

PART I



World War



CHAPTER ONE

OSS: The Jedburghs

1943-1944



IT WAS HARD to stay calm as I strode down the Washington Mall on that bright October morning in 1943. A few weeks before, I'd been just another young rifle platoon leader in the 515th Parachute Infantry Regiment training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Then I answered a call for volunteers with foreign-language ability willing to accept "hazardous duty" behind enemy lines. Now I had classified War Department orders to report for an interview with an organization called the Office of Strategic Services, the OSS. I hadn't even heard of the OSS until my regimental adjutant, Captain Elvy Roberts, had told me the outfit was involved with secret intelligence and sabotage operations overseas and commanded by the fabled General "Wild Bill" Donovan. That had been good enough for me.

I entered a cluttered office in the Munitions Building, one of several *temporary*, concrete-slab World War I structures that had blighted the west end of the Mall since 1917. Placing my orders on the desk, I saluted a middle-age major who seemed uncomfortable in his rumpled uniform. There were bulging cardboard boxes of personnel files and teetering stacks of mimeographed orders scattered on his desk and nearby cabinets. He looked like a kindly professor and hardly seemed the proper gatekeeper for a supposedly crack cloak-and-dagger unit.

I felt suddenly uneasy. Maybe I'd made a bad mistake leaving the regiment. Maybe I was headed for some dead-end desk job. Since high school I'd had one ambition: to become a career Army officer. Because my dad was a Democrat in a heavily Republican district of southern California, I'd missed an appointment to West Point. At UCLA, I'd majored in Military

Science and was ROTC Cadet Colonel, hoping to earn a regular commission as Honor Graduate, but that program was canceled after Pearl Harbor. One of the reasons I'd gone Airborne was to serve in combat with an elite outfit and better my chances for a regular commission after the war. At twenty-two, of course, I had boundless confidence that I would survive the war.

After casually verifying my dates of commission and previous assignments, the major took off his gold-framed glasses and spoke with the cool, inquisitorial tone of a district attorney. "Lieutenant," he asked, "just what makes you think you are qualified for hazardous duty behind enemy lines?"

His sudden shift in manner caught me off balance, which, of course, was his design. In my very first exposure to the OSS I was learning an important lesson: Don't judge people by appearance, and maintain a proper degree of wariness when dealing with anyone.

"Sir," I began, "I'm a parachute infantry platoon leader, trained to lead men in small-unit action."

The major frowned and feigned impatience. "I *have* read your file, Lieutenant. That's why you're here. What else have you got to say for yourself?"

This interview was sure different from those I'd had in the regular Army. "I believe I'm resourceful, sir. I broke my ankle after my second jump, so I volunteered to go to demolition school while my leg was healing. Then I finished parachute training with an extra qualification." This was harder than I had thought. Obviously, they weren't looking for someone to sit behind a desk. "Sir," I continued, "I guess you'd say I've got initiative." I had been about to add that I was working on my private pilot's license and that I was serving as the regimental demolition officer, a post normally held by a captain, which gave me additional qualification for duty on sabotage missions. But, as the major had made clear, he was intimately familiar with my personnel file.

He stared at me, again the prosecuting attorney. "Do you understand a mission behind enemy lines involves unusual risk?"

"Yes, sir, I do." I knew I looked young, but I hoped I appeared tough enough for the challenge. "Sir, my old regiment is losing men as replacements for outfits already overseas. It's just possible the 515th might spend the war training replacements. I don't want that, sir."

He pursed his lips and wrote on a notepad, then filled out a printed chit, using a pen from a handsome desk set. "Our headquarters is in the old Public Health Service buildings on Twenty-fifth and E." He clipped the chit to my orders and handed them across his desk. "Report to Building Q over there at 1 P.M. tomorrow . . . ah, 1300, I mean." He grinned at his faux pas, an admission of fallibility by a desk-bound Washington warrior, whose job it was to do the initial sorting of wheat from chaff among earnest young men who would be asked to fight and perhaps die in desperate, isolated

battles on the other side of the planet, while he held his ground in this untidy little office.

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IN THE headquarters parking lot the next afternoon, I found a group of nine young officers, mostly lieutenants with a couple of captains thrown in, already assembled on the sidewalk. Five of us were parachute infantry, and there were a couple of armored cavalry men, and even one Marine. After we piled into the back of a deuce-and-a-half Army truck, a corporal pulled the tarpaulin across the tailgate. We were then driven past the marble-pillared administration building and the sentry gates of the walled compound.

"You gotta keep the tarp closed," the driver called back as we rumbled up Pennsylvania Avenue toward Georgetown.

"Where're we headed?" a captain asked the driver.

"The Congressional Country Club, sir," the kid called over his shoulder, nervously wheeling the truck on the cobblestones and streetcar tracks.

The captain shook his head. "Hell," he muttered, "you ask a simple question . . ."

But the driver was not just another wiseacre GI. Half an hour later we rolled up a crescent drive and stopped before an impressive redbrick colonial structure. This was not a typical requisitioned civilian hotel stripped of its peacetime splendor. There were still handsome leather furniture, crystal chandeliers, and oil paintings in gilded frames. After the sweltering huts and fly-blown outdoor latrines of Fort Benning, this place was real luxury.

At our orientation the next day, we saw the unmistakable influence of General Donovan on the OSS. The officers who briefed us were wealthy, influential civilians who had traded Brooks Brothers gabardine for well-tailored uniforms, not West Pointers who had served between the wars in the dusty outposts of the peacetime Army. Donovan was intimate with the most successful corporate and Wall Street lawyers in New York, as well as the luminaries of the Ivy League. It was from these institutions that he drew the inner circle of his organization.

Many of the young junior volunteers were also from the wealthy East Coast milieu. They seemed to know one another, or at least recognized the subtle signs of breeding and privilege, which most of us didn't display. By the end of the war, the OSS was being called the "Oh So Social." Glancing around the Club ballroom, however, I saw other tough-looking young Airborne lieutenants who bore more of the rough-edged stamp of ROTC or Officer Candidate School than recent Ivy League graduates.¹

The welcoming colonel was quick to impress on us the secret and sensitive nature of the assembly.

"You've been brought here," he told us, "to evaluate your suitability for combat duty with resistance groups in enemy-occupied areas." He stared over his half-frame glasses at the rows of folding chairs filled with eager young officers. "I'm talking about guerrilla warfare, espionage, and sabotage. Obviously, no one doubts your courage, but we have to make certain you possess the qualities needed for a type of operation never before attempted on the scale we envision."²

Guerrillas, the colonel said, move fast and operate mainly at night, then disperse into the countryside, only to reassemble miles away. The skills required of a guerrilla leader would be the same as those shown by legendary backwoods fighters and Indian scouts. I smiled now. Since early childhood, I'd preferred outdoor sports, camping, hunting, and fishing, to the regimentation of playground games and team sports. All during high school and college, I had trekked the wilderness of the High Sierras, and knew from firsthand experience how to stalk mule deer in deep timber and climb miles of canyon and rock slide to find an untouched trout stream. I felt quite confident that I'd do well in the training.

But the colonel suddenly deflated this premature confidence. "We aren't looking for individual heroes," he stressed, "although your courage will certainly be tested in coming weeks. We want mature officers who can train foreign resistance troops, quickly and efficiently, then lead them aggressively. If we are not completely satisfied with your potential, you *will* be reassigned to normal duties."

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OVER the next several weeks I grew to respect my fellow volunteers. One quiet-looking type, Frank Coolidge, for example, had served five years in the French Foreign Legion and had survived hand-to-hand combat in the mountains of North Africa. Bill Colby was an Army brat with a scholarship degree from Princeton, who'd qualified in the Airborne despite poor eyesight. Hod Fuller, an easygoing, sandy-haired Marine captain, had fought with the First Division on Guadalcanal. Before the war, he'd sailed a small boat around the world, so this adventure was nothing new. And Bernie Knox, an older scholarly guy, had fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. These men knew infinitely more about combat than I did.

More important, Bernie's experience in Spain had given him a level of political sophistication far beyond my own. I knew enough military history to understand Clausewitz's axiom that war was merely an extension of pol-

itics. But I was only beginning to grasp the dimensions of the totalitarian systems then struggling for world domination. The war in Spain had been described as a dress rehearsal for World War II, not just a conflict between fascism and democracy, but also as a ruthless struggle between the two dominant brands of totalitarianism: European fascism and Soviet communism. When idealistic young volunteers like Knox had trooped off to fight for "liberty" in the hills of Catalonia, they had not expected to be cynically manipulated and even betrayed by Moscow-trained political commissars.

They learned through harsh experience that neither Communist nor Fascist gave a good damn about the kind of individual freedom we in the Western democracies regarded so highly that we would risk our lives for it. Now battle-hardened young men like them were prepared for the intrigue and potential betrayals inherent to a guerrilla war in occupied Europe, where Moscow-controlled Communist resistance groups had taken the early initiative against the Nazi occupiers. It would be months before I would gain bitter experience from these same political complexities.

Our initial training emphasized the skills of guerrilla warfare and, we were told, was designed to test us both physically and psychologically. The famous Club golf course had been transformed into a night-stalking area, with sentry posts, simulated railway trestles, power transformers, and other target paraphernalia. Not only were we required to crawl through the wet grass undetected, and spring from the manicured boxwood hedges on supposedly unsuspecting sentries (who were usually unarmed combat instructors), but we were also required to do this in teams. Often one of the team members was a ringer from the training staff, put there to rattle us through incompetence or overaggression. How we handled this *subordinate* was more important than our clandestinely placing a token demolition charge at a rail switch.

As the training progressed, the intrusions by psychologists became blatant. We were interviewed by gentlemen in tweed jackets who would gaze thoughtfully across the brims of their briar pipes as we struggled to answer their hypothetical questions about our potential reactions to danger and betrayal behind enemy lines. Rorschach inkblot tests were routine, as were bizarre word-association exercises. Again, however, the overt testing was often a facade for hidden methods of assessment. The Irish-American officers would be approached by a friendly instructor after an orientation lecture on the British unconventional warfare units with which we might eventually work. The instructor might begin a subtle anti-British patter, hoping to elicit a similar response. If this didn't work, the Irish guy might be asked outright how he could morally justify serving with the same British troops that had brutally suppressed his "homeland." One of these officers, a tough ex-regular Army sergeant named Jack Gildee, quickly saw through

this probing. "I don't give a damn if I fight with 'em or against 'em," he said. "I just want to get over there and fight."

By mid-November the several dozen captains and lieutenants who had been briefed in the ballroom numbered fewer than fifty. But there was still one major hurdle to pass, a personal interview with Wild Bill Donovan himself.

I approached my own interview with the General gripped by the same kind of pleasant apprehension I always felt before a parachute jump. Everything about Donovan was somehow larger than we average mortals. In World War I Donovan took command of the first battalion of the New York National Guard's 69th Infantry Regiment, an outfit commonly known as the Fighting Irish. His own battalion, whom he called his "Micks," were tough, working-class guys whom you didn't lead into the frontline trenches of France by bromide and homily, but rather through example. On October 15, 1918, his battalion was one of the point units of the Rainbow Division that broke through the enemy trenches during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. They then repulsed a savage German counterattack, which practically decimated Donovan's unit. Although his right knee was shattered from a machine-gun bullet, Donovan called for volunteers to carry him on a bloody blanket through the trenches and over barbed-wire entanglements on the parapets. He skillfully rallied his defense, directing a mortar barrage and machine-gun fire against the waves of German attackers. Near unconsciousness from pain and blood loss, he refused evacuation until his own wounded were removed.

Donovan received America's three highest decorations for valor, the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Distinguished Service Medal, as well as the Purple Heart with two oak-leaf clusters, making him one of the most decorated American soldiers of the war.

After the war, he pursued his law career with equal vigor, serving as the head of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division in the mid-1920s. He became one of the best legal strategists in the country and later dabbled in New York State politics before establishing a successful international law firm in New York.

In 1940, when President Roosevelt wanted a personal emissary to assess the war situation in Europe, he sent Donovan. When Pearl Harbor came, he chose Donovan to organize and lead America's wartime central intelligence organization (which became the Office of Strategic Services in 1942). To Roosevelt, Donovan was the logical choice. "When in serious trouble," FDR told an aide, "it's a good idea to send for Bill Donovan."

My interview with Donovan was in his second-floor office in the old Public Health Service Building. A colonel stood beside his desk, noting my

military qualifications from my personnel file. Donovan listened politely, for he was a man of great personal charm, then nodded to the officer to desist. My eyes were fixed on the rows of ribbons on the General's chest, in particular on the tiny star-flecked blue rectangle of the Medal of Honor.

"Lieutenant," he said, smiling, "you have an excellent training record. And you know how I feel about thorough training."

"Yes, sir," I answered. We had been snaking on our bellies along the golf course fairways most of the night trying to evade K-9 teams.

General Donovan held me with his bright, probing gaze. "Well," he said, "I just want you to know that the kind of combat we'll be in is a lot rougher than any training." His blue eyes did not blink. "You do understand that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

He nodded and smiled again. "I believe you do," was all he said. The interview was over. I had passed the hurdle.

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THE survivors in my group moved to Area B-I, the former boys' camp in the mountains of western Maryland that had become FDR's weekend retreat, "Shangri-La," and would later be known as Camp David. Here the emphasis was practical "tradecraft," not ink blots.

Although the accommodations were still comfortable—pine-paneled cabins with indoor plumbing—the classroom and exercise schedule ran from early morning to late at night. Our principal weapons and unarmed combat instructor was British Major William Ewart Fairbairn of the legendary Fairbairn-Sykes team, who had invented the double-edged fighting knife that bore their name, and had developed the hand-to-hand combat training course for the Commandos.

Fairbairn was a tough former colonial police officer with years of service in China, and was known as the "Shanghai Buster." Once you felt his callused grip on your throat when he trip-tossed you savagely to the ground during your first feeble attempt at a knife lunge, you realized you had a lot to learn from "the old man."

The Major's fighting credo was simple: A well-trained man had nothing to fear from close combat. Rather, if this man was properly armed, all nearby adversaries had *everything* to fear. We would become so proficient with a variety of Allied and enemy weapons over the coming months, he promised, that using them would become "instinctive."

"You chaps have been trained to *aim* a weapon," he told us during our first session with him on the pistol range. He stood upright, hefting a standard

Army .45 automatic, then pointed it toward a target. "That's all proper and good on the range." He turned away and slid the pistol into his belt. "The only problem is that your average Hun or Nip rarely stands still with a bull's-eye on his nose."

Three spring-loaded silhouettes of enemy soldiers—the first such targets we'd seen—clanged up in the thornbushes twenty yards away. The Major spun in a crouch, his right arm cocked with the pistol just forward of his hips, his left arm also cocked as a balancing boom, and his knees slightly bent. The six shots came in three quick groups of two. Squinting into the low November sun, we saw the tight pattern of bullets in the center of each silhouette. Major Fairbairn had not aimed his pistol. He and the gun were simply not separate units; the man and the pistol had become a single weapon.

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WHEN the training schedule permitted, I'd head into Washington to see Mary Osborne, a Wave officer working on a highly classified project for Naval Intelligence. We'd been introduced by my sister Anita, a petty officer on the same project. Anita was only eighteen months younger than I, and we'd always been close. But I couldn't reveal the nature of my OSS assignment, and she and Mary certainly could not discuss theirs, beyond the unusual comment that the work was "ultra" secret. I hadn't heard that classification level before and had no way of guessing that they were assigned to the Ultra code-breaking program that did so much to shorten the war.

Mary was a quiet, thoughtful, and extremely attractive blond who could have had her pick of the large Washington officer corps. I was never quite certain what she saw in me. Usually, I was so exhausted from training that I'd snore through the latest Bing Crosby movie. But we certainly did click. After a few weeks in Washington, we were planning on marriage. Provided, of course, that I made it back from overseas.

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BY THE end of November, our training at Area B-1 had become a grueling marathon. We fired American, British, and German weapons almost every day. We crawled through rain-soaked oak forests at night to plant live demolition charges on floodlit sheds. We were introduced to clandestine radio procedure and practiced tapping out code and encrypting messages in our few spare moments. Many mornings began with a run, followed by a passage of an increasingly sophisticated and dangerous obstacle course. The

explosive charges under the rope bridges and wire catwalks no longer exploded to one side as exciting stage effects. Now they blasted directly below, a moment before or after we had passed.

Once the word was out that Wild Bill Donovan was training a batch of educated cutthroats up in the Maryland mountains, Area B-1 became an obligatory stop on the make-work schedules of VIP staff officers who crowded wartime Washington. The city was a mecca for men with political connections, who pranced like show horses in their handsomely tailored uniforms in the drawing rooms of Embassy Row and Kalorama Circle. For them, the war was a splendid entertainment after the drab years of the depression and the drudgery of the New Deal bureaucracy. What made this adventure even more exciting was their secure knowledge that they wouldn't see actual combat, even during their carefully orchestrated inspection tours overseas, where they netted a respectable clutch of campaign ribbons. Sometimes after an exhausting day in the classroom and on the firing range, we'd be ordered to assemble in Class A uniform and forced to listen to some sleek brigadier from the War Department proclaim how proud the country was to have produced fine young fellows like us who would soon have Hitler by the throat. We knew full well we would be involved in throat slashing in a matter of months, while this gentleman waxed eloquent over dry martinis at the Army-Navy Club. But we couldn't be certain whose throat would be cut, ours or the enemy's.

On one memorable occasion we were visited by William F. Stephenson, the British Secret Intelligence Service officer (code name *Intrepid*) who had been handpicked by Churchill not only to establish a Washington office in 1940 to help bring America into the war, but also to steer attorney William Donovan toward the helm of America's own clandestine intelligence service. Stephenson was a man of great experience and intellect who normally would have received our utmost attention and respect. Unfortunately, his visit was the last of a series of pep talks by sleek noncombatants. We'd had enough.

As Stephenson spoke of the great pride our British counterparts felt in shepherding us toward our glorious destinies, a bizarre chant rose in the rear ranks of our formation. "Forty-eight," a man called. "Forty-nine," two more replied. Guys like Bill Colby, Bill Pietsch, and me, who'd gone through parachute school at Fort Benning, used this form of hazing to deflate official pomposity. Stephenson looked surprised, then chagrined, as he realized what was happening. "Fifty!" A dozen of us now chanted. "Some shit!" the formation shouted in unison.

The Man Named *Intrepid* shook his head sadly and turned to his mortified American escort officer for a full explanation. The patriotic formation was dissolved, and we could get on to more important things like practicing our codes or cleaning weapons.

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THE *Queen Elizabeth* arrived at the Clydeside port of Gourock on the fifth day out of New York. It was a cold December afternoon, and the estuary was burnished by the weak sun. But the sprawling port of Glasgow was gray with coal smoke. Standing with my friends on the midship's boat deck, I watched the hooting tugs maneuver the huge liner alongside the pilings. The redbrick warehouses and rusty cranes had a decrepit quality to them. Further up the Clyde heaps of sooty rubble marked the destruction of the Blitz. The troops and stevedores on the dock moved purposefully in the cold sunshine. Even though Great Britain was in its fifth year of war, its people had not lost their determination to win.

Several thousand American soldiers crowded the decks, jostling and laughing, happy to be safely in port. I gazed across the Clyde at the camouflaged destroyers and corvettes getting up steam to go to sea. We had crossed the Atlantic alone on a flank-speed zigzag course, faster than any U-boat could track us. But the bulk of men and matériel for the invasion of Europe still came by slow convoy from east coast ports in America and Canada. And these convoys were still the prey of U-boat wolf packs. A line of rusty transports and Liberty ships was unloading on nearby docks, the survivors of an Atlantic convoy. I watched the columns of British troops tromp down the gangways to form up at dockside: Canadians with black berets, Sikhs in khaki turbans, tough little Gurkhas with flat, impassive faces. The term "World War" acquired a new reality. Men were, indeed, converging from all across the planet to prepare for the impending invasion of Europe. The anonymous columns of disembarking troops and the grimness of the war-battered port reminded me we had come a long way from the linen napkins and chandeliers of the Congressional Country Club.

British soldiers took my group to a warehouse where we waited until darkness fell. Then two battered lorries drove us through the blacked-out city to the railway station. The waiting rooms were smoky and dim. People moved through the shadows like phantoms, trailing the scent of cheap tobacco and wet wool. The train north was crowded with troops, stuffy and dimly lit.

It had taken us just five days to cross the Atlantic, but the trip from Glasgow to Mallaig lasted almost thirty hours and involved three such trains—the last a narrow-gauge line in the Northwest Highlands. The dry weather of our arrival gave way to a chill, wet gale that swept Loch Nevis as a motor launch carried us toward a bold ridge of heather and lichen stone. This was the old estate called Inverie House, our first training site in Britain.

The establishment was run by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the godfather of the various British unconventional-warfare groups that had arisen during the war. In 1940, Churchill had created the SOE as one of his first official acts as prime minister, giving the organization the typically Churchillian edict, "Now, go out and set Europe ablaze!" He understood that the very success of the Nazis' Blitzkrieg contained the seeds of its downfall. By occupying all of Europe, from the Barent Sea to the Pyrenees and east to the Aegean, the German forces were stretched terribly thin over the ground.

So Western Europe was ripe for aggressive actions by resistance groups. The brief of the SOE was to help organize, train, and supply these groups. By the time we arrived in Britain, the organization had become huge. Fittingly, the SOE's headquarters was on London's Baker Street, not far from Sherlock Holmes's imaginary digs.³ The SOE now had clandestine training sites around the world, including a number like Inverie House in the isolated moors of Scotland and the northern English shires. In addition, the SOE controlled squadrons of airdrop and reconnaissance planes, speedboats, and a couple of submarines, and managed a regular cottage industry of forgers and mapmakers.

SOE officers had established espionage and sabotage networks throughout occupied Europe. Now, as 1943 ended and the year of the invasion began, America was ready to shoulder its share of the unconventional warfare burden in Europe. There were already a few OSS teams in France transmitting good intelligence, and a couple of advance American liaison teams to the French Maquis were in place. Our group, we learned, would be part of an eventual major guerrilla offensive.

Inverie House was a twenty-room manor, small by British standards, but it certainly seemed palatial after the cramped quarters aboard ship. The grounds were overgrown, and nearby hedges and outbuildings had been adapted as weapons and demolition training areas. That night we feasted on a dinner of roast venison. As we bedded down, we wondered how the lean young British officers on the training staff stayed so fit with such an ample mess.

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OUR SOE training staff quickly demonstrated how they maintained their fighting trim, despite the establishment's well-stocked larder. The emphasis here in the Highlands would be on grueling outdoor exercises designed to build our stamina and test our courage. We were sent on twenty-mile "jaunts" across the windswept moors, lugging a heavy rucksack, a shoulder weapon, and ammunition. On the crests of the ridges, the chill northeast

wind would slice in from the burnished Hebrides Sea beyond the Isle of Skye.

One freezing morning we were sloshing through a half-frozen bog between two bare ridges when our British host announced that this would be a dicey place to be caught in a mortar barrage. Then, like Mephistopheles, the captain waved a handkerchief, and live two-inch mortar rounds began to smack into the hillside above, a walking barrage that was definitely headed toward us. "Well, chaps," he said, "I shouldn't stooge around here, if I were you."

We dashed toward the shelter of the opposite slope, but the mortars continued to fall behind us. I flopped into the wet heather beside a lichened boulder, my chest heaving and my mouth parched from exertion. Even as I did so, I knew this was too obvious a place to take cover. I saw the mortar rounds had been switched from high explosive to smoke, a sure sign they were going to bracket this boulder field. Bill Pietsch, a West Pointer my age, was behind a rock to my right. He had reached the same conclusion. "Let's get the hell out of here, Jack," he called. I rolled onto my stomach and slid sideways to center the rucksack, pushing free of a boulder as I did so. At that moment, a mortar round exploded with an incandescent shock wave, *exactly* where I had been lying. I was on my feet and running low toward the ridge line, my heart thudding in my ears like a jackhammer. Bill had been a cross-country star at West Point, and was probably the fastest runner in our group. But he sure as hell couldn't catch me that morning.

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Two weeks later our group had moved to a manor house near Wokingham in the green Berkshire countryside west of London. Here the hazards were psychological, not physical. We were joined by a group of British, Dutch, and Belgian officers. Our training focused on "schemes" involving clandestine tradecraft, including the demanding skill of living a cover story. We would be issued a packet of personal documents to memorize, and then were interrogated about our backgrounds. Next we were driven to a station in Hampshire (yet another requisitioned country manor) to spend a few days among strange officers, all the while maintaining our false identity. We were ordered to hold the cover from departure to our return. One fellow did well during the two days at the other site and was complimented roundly by the British staff. Afterward, over a drink in the manor house library, his British escort got chummy and asked who the man "really" was. Our guy made the mistake of revealing his true identity. This cost him his job; the next morning he was sent back to a Parachute regiment.⁴

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In February, we went in small teams to the RAF parachute school at Ringway in the Midlands. Even though many of us were parachute-qualified, the Brits had their own way of doing things. And the SOE in particular insisted on all its covert personnel completing the Ringway agent's course, which involved three jumps, one a night drop from a tethered balloon.

The British Airborne parachute was different from ours in that its canopy was packed in a bag and didn't deploy until the suspension lines were pulled taut. This was a much safer system than the American chute. U.S. T-7 parachutes burst open as soon as the static line went tight and could malfunction easily; hence we carried a small reserve parachute on our chests. The British did not. If their chute didn't deploy, you were dead.

The SOE used bombers to drop agents. Not only did these planes have a greater range than standard transports, their true advantage lay in their stealth. Almost every night RAF Bomber Command struck targets in Germany, deploying a long "stream" of aircraft from British bases. German radar operators often saw individual bombers aborting the mission and looping back west toward England. These lame ducks were not worthy targets. What they never realized was that many of these *aborted* missions were actually SOE Halifax or Stirling bombers with teams of agents on board. When the plane dropped below the German radar horizon, it would turn back east and fly to a Maquis drop zone in the French countryside.

In SOE parlance, an agent was "Joe." And the hatch in the bomber's belly was called the Joe hole. On most planes, you sat with your legs dangling into the hole and the RAF dispatcher tapped you on the helmet when it was your turn to jump. But on the Stirling, a rectangular section of the aft deck was removed, and you simply moved toward the tail and stepped into the slipstream.

The British chute worked well on an aircraft drop, where the prop blast would quickly deploy the bagged canopy. But jumping from a tethered balloon was another matter. When I slid through the narrow Joe hole of the balloon's wicker basket and into the darkness, I was braced for the twanging jolt and pendulum swing I'd experienced on plane drops. Instead, I felt only the silent drop as the night fog swallowed me, washing out the horizon. The balloon was tethered at 800 feet, and I had already fallen a good 300 without the lurch of a canopy opening. My hand went for the ripcord of my reserve, but there was no reserve parachute there.

Then the chute deployed with a gentle, rubbery pop. I looked up to see symmetrical suspension lines rising into the wet cotton fog. I grinned. In

typical SOE manner, the instructors had not warned us about the slow, quiet opening on a balloon drop.

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OUR final move in England was to yet another stately home, Milton Hall near Peterborough in Cambridgeshire north of London. The manor was an imposing gray limestone manor house, the ancestral home of the Earl of Fitzwilliam. When the American contingent arrived we were joined by a hundred British and French officers who'd been training elsewhere, and by forty American radio operator sergeants. The oak-paneled bedrooms had been divided into small dormitories, and British, French, and American fellows were mixed up through "random" room assignments.

From this international combination, it was obvious that we were being prepared for a major joint operation. At our briefing the next morning, a British lieutenant colonel confirmed our speculation. A secret unconventional warfare plan had been approved by Supreme Allied Headquarters (after much heated debate on both sides of the Atlantic, we later learned), which involved the British, Americans, Free French, Belgians, and Dutch in an attempt at multinational military cooperation unique in the war.

For the first operations in France, three-man teams, composed of a British or American officer, his French counterpart, and an enlisted radio operator, would be parachuted into France to help organize, train, and eventually lead Maquis resistance groups. The principal goal of this operation was the arming of tens of thousands of resistance volunteers with air-dropped and captured weapons, their rapid training with these arms, and their deployment against German garrisons and lines of communication. The purpose of this resistance offensive was to support the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. It was hoped that the Nazi occupation army would find itself simultaneously attacked by regular Allied troops on the invasion front and by thousands of well-equipped and well-led *maquisards* in the rear. But to maximize impact, and minimize Nazi reprisals, it was vital that the big resistance offensive not come until the cross-Channel invasion. The mission bore the name JEDBURGH, and the individual units would be called Jedburgh Teams.

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AS THE spring of 1944 ground inexorably toward invasion summer, we trained in the East Midlands countryside, and the military traffic on the rail lines and roads seemed to swell daily, most of it headed south. We knew D-Day was coming, but we didn't know when. In the meantime, our SOE mentors stepped up the pressure. Now we worked eleven straight days, and had three

days off to unwind in London. The emphasis was on small-unit combat. We fired a variety of Allied and German weapons every day, on courses with pop-up targets. For my personal weapons I chose a Spanish Llama, which was a 9mm version of the U.S. Army .45, and the UDT 9mm submachine gun. Both could fire German 9mm parabellum ammo. Our close-combat instructor was now Major Bill Sykes, Fairbairn's partner. Sykes's method of instinctive firing training involved creeping around a blacked-out cellar and shooting at moving targets illuminated by the muzzle flash of our first shot. Once we could consistently hit the targets with absolutely no hesitation, Major Sykes pronounced us "improving."

I was impressed by the British Jeds. Several were former Commandos or Special Air Service (SAS) officers with combat experience. Captain Tommy MacPherson, for example, had led the raid on Rommel's desert headquarters, was wounded and captured by the Germans, and later escaped from his prison camp and made it to neutral Sweden. He could have sat out the war there, but returned to Britain and joined the SOE. Captain Joseph Coombe-Tennant, formerly of the Welsh Guards, was another escaped POW who served with great distinction as a Jed.⁵ One of my British roommates, Captain Adrian Wise, had been on the costly but successful Commando attack in Norway that had destroyed the German atom bomb program's sole heavy-water plant, thus thwarting the Nazi effort to build a nuclear weapon.

By now the American Jeds had instructed their allies in the fine art of deflating Colonel Blimps. Our Airborne hazing had evolved into the continental "*quarante-huit, quarante-neuf, cinquante . . . quelle merde!*"

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ON MY first trip into London, my friends and I stopped by the OSS office just off Grosvenor Square ("Eisenhower Platz" according to Whitehall wags) and down the street from Supreme Allied Headquarters. But first we shared a taxi from King's Cross with another Jed, Prince Michel de Bourbon Parme (nom de guerre: Maurice Bourdon), a descendant of the French royal family. He politely asked to be dropped at Buckingham Palace to visit his friend Princess Elizabeth. The cockney driver almost blew a gasket when the young French officer got out of the taxi and strode smartly past the Grenadier Guards at the gate.

We met the Jedburgh case officer, a soft-spoken, shuffling Irish bear of a Navy lieutenant named William Casey. Like many of Donovan's key subordinates, Casey was a New York attorney in civilian life. His slow, unflappable manner disguised a quick intellect and tenacity. He questioned us closely on our training progress, especially on our relationship with the French officers.

Before coming to Milton Hall, he explained, our Free French officers had

been politically divided among a variety of factions ranging from royalists like Prince Michel to followers of General Charles de Gaulle to men loyal to de Gaulle's archrival, General Henri Giraud. They had harbored suspicion and bitterness toward those they felt responsible for the military capitulation of 1940. But once they'd been assigned to the Jeds, they suspended their rivalries and prepared for combat. Casey was ten years older than we young paratroop officers, and had the sophistication to recognize the problems inherent in this French discord.

I listened to him closely that afternoon and vowed that I would avoid entanglement in the internecine French struggle.

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THAT spring the training evolved into realistic "schemes." We were dropped at night from low-flying RAF bombers into the coastal plains of Lincolnshire or far up into Scotland. To increase the realism of these operations, the SOE would inform the local Home Guard and Scotland Yard Special Branch that "foreign parachutists" had been reported in the area. Our task was to make it back to our pickup point by a prescribed date without detection.

I teamed up with my French partner and our American radio operator in May. One afternoon following a rigorous Bren-gun exercise, a tall young Breton aristocrat, whose nom de guerre was Lieutenant Dominique Leb, approached me. He said he'd been watching me in training and hoped we could become teammates. His English was much better than my French, and he was determined to improve it. (His real name was Jacques Le Bel de Pengilly, but he didn't reveal it for several weeks; Nazi reprisals against the families of Free French officers were commonplace.) Jacques's invitation was fortuitous; the two areas in which I felt weak were my spoken French and my knowledge of the current French political scene. He was a Gaullist who had escaped occupied France and been recruited for the General's Bureau Central de Renseignements et Action (BCRA) in North Africa, the fiefdom of General Giraud himself. Obviously, he understood French factional intrigue as well as anyone.

We both were enthusiastic about Technical Sergeant Tony Denneau, a scrappy kid from Green Bay, who was among the best radio operators at Milton Hall. Although he weighed only about 120 pounds, Tony relished the night parachute drops and the long treks. He was also a damned good shot.

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WHEN D-Day finally came, I was in a U.S. Army hospital, recovering from an emergency appendectomy. (General Donovan defied the War Department to personally inspect the beachhead.) I listened to General Eisenhow-

er's invasion proclamation over a scratchy loudspeaker in the ward. I was afraid I'd lost my chance to be a part of the greatest adventure of the war. But Jacques came to see me on his next pass and explained that only a few teams had been dispatched. Supreme Headquarters was still deeply concerned about provoking a premature Maquis uprising. The chances were, Jacques explained, that the Jedburgh teams would not be dropped in until—and *if*—Allied forces broke out of Normandy. Then, the Jeds would be badly needed.

"And also, Jack," he said, "we have decided, Tony and me, to stay together with you as a team. We will wait, *c'est tout*."

I gripped his hand. My teammates thought enough of me to wait until the medics pronounced me fit.

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BILL Casey came to Milton Hall in early August and assembled four American team leaders in the oak-paneled library. He wore his anonymous gray civilian suit, a subtle clue that he was on a confidential mission. Casey paced slowly before us, speaking softly, an attorney preparing an important summation.

"You'll be going on alert soon," he said. "I don't have to tell you the importance of your missions. But I'm sure you've guessed something big is going to happen."

We'd heard rumors about a second invasion of France, this one through the Mediterranean, to relieve pressure on the Allied armies still bottled up in Normandy. Casey was not confirming this, but he still got across the import of his message.

"I can't go into details," he added, "but let me simply say that enemy resistance to our operations has been fierce." He gazed at us with his gray, assessing stare, then looked away. "Unfortunately, there have also been some terrible reprisals against civilians in your areas of operation."

I exchanged glances with my friend Stewart Alsop. Casey was leading up to something.

"You've all been drilled on escape and evasion," he said, staring at us once more, "and resisting interrogation. I just want to emphasize that things are getting rough over there."

The men around me nodded grimly.

"There's something else I have to tell you," he continued with his typically soft, unemotional tone. "A couple of weeks ago Wehrmacht headquarters in Berlin ordered all German units in France to execute anyone, captured outside what they call the 'zone of legal combat,' who's taking part in resistance operations." He fixed us all once more with his cool gray eyes. "They emphasize this applies to all parachutists no matter what nationality or uniform."

Casey didn't have to state the obvious: If the enemy were going to execute you anyway, they'd probably torture you first to obtain whatever tactical information they could.

"If any of you want to be issued an L-tablet," Casey said, "now's the time to ask for it."

The L-tablet was a cyanide capsule in a tough gelatin shell. You put it in your mouth and bit down hard. Three seconds later you were dead.

"Jack," he said, standing beside me, "do you want one?"

"No, sir," I answered as firmly as I could. "I don't intend to get captured."

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MY TEAM was placed on alert on August 9. We were taken to the Joe house at Fairford RAF station for our final briefing. The SOE intelligence officer was a low-key young French lieutenant named André Wastrin. The team, he explained, was code-named "James." Our destination was the Department of Corrèze, in the rugged, wooded hills of the Massif Central.

The Maquis had been active there for over a year, taking advantage of the forests and isolated farms for cover. But the Germans, Wastrin said, had swept up many resistance units with specially trained anti-Maquis troops, which worked closely with the hated Vichy militia, the Milice. Nevertheless, Maquis pressure had grown steadily, especially after D-Day. There were already almost 8,000 *maquisards* of the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (FFI) divided into eighty companies in the region. Unfortunately, they were further divided along political lines. Resistance fighters of de Gaulle's Armée Secrète totaled about 5,000 men, well armed and well disciplined. The Communist Franc Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) had almost as many men under arms, but had so far resisted close cooperation with the Gaullists. On July 14, many of these units had been armed through an audacious daylight airdrop that delivered over fifty tons of munitions. An SOE liaison team, code-named Tilleul, had also been dropped in July, and they confirmed that the area was ready for a major Maquis uprising.

Lieutenant Wastrin went to the map easel and traced a major highway, Route Nationale 89, northeast from Bordeaux through the Department of Corrèze to the city of Clermont-Ferrand and on to Lyons. "This is the main Hun escape route from southwestern France," he said. "Both the road and the rail lines run through narrow valleys in Corrèze, especially here." He tapped the map three times, touching the towns of Brive, Tulle, and Egletons. "Naturally, there are numerous bridges, viaducts, and culverts in this area." Once the Allied armies broke out of Normandy, the German garrisons south of the Loire would be cut off. If a second Allied invasion swept up the Rhône valley from the Mediterranean coast, these enemy units would be trapped.

Jacques and I smiled. Our months of ambush and demolition training were about to bear fruit.

"Your mission has two objectives," Wastrin continued, "training these Maquis units in the use of the weapons they've received, as well as sabotage and ambush operations. You will also be the official liaison between the Maquis and London as concerns further weapons drops." He came back to the table. "Oh, yes," he added with a smile, "you'll be expected to lead these troops against the Germans."

He opened a blue pasteboard file with a crimson SECRET label. The German order of battle in Corrèze was impressive, over 2,000 veteran troops, equipped with artillery and armor, divided among four heavily fortified garrisons along Highway 89. The Germans obviously intended to keep the road open. Our job would be to close it.

Finally, Wastrin addressed the issue of our cover story. We would not be given one, he said with flat finality. If captured, we were to demand treatment as Allied officers, under the terms of the Geneva Convention. Jacques and I looked at each other again. This time we did not smile.

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I WAS bent like a hunchback in my parachute harness, wedged against the rattling forward bulkhead of the Stirling bomber. It was almost two in the morning on Friday, August 11, 1944. The bomber's narrow fuselage was jammed with cargo pods, our three-man team, and a ten-man reconnaissance party of French SAS troops. We had been flying for three hours, first in the bomber stream across northern France, then back toward the Channel on a bogus abort, now southeast over the Massif Central.

After so many night training drops in England, I felt perfectly normal in my British para helmet and baggy camouflage smock. But this was not another exercise. The musette bag on my chest held our codebooks and 100,000 French francs. My leg bag was heavy with extra ammunition and grenades. In the dim green light from the cockpit instrument panel, I saw Jacques and Tony hunched close beside me. Further aft, Captain Wauthier's tough French SAS troopers were grouped around the open rectangular jump hatch. The engine tone changed, and I felt the aircraft slow. Faint shouts reached me through the howling slipstream. The cramped cabin seemed to lighten as the dark shapes of the SAS troops tumbled through the hatch. A crewman pushed free their cargo pods.

Now it was our turn. We shuffled along the vibrating deck until we reached the cold, whistling maw of the hatch.

"About three minutes," the RAF dispatcher shouted in my ear, the fleece of his collar rubbing my face.

We hooked up our static lines, and each man checked his teammates'

snap-clip on the deck ring, then double-checked his own. I could just distinguish dark blocks of forest and lighter open fields. There were few roads visible and no lights. Then three flaring orange signal fires swept by through the darkness below, the characteristic drop-zone light pattern of the Maquis. Although I couldn't see it, I knew someone on the ground was flashing a prearranged code letter to the pilot. If the code was correct, we would go out in a moment.

"Get ready," I shouted to Jacques and Tony.

The dispatcher smacked my helmet. "Go!"

I dropped feet first, ankles and knees together, hands tight against my thighs, grasping the wool of my trousers, a soldier snapping to attention 800 feet above the dark forest of the Massif Central. The chute opened with the familiar elastic boom. I checked my canopy against the cold stars above, and looked below at the gently rocking landscape. The fires on the drop zone seemed much too large, a brazen taunt sure to attract German units. But I didn't have time to worry. Above me, two more chutes snapped open, Tony and Jacques. Then the four smaller canopies of our cargo pods. The Stirling droned away into the darkness.

I hit hard in waist-high brush and rolled onto my side. After dragging my parachute into a clumsy bundle, I snatched out my heavy Llama pistol. If this drop zone was a German trap, I didn't intend to surrender.

Jacques and Tony thudded down fifty yards behind me. I saw dark forms loping from the tree line. They called softly in French, dashing now to intercept the cargo chutes. A figure appeared near me. In the starlight I saw he wore a para smock like my own.

"Well done," the man called in a clipped regimental accent. "You blokes are smack on schedule."

His name was Flight Lieutenant André Simon, a veteran SOE officer. We had landed in a forest clearing three kilometers from Bonnefond and about twenty kilometers from the nearest Nazi garrison in Egletons. I was finally in occupied France. The long months of training were over.