subversion against the enemy overseas. This Organization will be known as the Special Operations Executive.' The Paper also laid down that there should be consultation and liaison with the other Government Departments, that the Foreign Secretary's agreement, and that of other interested ministers, were to be secured where relevant, and that the general plan or irregular offensive operations was to be kept in step with the general strategic conduct of the War. In other words the Minister for SOE was to keep the Chiefs of Staff informed, in general terms, of his plans and, in return, receive from the Chiefs of Staff a broad strategic picture. On 22nd July 1940, the War Cabinet gave approval and SOE was born. This brief but historical note, necessary to indicate to you that,

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from the outset, co-ordination with other Government departments and particularly with the Chiefs of Staff was implicit in SOE's Charter. The first directive from the Chiefs of Staff to SOE was issued on the 25th November 1940. This was in very general terms. It stated, 'Subversive activity to be prepared over wide areas: services communications to be priority targets; action to be aimed both at sabotage and building up secret armed forces to aid our eventual re-invasion etc.' There was little else the Chiefs of Staff could have offered in more specific terms at that moment. All their energies and thoughts were naturally concerned with the defence of these islands, and with the Italian threat to Egypt and East Africa. At the same time, SOE had nothing to offer, not even contacts in Western Europe which had just been overrun by the enemy.

The word 'co-ordination' does imply a two way traffic. Perhaps because at the beginning we had nothing physical to offer, there was little evidence of any offering from the other side. Furthermore, the creation of a new and secret organization with such an all-embracing charter aroused suspicions and fear around Whitehall. At the best, SOE was looked upon as an organization of harmless backroom lunatics which, it was hoped, would not develop into an active nuisance. At the worst, it was regarded as another confusing excrescence, protected from criticism by a veil of secrecy. Worse still our demands on the regular services for personnel, arms, aircraft, etc., were for purposes quite unknown and unspecified. Finally there was the inbred fear that our actions in delicate diplomatic situations would create boundless friction, diplomatic embroilments and disastrous crossing of lines with our secret intelligence, and political warfare organizations. So SOE went ahead rather on its own. It penetrated occupied territories. It recruited its personnel, built up its schools and training programme, founded its operational staff and its country sections; each dealing with some occupied or neutral country where fruits could be gathered. At the same time it maintained liaison officers with the War Office, the Admiralty and the Air Ministry, at a fairly low level, while using its own Senior Directors as a contact with the Foreign Office, the Treasury, and the Chiefs of Staff. But as a whole it was left severely alone as a somewhat disreputable child. SOE requests for air and sea transport to enable it to carry out its Charter were ignored or fulfilled only in the most minor degree; often, with the greatest reluctance, after strongly worded papers by its Minister to the War Cabinet. In fact SOE was not taken seriously, neither in its existence nor its potential. Yet there were 100 million or more forcibly suppressed people in the already occupied countries of Europe, soon to be increased as progressively the Balkans were overrun. To anyone who has studied the Russian Revolution or, nearer to home, the Sinn Fein insurrection, or the Palestine rising, or the Spanish Civil War, the crippling effect of subversive and para-military warfare on regular forces was obvious. Yet these campaigns, or nationalist risings, were not studied at any of the higher colleges of war; they were irregular and not really deemed worthy of serious attention. This was the root of SOE problems.

In many ways the circumstances of SOE's initial existence reflected very closely the early years of the formation of the Royal Air Force. It too had been the target of vicious attacks from the War office and the Admiralty as to the need for this third independent arm. The RAF survived as SOE survived, by a series of chance!

By July 1941, the year after SOE's formation, matters came to some sort of a head with a long minute from Hugh Dalton, SOE's Minister. This minute to Churchill claimed that given 1,200 air sorties in the ensuing eighteen months, a serious sabotage and secret army organization could be built up in France. At least a small concession was made. The flight of three aircraft at our disposal was raised to a whole squadron, but this, for the whole of

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Western Europe, was still woefully inadequate. Nevertheless, with this reinforcement, SOE was able to develop more successfully its penetration of the occupied countries; notably France. From the point of view of available personnel, of a vast area suitable for parachuting relatively unobserved, and the relatively short flights from base, France was the easiest for initial development. During the year 1941 considerable progress was made and some interest was even shown in high quarters; the Foreign Secretary and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff personally interviewing important individuals working for or with SOE in France. However, it was not until May 1942 that the next Chief of Staff directive to SOE was issued. Then they envisaged a large-scale descent on Western Europe by regular forces in the spring of 1943. They laid down, and I am quoting: 'SOE is required to conform with the general plan by organizing and co-ordinating action by patriots in the occupied countries, at all stages, particular care to be taken to avoid premature large scale risings. SOE should endeavour to build up and equip para-military organizations in the areas of projected operations, the actions of organizations to be directed in particular towards the following tasks: (a) prevention of arrival of enemy reinforcements by interruption of road, rail and air transport; (b) interruption of enemy signal communications; (c) prevention of demolitions by enemy etc.'

This seemed some improvement in our position in the councils of war, but in reality it was mainly lip service; it was neither followed up with the physical support we required, nor with the political support; we were still under the crippling Foreign Office ban not to undertake violent sabotage in unoccupied France, though the Germans were making wide use of French factories and resources to increase their own war potential.

By May 1942 much had happened in the development of SOE's operations. Thwarted as we were by miserly inadequate aircraft, we made every possible improvisation to get our agents, wireless sets, weapons and equipment into the field. We took our Charter very literally and seriously. Most strenuous efforts and urgency had been constantly maintained, not only to establish our links with occupied countries, but to prepare for more extended enemy incursions such as the possible German conquest of Yugoslavia, of Albania, of Greece, and the absorption of Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary which had begun in the spring of 1941. Similarly we anticipated the entry of Japan into the war in 1942. For example, SOE had played a not insignificant part in the coup d'état in Yugoslavia, whose leaders decided to defy the German ultimatum to join the Axis, and turned to protracted guerrilla warfare after the inevitable defeat of her regular forces. By May 1942 our missions, although small in number, had been established alongside both Mihailovic in Serbia and Tito further west. SOE posts had also been established in both Greece and Crete. Our build-up was being pressed with all speed. These operations were largely initiated and controlled by SOE's subsidiary headquarters in Cairo during 1941 and 1942, with its own operational staff, training schools, etc. Technically, liaison had been maintained with Headquarters Middle East in Cairo but in practice this was almost non-existent. This was partly our fault, but was also due to the regular services having more than enough on their plate after the fall of Greece and Crete. They also had difficulty in maintaining their own position against the constant German / Italian threat to the Lower Nile. They, thus, had no time to spare for small flames of resistance which were flickering in far-away countries, and which could never, in the minds of high authority, assist direct military operations or affect the course of the war. This attitude was to lead to great troubles for SOE in the year ahead, but we will come to, that later.

In the Far East events had moved with terrifying rapidity. Well before the Japanese entry into the war, in December 1941, SOE had established additional subsidiary headquarters in

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India and in Singapore with small staffs of operating and training officers. But in Singapore, right up to the opening of hostilities, we were forbidden to penetrate Siam, or to train Malay or Chinese personnel in subversive warfare, though Japan's intentions were obvious and her forces were already in Siam. These missions had only been established after considerable negotiations with the India Office, the Viceroy, and the Resident Minister and Commander-in-Chief in Malaya respectively, and I will leave things there for the moment with Singapore fallen to the enemy, Burma nearly so and the threat to India developing rapidly. There had been, for lack of understanding, no worthwhile preparation for subversive warfare in Malaya and Burma, and thus no training of left-behind parties. However in India we still had a secure base from which to try and make up for these lost opportunities.

To return to Western Europe. Things at last began to move for SOE in the winter of 1942/43. The Allied invasion of North Africa produced two new situations which SOE could exploit. First and foremost was the German occupation of the whole of France. This provided a far bigger target for operations and eliminated the previous Foreign Office ban on sabotage in a non-occupied zone. Secondly, Algeria offered SOE a perfect back-door entry into France. It had been no easy task to persuade the Supreme Commander concerned, General Eisenhower, to accept the establishment in his theatre in North Africa of an SOE mission which was in no way under his command (except logistically and therefore a nuisance), and whose initial efforts were to be devoted to a country outside his theatre of operations, i.e. France. But Eisenhower was always ready to listen, and he finally accepted a strong SOE attachment that sailed with the invading forces. This was November 1942. At that time, naturally enough, it was never visualized that later Eisenhower's secret negotiations for the surrender of Italy would actually be conducted through that SOE detachments secret communications; nor that SOE would play the leading part in the capture of Corsica, and a vital role in the French / American landing in the South of France in 1944. And of course it was not easy to persuade General Giraud, who was still in command in North Africa after Darlan's assassination, to help us in our work, nor to prevent him trying to thwart it at every turn. Neither did it sweeten our relations with General de Gaulle that we were working into France from French territory which he himself was not even permitted to visit.

Other things were taking place too, which those in authority could no longer ignore and which were bringing to the fore the fact that SOE and Resistance had a role to play. The most convincing evidence, possibly, was the raid by SOE's Norwegian Section on the German heavy water installation at Rjukan in Norway early in 1943, which put paid to the German efforts to produce the atom bomb before their final defeat. The target, in the War Cabinet's view was the highest priority and its destruction was first entrusted to Combined Operations. SOE assisted only with the reception committee in Norway and with the wireless communications. This operation was a disaster; the two gliders carrying the troops crashed in the Norwegian mountains and the survivors were executed by a German firing squad. SOE then told the Chiefs of Staff that the operation was still feasible, if entirely entrusted to us and done by our methods. They agreed. The operation was carried out in February 1943 and was 100 per cent successful. It was one of the most important individual actions of the war, for which we received the thanks of the Chiefs of Staff and the congratulations of the Prime Minister in a personal note. This undoubtedly was a turning point, given prominence by a directive from the Chiefs of Staff to SOE on 20th March 1943, and circulated to all the exiled governments in London and Cairo. This directive decreed that SOE was the authority responsible for co-ordinating sabotage and other subversive activities, including the organization of resistance groups, in all occupied countries, and for providing advice and liaison on all matters in connection with patriot forces up to the time of their embodiment into

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regular forces. We, in SOE, had been working for months to get this directive from the Chiefs of Staff, this official imprimatur. In future the Chiefs of Staff would consider nothing coming from foreign governments on these subjects which had not passed through the sieve of SOE and had been incorporated, if warranted, into SOE's planning.

One other significant action had been taken by the Chiefs of Staff just a little earlier, in December 1942 they had appointed an *ad hoc* committee on equipment for patriot forces, to review the quantities of equipment required and the methods of its distribution. SOE was invited to give evidence. The Committee's report at the end of March 1943 coincided nicely with other events which were carrying us along. It observed that 'sabotage material and weapons in the hands of resistance groups within the enemy lines are likely to pay a relatively big dividend and could make a large contribution to the enemy's military defeat', but it emphasized strongly that 'unless present delivery facilities were considerably increased, full value would not be received from resistance groups at the critical moment.'

Within a month of this, Lord Selbourne the new Minister for SOE, reported to the Chiefs of Staff that 'the tide of resistance is mounting steadily in France, sabotage is widespread and to a large extent under SOE control. There is no doubt,' he went on, 'that provided adequate supplies can be furnished, support of a very effective kind can be given to regular military operations.' This paper was referred by the Chiefs of Staff to their Joint Planning Staff, who remarked in June that 'although it may be possible to defer full scale revolt to the right moment SOE cannot restrict their support. It is in the very nature of the organizations they establish, that they should multiply themselves, and it is in every way desirable that SOE support should keep pace with this growth.' During the course of the full-scale row that developed over this, SOE pointed out that, owing to inadequate aircraft availability, the number of unfulfilled, planned operations to the field in Europe, at the end of each moon period in March, April, May and June, amounted respectively to 102, 120, 55 and 54 operations, of which nine tenths were for France. In spite of this, on the very next day the Chiefs of Staff agreed that we should support SOE's activities in the Balkans as far as possible and at the expense, if necessary, of the supplies to resistance groups in Western Europe. This was just not good enough for our Minister, who took the matter immediately to the Defence Committee of the Cabinet. The Prime Minister emphasized the immense value to the war effort of stimulating resistance among the people of Europe and rules that Bomber Command was to do additional supply for SOE over and above the twenty-two aircraft then specifically allotted. Furthermore SOE's right of appeal to the Defence Committee, through its Minister, if the Chiefs of Staff directed against him, was specifically provided for. We were, for the moment, out of the wood.

During this meeting the Chief of Air Staff had argued forcibly that subversive organizations should be brought more directly under the control of the Chiefs of Staff. Coinciding with this, a formidable and full-scale attack on SOE's independent position was being prepared by the Foreign Office and also by Middle East Headquarters in Cairo. I must deal with these now.

The fundamental reason for the trouble lay in the fact that it had never been anticipated by Whitehall away back in 1940, or in the years that had elapsed, that subversive operations would reach even the scale they had achieved by 1943, and Whitehall was far, far too slow in appreciating the significance of what was going on and what was to come. SOE for its part had its founding Charter which amounted to a licence to create, in any part of the world that they could reach, the maximum trouble to the enemy in any form we could devise. This we



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took absolutely literally, but the duty did lie on us of keeping the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office informed. This entailed the fact, as we absolutely accepted that SOE was to make no political decisions on its own at all, but to encourage in the field the incipient resistance wherever found and to report to the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff what was happening and what the prospects were. But you cannot, in an emergency in time of war and particularly in guerrilla warfare, and when communications are bad, always wait to discover the political view of your temporary allies. If they were prepared to fight the common enemy it was enough, for our objective was to kill Germans and Japanese. Hence, our initial support in Yugoslavia for both Mihailovic and Tito, and in Greece for both EDES, the right-wing Republican movement under General Zervas, and the stronger Communist organization ELAS. And all this going on with the Greek King and his recognized government located in Cairo, to which was accredited a British Ambassador. Yugoslavia was in a very similar constitutional position. They were difficult situations. But we did keep the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff informed as far as possible.

Here lies the crux of the problem really. The Foreign Office is of course responsible for policy, whereas the Chiefs of Staff are charged with the strategical conduct of the war, so the conflict really lay between these two; SOE being merely the agent for carrying out the overall policy of which resistance movement to back when the decision was made. Mr Churchill himself, the Foreign Secretary being absent through illness, had directed in the spring of 1943 (in answer to our query on this particular case) that in supporting guerrilla warfare in Greece. SOE were to favour the groups which were willing to support the king and his government. But a rider was added that this was to be, and I quote again 'Subject to operational necessity'. Now at that very moment the invasion of Sicily from North Africa was being prepared (July 1943). SOE was asked by the military high command to go ahead with preparations for the greatest possible diversionary actions in Greece, in order to induce the German High Command to believe our invasion was directed there. A diversion on the scale required meant, as our Senior officer in Greece reported, the utmost support with arms and explosives of ELAS, the more efficient guerrilla force at that moment and violently anti-king and anti-government! After final reference to the Chiefs of Staff and to the Foreign Office, where I had a personal interview with the Foreign Secretary, orders came that we were to go ahead with the plan. At the appropriate moment, the Gorgopotamos viaduct on the main German supply route was destroyed, a wave of sabotage raged through the entire country of Greece and the enemy's communications were reduced to chaos. The Germans were entirely deceived and moved to Greece two divisions which might otherwise have been used against us in Sicily.

So far so good, but it was beginning to be recognised in Whitehall that the efforts of SOE in occupied countries could bring problems of a political nature that had never been imagined, and Middle East Headquarters in Cairo woke up to the fact that they had a minor campaign going on in their theatre whose significance had so far escaped them. To put it mildly SOE was now deeply suspect to the Foreign Office, who felt that we were following a policy of our own, and unpopular with the military authorities for bringing them into head-on collision with the Foreign Office. We were being squeezed between the two and made a scapegoat, whereas all we wanted was a firm policy.

Worse was to come. By August 1943 SOE working from Cairo had already established some seventy or more missions in the Balkans behind the German lines. At the same time encoding and decoding of wireless signal traffic between SOE Cairo and all its outposts got hopelessly bogged down, simply by its vast volume. In some cases there were long delays in

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deciphering even priority messages from the field, the worst cases unfortunately being those sent by the Foreign Office Liaison Officer who had been appointed to Brigadier Myers staff in Greece; these were messages to his embassy in Cairo. This was interpreted as a deep plot on the part of SOE to prevent the Foreign Office being properly informed, so that SOE could carry out its own policy unhindered! As I have said, SOE did not formulate policy – what we continually asked for was political guidance and clear military directives – but, failing these, SOE had to carry on as best it could.

While this acute imbroglio was in full spate we had an even more awkward child in our lap, Yugoslavia. As I have told you, SOE had, since 1942, a small mission alongside both Tito and Mihailovic and these had developed considerably by mid-1943. Tito and his partisans were by then involved in open and continuous guerrilla warfare, while Mihailovic and his groups remained quiescent; his stated policy being to conserve his forces until an Allied invasion of the Balkans. I will not bother you with the details of this affair; the long-drawn-out negotiations with Mihailovic to try and persuade him to fight now as Tito was doing; the equally protracted discussions in London, in Cairo and even in Algiers, as Eisenhower's armies in Sicily prepared their invasion of Italy, hoping that Tito would protect their right flank across the Adriatic. Suffice it to say that SOE was again heavily involved with the Chiefs of Staff, with Supreme Allied Commanders in Algiers and Cairo, but particularly, and not altogether pleasantly, with the Foreign Office. But in the end we got what was required, a clear-cut directive. It ordained all-out support for Tito and his partisans and the total withdrawal of our missions from Mihailovic; not an easy matter geographically. The culmination of all these events was hard-pressed attack by the Foreign office to clip the wings of SOE, but at a meeting of Ministers held by the Prime Minister on 30th September 1943, the autonomy of SOE was settled for all time.

They agreed that:

- (i) 'SOE Organization will preserve its integrity.
- (ii) The main policy for SOE will be settled in London between the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for SOE, reference being made if necessary to the Prime Minister.
- (iii) The Chiefs of Staff will be kept in close touch with SOE operations on all levels and will have the right to express their view to the Minister of Defence on SOE matters, if at any time they consider this necessary.'

At last we had moved into smoother waters. The practical outcome of this and the previous meeting was that I, as the Commander of SOE, was called more frequently to the Chiefs of Staff meetings, and my staff to meetings of the Joint Planners. More important still I was personally allowed to see the agenda of all future meetings of the Chiefs of Staff so that SOE could declare an interest in future operations and plans when necessary. A weekly meeting of the Foreign Office, chaired by the Permanent Under Secretary, was also established at this time where senior members of both parties could consider SOE's actions and plans. A month earlier, a senior Foreign Office official had been posted to SOE's Headquarters in Baker Street, and very glad we were to have him. A two-way traffic had at last been established at the top level which endured reasonably satisfactorily until the end of the war. By this I do not mean to imply that differences of opinion no longer arose, they did frequently, but at least there were recognised channels for bringing them to the surface and obtaining decisions.

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At the lower level, too, in the various theatres of war, liaison and co-ordination became satisfactorily established as SOE activities more closely concerned the Supreme Commanders in the field. A large SOE Headquarters was established in Italy alongside Alexander's Headquarters to continue, at closer hand than from Cairo, operations in Greece, Albania and Yugoslavia where large numbers of German divisions were pinned down in guerrilla warfare; and also to support and develop the actions of the Italian partisans behind the enemy lines.

In the Far East SOE's subsidiary mission charged with the penetration of Malaya, Burma, Siam, etc., moved its headquarters from near Dehli to link up alongside the Supreme Commander, Mountbatten in Ceylon. In the United Kingdom, which had become the base for the direct re-invasion of Europe, a Supreme Headquarters had been set up with General Morgan as the Chief of Staff (known as Cossac') to prepare the plans; though the Supreme Commander had not yet been nominated. The Chiefs of Staff Committee decreed that 'Cossac' was to exercise operational control of all subversive activities in his theatre. This was of course exactly what we wanted. I went directly to see General Morgan at his headquarters in St James's Square and explained the position. 'That's Grand,' he said, 'you are my front line troops.' This was of course the factual situation, but it had taken a very long time to have this recognized. So when the Normandy invasion came in June 1944, there was a senior SOE officer at Eisenhower's Headquarters, and SOE Detachments at Montgomery's Group Headquarters, and with his two armies as well, all with their own wireless communications. Their function was to co-ordinate the guerrilla sabotage and conservation actions of the patriot irregular forces that we had organized and armed in secret over so many years behind German lines, with the coming operations of the regular forces. In each theatre of war the Supreme Commander could exercise operational control of SOE in his theatre, and, call upon its services in any way in which it could help. This pattern was followed in all theatres.

As an example I will give you some details of SOE's participation in the invasion of Normandy and the subsequent drive to the German frontier. First and foremost was the assistance we were asked to give to the initial Allied landing. Here the primary objective, given by Eisenhower, was to delay the arrival of enemy reinforcements at the bridgehead. Our plans, worked out in the greatest detail with his staff, involved over 1,000 attacks on the German lines of communication throughout Belgium and France in the first week. These were to start on the night of 5/6 June before even a single Allied soldier had landed. For our part, this meant expanding our field force to meet this plan, parachuting the necessary arms and explosives, and allotting targets to the various networks we had established. We also had to present the plan to our field force in such a way that capture of any part of it by the enemy would not give away the vital sector where the initial bridgehead was to be secured. Of the thousand or more targets aimed at, more than nine hundred were destroyed. These were mainly rail, bridge, viaducts and tele-communication centres, which put the whole enemy system in chaos.

Following the Allied breakout from the Normandy bridgehead, the SOE detachments at Army Group and Army headquarters were in constant touch with the resistance groups behind the German lines. They co-ordinated, as far as possible, the action of those groups with the operation of the regular forces as requested by the Commander concerned; e.g. the blowing of certain bridges and the conserving of others which the Allies might wish to use themselves.

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Some matters in which SOE was involved continued to be outside the field of Supreme Commanders and were referred to the Chiefs of Staff, to the Foreign Office, or to any other Government Department as relevant. I am thinking particularly of Poland where there was constant unending guerrilla warfare against German communications to the Russian Front, which we were supporting as best we could, of the Warsaw rising; of Czechoslovakia; and to some extent of Norway which was never in Eisenhower's theatre and eventually fell into the lap of the Commander in Chief Scotland. Also referred to the Chiefs of Staff were our efforts against launchings of the V1 and V2 from occupied territories, but these were sporadic and amounted to little.

I would now like to try and summarize the reasons for the early confusions and embroilments that checked our efforts at full co-operation, and the way in which gradually a satisfactory *modus operandi* was reached. First and foremost I must point to the initial lack of imagination in government circles generally as to the potential of the 'fourth arm', if I may call it so, and to the hostility both veiled and open which not surprisingly followed the creation of SOE, when at best it was not taken seriously and at worst it was snubbed. I must admit the political complications that SOE could have brought about were legion. By 1943 the occupied countries in which we were operating at considerable strength, and their internal political circumstances were roughly as follows: you will appreciate from this list that there was some room for misunderstandings to arise!

**Poland.** An ally with equal rights in all respects; the President and government established in London, and having their own secret wireless communications with Poland already established before the Fall of France; a secret 'Home Army' already established and being expanded. Poland was the only occupied country permitted by the British Government to have its own wireless communications.

**Norway.** A full ally, with her king and legal government established in Britain.

**Holland.** In the same position.

**Belgium.** Her king virtually a prisoner of the Germans, but a provisional government established in London after many difficulties.

**France.** The country divided for two years into occupied and unoccupied zones – the people divided between loyalty to Petain, or loyalty to General de Gaulle, or hostile to both but pro-Ally. For these reasons SOE operated two separate and water-tight organizations in France, one purely British and one through the Free French until the Normandy invasion when they were amalgamated operationally under General Koenig.

**Denmark.** Initially the constitution continuing, with the King and Parliament in so-called power, but German forces controlling the country though not technically in occupation. Finally 'occupied' by Germany owing to Danish 'resistance' in 1943.

**Czechoslovakia.** German occupied prior to September 1939. The émigré ad hoc Government of Benes and Masaryk was not recognised by the British Government until late 1940 – a curious lapse.

**Greece.** The King and an unrepresentative provisional government in Cairo with a British Ambassador accredited, the country torn between communist and loyalist parties and forces.

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**Yugoslavia.** The boy King and a few supporters in Cairo with a British Ambassador accredited: the late Regent an internee of the British in South Africa: the country divided between Tito and Mihailovic.

**Albania.** Conquered by Italy prior to 1939 – in complete confusion politically.

**Italy.** At first an enemy, and the officially an Ally, but with Italians fighting on both sides.

And then in the Far East

**Siam.** Japanese controlled, but not technically in enemy occupation!

**French Indo-China.** The same as Siam but some stout-hearted Frenchmen prepared to resist.

**Burma, Malaya.** Entirely British dependencies and colonies, and in a British theatre of war.

**British North Borneo.** A British dependency, but in an American theatre of war (General MacArthur). I went to Australia in 1944 to meet MacArthur and co-ordinate our affairs.

Every country presented its own problems, the most difficult being Greece and Yugoslavia where our British officers sent in to assist frequently found themselves in opposing camps of a local internal battle.

All these problems had to be solved empirically to suit the varying conditions, and solved as we went along, not just by sudden decision. With those countries that had fully recognized émigré governments in this country (that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Holland, and Norway and eventually Belgium), SOE dealt direct with the Prime Ministers, and other ministers as circumstances required. Of the others, Denmark and Albania were two of the foreign countries where we had a free hand – no one else was really interested until near the final stages of the war; in Denmark's case when the Danish resistance, so methodically built up, was brought at SHAEF's request into violent and open action to assist Eisenhower's armies embattled on the frontier of Germany; and of course in another category were Burma, Malaya and Borneo, British Territories.

The Norwegian case is an example of the ideal solution being found. Step by step, confidence was established between SOE and the Norwegian government and authorities in London and the people in Norway, to the ultimate stage when all plans and operations in Norway were discussed in complete frankness between the two parties, and decisions were mutually agreed and acted upon – but the way was not as easy as it sounds! Albania provides an example of the other extreme where SOE operated its own panning as that country was Italian / German occupied with no form of Albanian government either within or without the country (a communist government directly under Moscow was formed in the closing stages of the war).

As the war reached its peak from early 1943 onwards, our task of co-ordination in the political field was immensely eased by the decentralization of considerable political authority to the various theatres and the recognition in those theatres of the contribution resistance was making. For example the appointment of Harold Macmillan as Minister of State in the

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Mediterranean, and later Duff Cooper as Ambassador to France in Algiers, meant that we had direct access to high authority on the spot on political problems affecting France, Greece, Yugoslavia and eventually Italy. We were able to smuggle out from Milan in 1944, to talk to Macmillan and Alexander personally in Rome, the representatives of the National Liberation Committee headed by the future Prime Minister, de Gasperi, and put them safely back. Similarly in the Far East we extricated from Bangkok, early in 1945, the senior representatives of the Siamese government to negotiate direct with Mountbatten in Ceylon and with his political adviser, and we were able to put them back in Bangkok, the Japanese remaining unaware of what was happening under their very noses.

I hope I have dealt satisfactorily with the political aspects as they affected our work; now I come to the more strictly military. Here again, in the early years the same influences were at work. There was insufficient understanding and natural concentration on more immediate and pressing issues, and in addition we did make ourselves unpopular with the Chiefs of Staff by our constant demands for additional aircraft. These demands were put straight on the Chiefs of Staff plate and even, as I have explained, referred to the War Cabinet when our Minister felt he had good cause to appeal. But by late 1942 the Joint Planning Staffs at least, directly under the Chiefs of Staff, were beginning to take note of our possibilities. My own Chief Staff Officer, an exceptionally able planner and a Staff College regular soldier could talk to them in their own language, one they understood and talk to them convincingly.

Further, and at about the same time, the Committee for the arming of patriot forces had pointed out forcibly the great potential of Resistance. Following this, early in 1943, almost in a test-case – and where the enemy had been forewarned of the target by a previous failure of an attack by regular forces we had destroyed the heavy water installation in Norway. Things were working nicely in our favour. Leaders of resistance were being brought out to London to meet high authorities in the Government. Then suddenly our most acute crisis came – the demand at the end of 1943 by the Foreign Office, and by Headquarters Middle East, supported by the Joint Intelligence Committee, that SOE's autonomy should be severely restricted or even that it should be broken up. We survived the assault with a few casualties – as I have explained – and it was agreed with the Chiefs of Staff that within the various theatres SOE's operations should be under the control of the respective Supreme Commanders. This we welcomed and in fact had offered such a solution – it solved many of our problems, both at our various headquarters and our missions in the field. There was now intimate contact all down the line, rendered possible by our very highly developed wireless communications which fortunately were completely under our own control. I can remember no serious lack of co-ordination after the spring of 1944, or even lack of appreciation of what assistance SOE and Resistance might bring. Perhaps our watershed came then, when the Prime Minister, at the urging of Lord Selbourne, our Minister, and various French leaders brought from France, turned on massive aircraft support for our operations in that country.

I have taken you through the rather long history of the subversive and para-military operations during the last war, and the very uncertain and slow progress that was made in integrating them fully with the political and military strategy of the war. I have purposely avoided bringing into my review, so as not to complicate matters even further, co-ordination with Allied subversive organizations, i.e. the American OSS and the Russian NKVD. Suffice to say we got nowhere with the Russians at all in spite of an exchange of high-ranking missions between London and Moscow, which remained in those places. With OSS we finally had an integrated staff for Western Europe in Baker Street. The British element were

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*primus inter pares*, but in other theatres the inter-relationship was considerably looser and difficulties did occasionally arise.

I feel that the two basic lessons we have to learn from the past are, first, that subversive warfare has come to stay as a factor in any future wide-scale hostilities, secondly, we must find a place for it in our hierarchical set-up, not when hostilities break out but *now*, so that it is fully integrated into our political and military strategy from the start. How to achieve this is the problem.

Looking at the two greatest powers, we see in the Soviet Union, a centralized structure controlling intelligence in the broadest sense, espionage and subversion. We see in the United States the Central Intelligence Agency which must cover the same sort of field, for surely the Bay of Pigs in Cuba though a total failure, was a subversive operation, and we know the CIA was the chief agent there. Here in Great Britain during the war the Secret Intelligence Service under the Foreign Office was entirely separate from SOE, which had its own Minister. Again the Political Warfare Executive was under another Minister, although at the outset it had been part of SOE. This curious dispersal of effort was probably more the result of party political in-fighting under a Coalition Government than of any rational thought, and it certainly did lead to considerable crossing of lines and much avoidable and unpleasant internecine strife. Even weekly meetings between the senior executives of the three organizations were not sufficient to eliminate misunderstandings.

Having been much involved, and having seen at close quarters all these things happening for more than four years, I have come to the conclusion that to co-ordinate all these activities (secret intelligence, political warfare and SOE activities, which are all subversive) the three departments must come under one Minister. He need not necessarily be a member of the War Cabinet, for this would be an unnecessary distraction from his highly specialized duties, but he must have the right of appeal to it. I would also advocate one Executive Head for all three departments, for only in this way can you enforce collaboration and co-ordination. This Chief Executive would have full access to plans and agenda of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, as eventually attained in the war, but he would not be a member of that Committee; I see no need for that at all, though he would have the right to appear before it when matters in which his department were involved might be on the agenda or require to be brought up by him. In the strict field of military operations lower down the scale, I see no difficulties. The system we evolved in the war was perfectly adequate. The Ministry I have recommended would not be part of the Foreign Office. The body to be set up, call it Special Agency or anything you like, must be an autonomous body with its own contact with the Treasury and any other departments, as SOE was during the war. Only by this means can its voice be heard and swift action be assured.

As I have tried to make clear, it is the political aspects of subversive work which are the main sources of possible trouble. To overcome this, the appointment of a very senior Foreign Office official to the staff of the Chief Executive, with a dual responsibility to each in turn, would ensure the co-ordination so vitally necessary. I can only hope, in concluding, that these matters have already received the close consideration of our successive governments since the war.

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## Discussion

**Q.** Could I refer to what you said fairly early in your talk about the suspicion and friction there was between regular forces and special forces. Regular forces saw some of their key men removed and very often realized that the reason why they were not having certain pieces of equipment was because these were going to special forces and, having been on the two sides more or less, I can see that that did lead to regular forces wondering what special forces did and why they did it. I would like to know whether during the war an effort was made to educate regular forces in what special forces did, what their value was and, with due regard to the security, the fact that they were worthwhile?

**Gubbins.** Almost no effort at all. There was from the outset and intense security clamp-down on our very existence – not of our own making at all – which did us great disservice. It was frustrating beyond belief whenever one had to see a really senior officer or official in any government department, which happened frequently; to each of them one had to explain one's position and function. It was of course essential to have the highest possible security on all our hundreds of individual operations. Top security was required on personnel involved, time, date, place, future plans, etc., but our existence and general role in military affairs should have been given much wider circulation; it could only have done good and anyway once we began operating on a considerable scale it did not take the Germans long to discover our existence as an organization! The CIA does not hide its head; only its operations. To be fair from late 1942 onwards, beginning with the Allied landings in North Africa, knowledge of our role began to be appreciated in the higher echelons of government, and particularly within the Services. An SOE unit was included in the 1st Army, when it landed in Algeria, its tasks and functions having been discussed beforehand with the Army Commander and his subordinate commanders and staff. In Italy from the earliest landings the appropriate SOE headquarters worked alongside the Supreme Commander and his staff, and for the Normandy invasion there had been the most detailed and intimate co-ordination of plans for months beforehand. But your general criticism is right: our role was kept too secret. As regarding pinching personnel, we had a relatively small number of officers from the regular forces. As regards 'material' I agree we did have a 'corner' in the new plastic explosive but we were using it effectively for sabotage in occupied countries as early as the middle of 1941. I do not think we had much priority otherwise as we made a lot of our own weapons and devices.

**Q.** I think the situation is much better now because we all know what the Special Air Service by and large do in this sort of job and we are all educated to it, but as you so rightly say Germans and the Japanese had good cause to know what we were doing; it is surprising that our own side was not briefed.

**Gubbins.** I think the real root of the trouble was that this idea of a subversive organization was started before the war in a special Intelligence Section of the War Office, therefore it got labelled with the name 'Intelligence', and therefore it had to be frightfully secret. SOE, of course, was an operational or 'action' unit and not Intelligence. This was a mistake which was carried on far too long. We could not get rid of this label and were classed with Intelligence right through the war. That was undoubtedly one of the basic things that led to the trouble.



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**Q.** Could I ask what may still be a great secret? What in fact was the strength of Special Operations in officers and men?

**Gubbins.** At its highest, at the peak period of the war, about 10,000 that is officers and men, male and female. There were a very large number of women employed, e.g. all our cipher staff and most of our wireless communication operators were women, except in the field where they were mainly men. I should say about 10,000 at the most, at the peak of the war. Of course we had a higher proportion of officers than in any normal unit, simply because in the field a 'Mission' usually consisted of an officer and a couple of NCOs, or an officer and a wireless operator. But we were controlling as it were very large numbers of patriot forces; 16,000 perhaps in Denmark, 20,000 in Norway; 100,000 in France, 18,000 in Burma, and so on. So it needed a pretty big staff of wireless operators, cipher staff etc. Our wireless traffic at the peak contained two million groups weekly! In addition there were large numbers of personnel in all theatres engaged in packing containers, checking and storing parachutes, manning schools, etc.

**Q.** How far did the SOE prepare the way for the Dieppe raid, and also for the North African and Algerian Landings?

**Gubbins.** Not for the Dieppe landing at all; all we did was to send two liaison officers with them. We did supply certain special explosive devices and things like that, but we took no active part. In North Africa this was an entirely American concern in the preparatory phase. You will remember that the USA still had an Ambassador to Vichy France, still had Consular Officers and their staffs in North Africa who were engaged busily preparing the way with certain local leaders. We did however send a small SOE detachment with 1st Army to initiate guerrilla warfare, which had some success. This was our first co-operation with regular forces in the field.

**Q.** Could I ask whether SOE was responsible for the sabotage and subversive activities in Germans? And if it was not, are you allowed to say who was?

**Gubbins.** The fundamental basis necessary for successful subversive warfare is a population which is largely friendly; this obviously was not the case in Germany! I can say that apart from minor non-violent irritants we achieved nothing destructive in the physical sense.

**Q.** How did you recruit for SOE?

**Gubbins.** In a hundred different ways. We started, before the war, looking for people not in any of the services who knew European countries; who were explorers, who had language or other special qualifications, etc. We spread our net pretty wide but with the utmost security. These people were then put through short courses, and those who passed the test and who seemed suitable for guerrilla or subversive warfare were commissioned immediately on the outbreak of war. A few of them already had territorial or reserve commissions. But this was only a small nucleus. SOE was formed in July 1940, by combining MI® and the existing Section 'D' and other stray elements. We had a vast area of occupied territories as our field, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. Expansion had to be rapid, to form sections at HQ to deal with each country individually, in establishing schools and staff and instructors for various types of warfare and subversion, and finally to procure suitable personnel for despatch to the field of action. HQ Staff were largely recruited by personal contact:

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knowledge of the country concerned and of the language were important qualifications, as also specialist knowledge of signals, engineering (for industrial sabotage), explosive devices, etc. Personnel for the field were found in two ways. For countries such as Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc., it was obvious that nationals of those countries, who were of course fighting alongside us in the war, were the most suitable for our and their purposes. We worked closely in recruiting with the governments here in exile (except Denmark). For countries like Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania, where open guerrilla warfare was in progress in the wild terrain and under local leaders, our field force consisted of almost entirely British officers and signal personnel. In the Far East again it was mainly British personnel with a few Gurkha and Indian added. France was a special case where both British and Free French personnel were used.

As our operations increased in magnitude recruits for active service in the field came mainly from army sources through carefully worded notices in Army orders and such like. They were put through various schools to test their suitability.

**Q.** Was Force 136 under command of SOE and if so were there any special preparations had Operation 'Zipper' come off in earnest for the re-occupation of Malaya?

**Gubbins.** Yes, Force 136 was part of SOE. It was our far Eastern army if you like to put it that way. Force 126 was making preparations for the Malayan invasion and already had missions established there.

**Q.** Could you say a little more on the relationship with the Americans and the problems that developed in trying to create an integrated approach?

**Gubbins.** Before the USA came into the war they had no intelligence service whatever. After their entry a centralized agency for both Intelligence and Action (SOE's role) was created, entitled Office of Strategic Services, OSS, under a General Donovan. A great friend of our country, he had been pressing for this since 1940, and I had conducted him round our training schools in Britain long before Pearl Harbour. Immediately after this event we took into our schools here in Britain and in Canada a number of his officers, and lent him senior instructors to start his own schools in America.

It was late 1942 before OSS became operative, so to speak, and by then SOE was firmly established in Western Europe and the Balkans. For Western Europe an integrated SOE / OSS Staff was created to prepare for eventual invasion. This was under a British Commander. No American personnel were introduced into France before D-Day for obvious reasons; one being the language problem. This arrangement worked very satisfactorily. In the Italian and Southern France campaigns things were quite different. SOE and OSS worked independently, their operations being co-ordinated by a special section of the Supreme Army Commander's Staff. This was not always satisfactory.

In the Balkans it was again different. SOE missions were already securely established before OSS came along, towards the end of 1943. As I have already described, the political situations in those countries were fantastically involved, but at least the British officer fighting with the guerrillas were accredited representatives of the British Government in every sense of the word; in contact with that government both militarily and politically and endeavouring to carry out its policies, OSS wished to send in American 'fighting missions' to join in the 'scrapping' but, as Donovan explained to me, would not carry nor convey any

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political authority or responsibility of the USA Government. This would have obviously created an intolerable and impossible situation. However OSS pressed very hard indeed and a compromise was finally reached in Cairo between Field Marshal Lord Wilson, Donovan and myself that selected individual OSS officers that could be sent to join, and be under the command of, British Missions in the field. I would add that many of these OSS officers were of great service to us. They were highly trained engineers to build landing strips, medical personnel and so on. I must give them full marks.

In the Far East, in Mountbatten's theatre, things were also different. The main theatres of fighting were British possessions, Burma, Malaya, etc., with fringe activities in China, in the Dutch East Indies, etc., so SOE was naturally predominant, but OSS was much involved in China particularly after it became an American theatre with General Wedermeyer in Chungking. Again, Mountbatten had a co-ordinating section in his staff for all para-military operations.

**Q.** Could you say a little on MacArthur's attitude?

**Gubbins.** MacArthur would not permit OSS to operate in his theatre, more for reasons of internal American politics than any other, I would think. On the other hand he was personally extremely helpful and encouraging to the joint British / Australian 'Special Operations' activities, though I must admit I found one or two of his senior staff officers somewhat unhelpful and obstructive! We were of course operating in British territories, particularly Borneo, but they lay in MacArthur's theatre and were therefore naturally under his ultimate operational command.

**Q.** In modern type warfare it appears you start with subversion and not with regular forces at all. Can you say how our special forces should be organized in the future to deal with subversion – rather like an anti-missile missile?

**Gubbins.** Combating subversion was not really a function that could have been exercised by SOE as it developed under its charter. Its most important function was the raising of Resistance in occupied countries where the people were predominantly anti-German. There was in Germany itself a tiny element of resistance which was pretty effectively scotched by the Gestapo and their like. However, the Gestapo were eventually powerless in the occupied countries, even with the aid of a small traitorous section of the inhabitants.

**Q.** You said that it took a great deal of time in the war to get anything started at all, and in fact nothing was started in any theatre until it got stabilized; nothing happened while we were going backwards. Now in any future general war, say, in Europe, can we really think that anything could be organized in the time we feel such a war would last, especially as again we shall probably be going backwards for quite a bit?

**Gubbins.** It is up to each country who feels its territory may be invaded to make its own preparations. I am sure for instance, that Poland in 1939 had begun to prepare for this eventuality, with secret transmitters and such like. As has recently been made public we in Great Britain had gone a very long way in this direction in 1940 with 'Auxiliary Units' in anticipation of invasion.

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**Q.** I wonder if in time of peace any country could recruit the right sort of people who would have anything to do with this sort of business. You need people with a great deal of common sense and integrity. Would those sort of people be really interested in something which is really dirty work? It might attract the wrong sort of people, those with frightful political ambitions etc.?

**Gubbins.** I do not foresee these difficulties myself. Before September 1939 we had selected some fifty 'good men and true', if I may so call them – the wastage from our special courses was miniscule. If the government had given more and earlier encouragement we could have got as many as would be needed. Remember that what you are after is real leaders, not the rank and file – they come later.

**Q.** You mentioned that you had little success or results from your dealings with the NKVD in Moscow. I wonder whether you would say anything more as to the reasons for this?

**Gubbins.** Basically I suppose, that except for the military defeat of Germany and later of Japan, there was little if any common ground between the British and Soviet long-range policies as to the fate of the occupied countries when victory was achieved. British policy was for free elections and non-interference; that was hardly compatible with Russia's. Russia's seizure of the Baltic States, of Ruthenia (under the title of Sub-Carpatho-Ukraine) from Czechoslovakia, and her behaviour towards Poland, our full ally, did not ease the position. There was no common cause except immediate military victory, and no aid that the Soviet Government could render to SOE in its task. All we ever achieved was a limited exchange of information, and of devices.

**Q.** You said that effective industrial sabotage was dependent on a detailed knowledge of industrial and technological processes. Is it possible to say something about how you set out to acquire this knowledge?

**Gubbins.** Yes. We had a separate experimental establishment and school for this purpose, with a first-class engineer in charge who undertook a deep and practical study of the subject. To sabotage an industrial plant effectively, i.e. to put it out of action for as long as possible, one goes for the vital parts in order of priority; these differ for all types of factories. Information on these priorities was obtained from all sort of sources, particularly insurance companies, the fire services, electricity boards, the Patents Office and so on. A most effective library of information and experience was built up. Incidentally, to put out of action a sulphuric acid factory our best weapon was a hammer – the huge clay vats were almost irreplaceable.