

NOTES ON S.O.E.

1941 to 1943

with special reference to
The Belgian Country Section

By

Major G.T.R. Thompson

FOREWORD

The following notes were prepared by my father, Major G T R Thompson, in 1963 following a letter from Major Bryan Lewis on 31st January 1963 asking him if he would be so kind as to assist him "from the Belgian point-of-view" in the preparation of a book to be called "The S.O.E Story". The letter went on:

"I must make it clear that the book is not intended as a history - rather more as a very compressed but representative digest of the S.O.E's work during the last war. No exaggeration, no dramatisation and, certainly, no frills! And all, so far as Europe is concerned, within the covers of one or, possibly, two large volumes.

..... So far, Maurice Buckmaster, Claude Knight, Colonel J.S. Wilson, and Hollingworth (in conjunction with the Official Danish War Historian) either have already commenced their contributions or will be doing so very shortly. In addition, I am in the process of contacting the remaining obvious people, all with the object of providing the most adequate coverage available.

..... Publication date is to be not later than 1st Sept. this year - and I have already made suitable arrangements for The Special Forces Charity to benefit (I hope, substantially) from the royalty proceeds.

.....I do look forward to hearing from you in the near future."

My father prepared a precis of his notes and sent them almost by return of post to be followed up two weeks later on 14th February 1963 by his "bit of Home Work", the Notes that follow, amounting to 36 pages of type written script. Bryan Lewis responded on 20th February by saying "Without any attempt to be polite your material is absolutely first class and I only hope that the other Country Sections will be as factual and comprehensive. As I said in my telegram and on the basis of your notes you ought to be writing this book - not me."

Further exchanges took place to clarify certain points.

The last communication from Bryan Lewis was on 7th December 1964:

"Dear Gay,

Please excuse the brevity of this note - I am in haste for the next London train which I invariably miss.

Am at present clearing up the S.O.E Story (Final title probably "25 Years After" with suitable sub-title - issue next Spring, I hope). My main concern is the collection of photographs for inclusion - have you any you would allow me to use. Say, of yourself, of a group, or of an actual operation, or result thereof? I would be most grateful if you have.

Have written to Claude similarly.

Hope you are well and, again, please excuse my rush.

Yours ever,

Bryan Lewis"

My father noted on the letter that he had replied that he was unable to help.

So far as I know, the book was never published.

Graeme (Gay) Thomas Roe Thompson was born in Penarth to Tom Roe and Dorothea (née Hancock) Thompson on 31st August 1909, was educated at Repton School and went into the army after leaving school which he left at the age of 22 on marrying Dora Bridget Gladstone. They lived in Menton in the south of France near his parents from 1931 to 1938 during which time he gathered a good working knowledge of the French language while working there as an Estate Agent. They left in the shadow of the start of the War. He worked in S.O.E between September 1942 and September 1943 and then fought in North Africa and Italy.

After the War, he dabbled in small farming until he retired to East Devon in 1952.

He died in October 1968.



M.J. Thompson

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NOTES ON S.O.E., 1941 TO 1943

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BELGIAN COUNTRY SECTION

by

Major G.T.R. Thompson

1. HOW I CAME INTO THE ORGANISATION

My recruitment to what afterwards became S.O.E. was quite a matter of chance.

In September 1941, I was temporarily commanding one of the London District Field Security Sections in the absence of a sick officer - a job that was drawing to a close.

Major Knight of the Belgian Section met my superior: Major Walker, London District Security Officer, and asked him if he knew of a suitable French-speaking officer for employment.

As a result, I was summoned to Fitzmaurice Place, where under cover rooms were reserved for the interviewing of outside military and civilian personnel, the Headquarters building in Baker Street being maximum security with entry forbidden to non-members.

Here I was interviewed by Mr. Dadson, Head of the Belgian Section at that time, and Major Knight. I knew before hand that the job was a highly secret one, and I was told very little at the interview beyond the facts that I might be placed in charge of some rather temperamental men in a country house, and that parachute training might be involved.

Some weeks elapsed, during which I was presumably thoroughly screened, and then I received official joining orders to report at Room 055, the War Office. This room was another cover address, used only for interviewing military personnel, and I found there instructions to report to Major Knight at Norgeby House, Baker Street.

On arrival I was taken to the Security Section to sign the "Poison Book" (Official Secrets Act), and later I was taken to Dorset Court to be introduced to Colonel Wilson, who was at that time second-in-command to Major-General (then Brigadier) Gubbins, Head of the very large Training Section of the Organisation.

Shortly afterwards I was introduced to Sir Charles Hambro, who was at that time, as far as I can remember, the Director in charge of the Country Sections for Western Europe, which included the French, Free French, Dutch and Belgian Sections.

By the end of the first day my brain was in a whirl, for there was so much to learn and absorb, and the Section was so understaffed that other members had little time to instruct me.

The sub-section of the Belgian Section, in which I worked, was under the charge of Major Knight, with one other officer, a civilian woman Secretary and myself. The scope of the work covered was that which was later spread among three sub-sections employing six or seven

officers with adequate staff or P/A's and Secretaries.

The second afternoon of my new job I was left in charge of the office and the telephone, and had to try and deal with baffling enquiries, such as: "This is ----- speaking, I want to know how many containers you need for Zebra next Moon."

This was at a time when I did not even know what containers were or what the Moon, in the S.O.E. sense, meant.

I spent long hours dashing about London, meeting our opposite numbers in the Belgian Service, interviewing unknown Belgian agents at rooms in Fitzmaurice Place, conducting them on various errands, and supervising their clothes for their missions.

Within a week of my joining I was taken down to our Holding School at Newport Pagnell, where I met a very tough, commando-type bunch of trained saboteurs under the command of Colonel Roper-Caldbeck (spelling?) and looked after by Lieut. Ivor Dobson, one of our Section Conducting Officers.

These men, mostly Flemish-speaking, were all fully trained and anxious to go into the field, but it was not the policy, at that stage in the war, to embark on extensive sabotage in occupied Europe, so the men had to be kept in a Holding School, given some routine training, and generally kept occupied and amused. I believe that later some of them were employed on special tasks in the Dieppe Raid.

I think that I was originally intended to be an Accompanying or Conducting Officer (these terms will be explained later), but the Section Headquarters was so understaffed that I was kept on there, and shortly other reasons arose for my remaining.

A week or two later I was told one afternoon: "----- is leaving this Moon; arrange to see him; discuss his life with him and prepare a new identity, cover, and papers for him.

This was my first introduction to the preparation of the Cover Story, and at that time I had nothing to go on but my own imagination, a knowledge of Western Europe, and a knowledge of the French language.

Later, and gradually, the Cover Story was to become a much more organised and scientific affair. Discussions with the agent would be started as soon as he left the preliminary Training School, and a long and pains-taking build-up would continue right through his training, until the results met with his and my satisfaction, and finally with the satisfaction of an examining interrogator immediately before his departure. This subject will be elaborated in more detail later in my notes.

2. THE ORGANISATION IN THE EARLY DAYS

When I joined it the Organisation was known as S.O.2 and the name S.O.1 was used, I believe, to cover the Political Warfare Executive, the latter, if I am correct, having quarters at Woburn Abbey, as well as in London (This needs confirmation).

S.O.2 (and later S.O.E) had also two outside cover names: M.O.1 (S.P) for reference with the military, and the delightfully quaint, I always thought, Inter-Services Research Bureau (blazoned on the face of 64, Baker Street) for use with outside civilians. This latter title always conjured up in my mind pictures of Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen feverishly peering into microscopes and poring over bubbling test tubes, perhaps it was meant to!

S.O.2 was a much smaller and more primitive organisation than the later greatly developed S.O.E, although the method of organising remained fundamentally the same up to 1943, when I left.

The two first succeeding heads (C.D) of the Organisation were both civilians (I am not quoting their names) and under them were two big main divisions:-

- a) The Country Sections in groups under Regional Directors. I believe that these Directors were mostly civilians - the Directors for Western Europe always were in my time.
- b) The considerably larger M (Military) Section, which covered Training of agents with the staffs of a large number of Special Training Schools and Stations scattered over England and Scotland.

To the best of my knowledge the Head of M. Section also controlled the Military Supplies (MS) Section, dealing with parachute containers, and all supplies and equipment for agents going into and in the field, and the Military Operations Section (MO) dealing with the actual despatch of agents and their gear.

There were also, of course, a number of ancillary Sections, dealing with Finance, Security, Personnel, Transport, etc.

In addition there was liaison with the sister organisation (S.I.S) generally referred to by us as "C". [*Also known as MI6 - MJT*].

The growth of the Organisation (now in future referred to as S.O.E) will be dealt with later in my notes.

3. THE BELGIAN COUNTRY SECTION IN THE EARLY DAYS

As I have already mentioned the Section was small and under-staffed when I joined it. The executive staff was housed in three rooms at Norgeby House, and a fourth room was used by the three civilian women Secretaries, which was an inconvenient arrangement.

The Head of Section (T.) was Mr. Dadson who, apart from general supervision, looked after matters of policy, top relations with the Belgian Services, and, of course, plans in general for our operations. He was responsible to the Director for Western Europe.

A Mr. Duff-Torrance was in charge of operations, briefing, preparation of missions, and communications with agents in the field, with the help of a secretary.

The remaining sub-section, in the charge of Major Claude Knight, dealt with pretty nearly

everything not covered by Messrs. Dadson and Duff-Torrance. This included recruiting, training (by liaison with the Training (M.) Section), general disposal of agents between and after school courses, a good deal of liaison with the Belgian Services at most levels, cover, clothing, and arrangements (in liaison with the Military Operations (MO.) Section) for despatch, and many other miscellaneous duties.

For this work Major Knight had, in addition to a Secretary, a Captain Jocelyn Clarke, a number of Conducting Officers at the various Special Training Schools, and myself.

Clarke's work and mine were roughly interchangeable at this time and, apart from the general rush of work in London, which I described briefly in my earlier notes, we visited various schools periodically for short stays to see how our men were getting on with their training. In addition, we took it in turns to accompany departing agents to the despatching school, our task finishing usually when we waved good-bye to the men as they climbed into the plane. The term used in our Section for this latter work was Accompanying Officer.

The men in training were usually sent to the schools in batches for a course of definite duration, and it was customary for each batch to be accompanied by a Conducting Officer and a Field Security N.C.O.

The Conducting Officer was the Belgian Section's representative at the training school. He was usually young (a Lieutenant) and would take part in the course with the trainees.

His duty was to observe the men, to get to know them closely, to watch their training progress, to assess their qualities and abilities, to watch their morale, to deal with any personal problems that they might have, and to send in weekly reports to the Section H.Q. in London dealing with all such matters. All this was, of course, done in close co-operation with the M. Section staff at the school concerned, who organised the training.

The duties of the Field Security N.C.O. were to help the Conducting Officer in his work, and to ensure maximum security for the men in their every day life. He would also assess the degree of security mindedness of the individual man, which varied greatly.

Careless talk would be frowned on, such as, for instance, one man discussing his future mission or cover with another agent.

When outside activities were organised, such as a visit to a Cinema in a neighbouring town or Church attendance, the F.S. N.C.O. would accompany the men, to see that they had no direct contact with outside people.

When I first joined, the Despatching School was situated in the mansion at Audley End, near Saffron Walden. Later it was moved to near St. Neots.

The men were usually taken to Audley End on the day of departure or the preceding afternoon. But the vagaries of the weather often made parachuting impossible on the appointed day, or the plane might leave and return many hours later, having failed to pin-point the planned dropping point.

In these circumstances it was not uncommon for agents to stay several days at the school.

In spite of the seriousness of the business in hand, the atmosphere of Audley End was informal and delightful.

The domestic arrangements were in the hands of a Mrs Gregson with her attractive staff of young F.A.N.Ys, doing cooking, housework and driving. The men were mostly housed in dormitories, keeping as far as possible to their own nationalities.

Some of the men would go out shooting in the grounds, bringing in pheasants, which they would help the F.A.N.Ys to prepare and cook, and there was often informal dancing to a gramophone in the evenings, and sometimes visits to cinemas in Cambridge were arranged for the men having to wait some time. All this helped to calm and amuse men living on their nerves in anticipation of a grim ordeal, a deep debt of gratitude is due to Mrs Gregson and her girls.

I remember spending several days at Audley End with a tall, dark Belgian W/T Operator named Edmond Courtin. Edmond became very attached to a girl called "Tommy", who worked in the kitchen, and he would spend hours peeling potatoes and plucking poultry for her.

He was successfully parachuted into central France, and for a long time his ebullient W/T messages would end with:- "Love to Tommy". I don't know whether "Tommy" ever knew this (I never heard her proper name) but perhaps she may read of it now.

My last sight of Edmond was when he was standing in the hatch of a Whitley bomber, shouting above the roar of the engines warming up: "Merde! Merde! I say sheet for good luck."

A less happy occasion was my very first visit to Audley End, which was later to end in tragedy for two very courageous men.

I was acting as Accompanying Officer to an Organiser named Cassart with his good-looking, fine young W/T Operator: Jean Verhaegen (please verify name and spelling of latter.)

Departure had to be postponed several times owing to weather conditions, but eventually a take-off was made from Newmarket Race Course (then used as our operational aerodrome for parachutists).

It was the duty of the Accompanying Officer to wait at the aerodrome until news was received that the "drop" had been successfully accomplished, and I waited through the long hours of a cheerless night without receiving news.

At about 4 a.m. the bomber returned, unsuccessful, and I took my two utterly weary men back to Audley End to sleep. I think that this sort of ordeal was far greater for the men than actual landing in Belgium. These two men were some of the most courageous that I ever encountered (and the standard of courage was high), and they showed no trace of emotion over their experiences, but the nerve strain was obviously so great that they slept without waking for more than 12 hours.

Eventually the drop was successfully made. I am not fully familiar with what happened

subsequently, but Cassart was betrayed and was taken by the Gestapo, I believe, when he was just about to meet Verhaegen.

Verhaegen managed to escape, and managed to reach England by a land escape route. He was previously a Corporal in the Belgian Army, but was now commissioned as second-lieutenant in the General List of the British Army, and was employed in the Training Sub-section of our Section Headquarters in Baker Street, where his experiences in the field were of the greatest possible value in giving advice to other future agents.

After I left S.O.E it seems that his wishes prevailed, for he was again sent to parachute into Belgium, but the final tragedy came over the dropping point, when his parachute became entangled in the tail plane of the bomber, and he was found dead on the plane's return to base.

Moments of crisis and feverish activity during Moon periods at Audley End bring to mind Colonel Barry, who was always unfailingly cheerful, patient, helpful and resourceful in difficult moments, also of Major Dodds-Parker and Major (Lord) Rae [Raey?], all of whom, as far as I can remember, belong to the Operations (MO.) Section.

These notes would be incomplete with a tribute to the young F.A.N.Y drivers, who drove us on our errands, always cheerfully and uncomplainingly, at all hours of the day and night. It needs a blithe spirit to wait in the cold at an aerodrome all night, and then drive a load of officers and agents back to quarters in the dead hours of the early morning - an hour or two of sleep, and then perhaps back to London on another job.

I forget the name of the girl who always delighted to take a narrow, hump-backed bridge near Audley End in "ton-up" style, the car making a neat four-point landing about 25 yards further on and one's tummy remaining at the point of take-off.

After this long digression I must now return to the development of the Belgian Section in London.

Not long after I joined the Section Mr. Dadson relinquished his post, and he was followed within a short time by Mr. Duff-Torrance. I did not know either of them very well, and I did not come into very close contact with them, as the junior member of the Section, but I found Mr. Dadson a very pleasant, easy, cheerful man to work for.

The command of the Section was now given to Major Claude Knight, and the Operations sub-section was placed for a short while in the hands of Captain Jocelyn Clarke, whilst the Training sub-section was taken over by Captain (later Lieut.Col.) Hardy Amies, posted to us from the training staff of the Special Training Schools at Beaulieu.

By this time my own work in connection with Cover Stories, Documents, Operational Clothing and Equipment etc was becoming increasingly onerous, and it was decided to provide me with a french-speaking Personal Assistant, to whom I could dictate my cover stories.

At the same time the need for an outside Cover Flat became increasingly pressing, since the use of rooms at Fitzmaurice Place (booked by telephone and sometimes not available) had become inadequate for the number of agents, Belgian representatives etc that we needed to interview

and confer with.

It was proposed that the Cover Flat (we found a small one in Edgware Road) should come under my responsibility, and that my P/A should combine Cover Story work with looking after the flat (receiving visitors, making appointments etc.).

I chose as my P/A the English wife of an officer, and I never lived to regret it, for she was just what I needed.

Madame Marie Koslowska (née Lee-Graham) was brought up in France (I am not certain that she was not partially of French ancestry) and some of my Belgian colleagues claimed that she spoke better and purer French than she did.

She had a flair for Cover Story work, and entered into it with enthusiasm. She was exceptionally good with our agents, looking after their welfare and comfort in every way, and they were all very fond of her. In addition she had great patience and skill in interrogation of returning agents (on living conditions etc in Belgium).

The continued development of the Belgian Section will be dealt with later in my notes.

4. THE RECRUITMENT OF BELGIAN SECTION AGENTS

There were two main sources of suitable men:-

- a) The Belgian Sureté (Renseignement), who were able to supply both military and civil personnel.

The differences and sometimes troubled relations between S.O.E and the Sureté are too widely known on both sides of the Channel to need any detailed mention by me. My contacts with the Sureté were comparatively rare and on a lower (technical) level than that concerning Policy. I met M. Le Page, and my relations with two members: Capitaine Idès Flor and M. Nicodème were mainly confined to Identity Cards and other Documents, and were always amicable within that sphere.

- b) The Deuxième Section (Résistance Armée) supplied us with military personnel, and relations were on quite a different footing: at one time exceptionally good, at all times passable.

In addition to the above we also trained agents for our opposite number in P.W.E. Whether these men were procured by us or by P.W.E, or by both, I cannot now remember.

The men were trained in propaganda work as well as undergoing our routine schools training, and briefing was carried out by P.W.E. This work called for a highly intelligent and educated type of man.

Inter-section conferences were held at Bush House, and I remember Mr. de Saumarez (? verify) and Captain Andrew Duncan in the P.W.E. organisation.

A further source of recruitment was suitable British Army Officers. These were men who had lived most of their lives in Belgium or France, who spoke the language perfectly and could adequately pass themselves off as being of one or other of these two nationalities. Sometimes they were of part Belgian or French parentage.

These men were used in the field exclusively for our own purposes, without any Belgian contact. The establishment and organisation of land line escape routes for our other agents was one such purpose.

The normal types of missions for which agents were required were:-

a) Organiser

The name is self-explanatory. A very intelligent, capable, responsible executive type of man was needed, who could act as leader of other agents, organise cells, and direct specific or general operations on orders from London.

b) W/T Operator

These were usually younger men with a technical bent, and they had to undergo long technical training. They either accompanied or joined Organisers in the field, for whom they maintained contact with London HQ.

This work conceded to be the most dangerous of all in the field,. Casualties were very high, and replacements took a long time to train.

In selecting W/T Operators to work with Organisers it was absolutely essential to choose men who liked, understood, and implicitly trusted each other.

The German D/F service was efficient and, until a method was found of transmitting messages in seconds instead of minutes, the risks of a working transmitter being located were great.

Some basic rules for Operators in the field were:-

- i) Stay in a different place to that in which the Transmitter is secreted,
- ii) Change both addresses frequently,
- iii) If possible, change the place of transmission every time.

The Operators were trained in their own code, and were allocated specific times and days of the week for "coming up".

c) Saboteurs

As mentioned previously, this work called for a particularly tough, unimaginative type

of man, acting on higher orders.

I believe that I am correct in saying that some elementary training in the use of explosives was given to all types of agents at our preliminary training school, but the intended saboteur later went on to a highly specialised sabotage training Station in Hertfordshire.

With explosives familiarity appeared to breed contempt, and fingers blown off by careless handling of detonators (highly sensitive fulminate of mercury) was not unknown, though I do not remember any more serious accidents. I was always awed by the casual way in which some saboteurs (and a few instructors too) would put a detonator into the mouth, to crimp with their teeth to the fuse, instead of using the crimping pliers. The mess in case of a mishap does not bear imagining.

I was told a second hand story of an instructing officer at the sabotage training Station (Station XII ??).

The instructor, whose name I was not told, was known to be a little casual about explosives. He entered the Lecture Room one morning, put an object on his desk, and said to his class: "Just a little gadget that I have fixed up - due to go off in 5 minutes." After a few minutes he became conscious of such a restless and inattentive air in the class that he at length said: "Is there anything the matter?" Attention was drawn to the "little gadget" on his desk, and he said: "Oh yes, better put it outside", and walked slowly to the window. Hardly had the object touched the grass of the lawn when there was a deafening explosion.

d) Couriers

The role of this type of agent was:-

- i) To carry instructions and/or large sums of money from London to agents in the field,
- ii) To do the same and to maintain liaison between various agents in the field,
- iii) To bring messages and reports back to London.

The Courier cannot be classified as any particular type of individual. He could be highly educated or a working peasant (see Delmaire in my later notes). In at least one other Country Section I believe that women were used very successfully, but not in our Section, possibly for lack of suitable material.

Possibly the main assets for a Courier are to be completely unobtrusive, to be "unlikely", to have a detailed knowledge of the terrain, and to have an innate skill and cunning in avoiding controls, crossing frontiers and inter-zonal border lines. A high standard of honesty was also needed, since sometimes very large sums of money were carried.

5. MISSIONS AND BRIEFING

No hard and fast rules can be quoted on this subject, but I give below what, from my observation, appeared to be the usual procedure.

It was usually decided what job a man was suitable for after he had left the preliminary school, but at that time it was impossible and premature to determine where he would fit into the organisation in the field.

Definite plans for the individual usually began to be formulated when he was at his last training school. The task was that of the Head of the Section in consultation with the officer in charge of our Operations sub-section. Latterly, however, it became more usual for the Head of the Section to call a conference of his officers, so that everybody could be put in the picture and know what was expected of them. A provisional "Moon Date" would then be also discussed for departure.

After this a series of interviews would be arranged with the agent, at school or in London, where the proposed mission would be disclosed to him and discussed with him.

Finally, all the pieces in the jig-saw would be put into place, and the officer of the Operations Section (in the early days only) would commit the outline of the mission to paper, in the form of definite instructions to the agent.

These would be fully discussed again with the agent, and he would be required to memorise them. After the very early days it was usual to micro-film the text of the mission, producing a positive about the size of the head of a pin. This could be easily secreted on the person, and could be read clearly with the aid of a microscope - a valuable aid to memory where a long and complicated mission was involved.

This is only a very brief note on this subject, as it did not really come into my sphere of activities. More detailed and accurate information could be obtained from Major Knight, and Majors (?) Dobson and Raemakers.

6. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE FIELD

I have already mentioned the use of W/T Transmitters and of Couriers to convey messages between S.O.E and agents in the field, but there is one more method of communication, which should be mentioned briefly.

This is the conveyance of instructions to agents by means of innocent messages put over the overseas broadcasts of the B.B.C.

The system was open, safe and simple. A message would be put out at a certain time on a certain day, which meant that a pre-arranged action should be taken. Such a message would be for example: "Jean embraces Grandmother, and sends kisses to little Marie on her birthday", and this could mean that a certain man should leave his job and return to London, or that a certain factory should now be sabotaged according to plan.

Another valuable use for this method was to prove the bona fide of an agent to other Belgians

with whom he wished to work.

Our agent would say to his distrustful contact: "To prove that I am genuine and not a Gestapo spy give me a sentence and I will have it broadcast on the B.B.C., so that you can hear it yourself."

A W/T Operator would then transmit to London: "Put out the following on B.B.C. 17.30 hours Thursday 18th"

The arrangement for using this service was that one telephoned a certain number at Bush House and gave the code name NAPOLEON BONAPARTE. The appropriate department was then contacted and the message given.

In an emergency I once had to follow this procedure on the telephone in my hotel bedroom. Afterwards, whenever I chanced to encounter the hotel switchboard girl, I always thought she cringed and looked nervously at the lunatic from Room 17, who telephoned to Napoleon.

7. TRAINING FOR THE BELGIAN SECTION

I realise that training as a whole in S.O.E is being dealt with expertly and detail by ex-members of the Training (M.) Section, but a few notes may be appropriate on training as it affected the Belgian Section in particular.

The training of an agent followed an established routine, similar to that of a school boy, starting in the Lower Third, and ending by specialisation in the VIth Form.

The following is a skeleton outline:-

- a) Party of trainees proceeds to Preliminary School, with the exception of a few V.I.P recruits,
- b) Same party, less a few eliminated as unsuitable, travels to the tough, para-military school in the Western Highlands,
- c) Short parachute training course at Ringway,
- d) Party breaks up for specialist training, and individuals go singly or in smaller parties to one of the following:
 - i) "Finishing School", Beaulieu (Organisers),
 - ii) W/T School, Grendon-under-Wood in the early days, later at Thame,
 - iii) Sabotage Course at Station XII in Herts (?? verify number).

After parachute training, and at intervals during the rest of training, the men would have breaks in London, when they would be lodged individually in one of a large number of security-covered hotels - the type of hotel being arranged to suit the background of the man.

The object of these breaks was two-fold, firstly to maintain morale by letting the man enjoy some recreation in the then not so bright lights of London, and secondly to enable the various departments of the Country Section to have easy access to him in the Cover Flat for all the jobs that had to be done for him, such as discussion of the mission, cover story, documents, tailor's fittings for operational clothes, and more mundane matters such as visits to the doctor and dentist.

The Special Training Schools

Our Section preliminary school was situated in a large, pleasant house near Guildford. The Commandant, Colonel Johnston (spelling?), was an officer of the older school, a charming and hospitable host, and something of a martinet. His school was run on most efficient lines with rigorous personal supervision. I remember that it was his habit before meals to go round the tables in the Officers and Other Ranks Messes to see for himself that the cloths were clean and tables properly laid. The food was excellent and appealed to the Belgians (I remember lavish helpings of strawberries and asparagus in season from well-stocked kitchen gardens). I felt that the school was a good introduction for the prospective agent, and I always enjoyed my own visits immensely.

In the preliminary school, and in most of the other schools, French language books (we were unable to obtain Flemish) were provided by the Belgian Section, and we endeavoured to keep up small libraries for the men. For this purpose Flight-Officer Marie Koslowska (known in the Section and to the men as Mrs. Cameron) would spend many hours in the second-hand department of Foyles. At Christmas time parcels of gifts were also sent to the men individually with the best wishes of the Section.

The preliminary school training was simple and not particularly secret, for the men at that stage knew little of what S.O.E was all about, and were not really considered in the organisation until they had finished the course. It was a time for testing and assessment of qualities, and unsuitable elements were eliminated and returned to outside life at the end of the course.

Our second school was in a delightful fishing lodge on the edge of Loch Morar. Here strenuous exercises were carried out in the picturesque and mountainous country, and much attention was paid to shooting and to the use of automatic weapons. The prime object of the course was to toughen the men up physically before they went to Ringway for the parachute training.

Other Country Sections used schools in houses at Arisaig and elsewhere (also Loch Ailort?).

I spent a happy week at the little Morar Hotel in 1941, and have revisited this part last May. It looks just the same. Fort William (40 miles) and the little fishing village of Mallaig were the only contacts with civilisation.

It was at Morar that I had a train held for me for the first and only time in my life. I was waiting to board the Glasgow train, and was having farewell drinks in the hotel with the training officers of the school. The Commandant said to someone: "We are not ready yet, go over to the Station and ask the Stationmaster to hold the train". This was done, and a message came back in due course that the train was waiting for me at the Station. I believe this might still happen in

the Western Highlands, but not in the British Railways England of today.

The Jumping School course near Ringway, Manchester, was a brief one and confined to learning the job. Most men disliked the night jump from a stationary balloon. We were always relieved and pleased when a course was safely over, for it often involved sprains and the occasional broken ankle, which could seriously hold up a man's further training and impair his fitness to go into the field.

I only once visited the Sabotage and Explosives Station, although I did an explosives (course) in another school myself, and the W/T School is too technical for me, so I will confine the rest of these notes to the "Finishing School" at Beaulieu.

The School consisted of a Headquarter House for the Training Section staff, a whole series of neighbouring houses for use by trainees of the various Country Sections according to availability, the whole in beautiful surrounding bordering on Beaulieu Abbey.

Colonel Woolrych was the Commandant when I first went there, and later Colonel Munn took over. Among the many officers I remember Majors Wedgewood and Forty, and Captain Burgess, who, I believe, died later.

We always asked for, and usually got, "The Vineyards" for our men. It was a pleasant house, and we particularly liked Captain Clarke¹, the House Commandant. I believe that in peace time he was (and probably is) on the Royal Staff at Sandringham. He was a quiet, relaxed man, with a twinkle in his eye and a ready sense of humour.

Clarke fed our men well and house them comfortably in quiet, peaceful country surroundings. He had the Game Keeper's deep knowledge of fieldcraft, and used to take us into the forest on exercises. I remember spending a sunny and enjoyable afternoon in the forest with him and our men, baking a chicken plastered in clay over a wood fire - we ate it afterwards with our bare hands, and how good it tasted!

It was the rule that the school staff came to our house to give the lectures, as they did to the other houses, so no man ever saw a man of another Country Section.

The course was most interesting and included instruction on how to organise cells etc in the field, the organisation of German Intelligence and Security Services, and many other subjects, which will be explained by people more qualified to do so than I am.

There were many varieties of mushrooms (we should call them toadstools in our insular way) in the New Forest, and some of our men with a knowledge of the edible varieties would go out to pick them for the Mess. I remember one such occasion when a delicious assortment of Cêpes, Morilles etc were gathered and cooked for our dinner. A little later André had a severe pain in the tummy; it turned out to be simple indigestion, but there were many serious and reflective faces in the Mess for the rest of the evening!

¹ Nobby Clarke

8. SOME BELGIAN AGENTS THAT I HAVE KNOWN

I have already mentioned the Organiser Cassart, and the W/T Operators Verhaegen and Courtin in my notes on the Despatching School.

Commandant Claser ("Mr. Rose") of the Légion Belge was in a different position, since he came to us from the field on his own, and was never trained by us.

I remember him as a short, bald man, stubborn, self-opinionated, and with a dictatorial air of "Either I get what I want or ...". Perhaps he had a right to be, since he had been in occupied Belgium and we had not.

My only contact with him was due to the fact that he wanted his appearance changed to some extent - a thing that we rarely attempted with our agents. We had certain alterations made to his teeth by a "safe" dentist, and he also insisted on being fitted with a toupée. For this we took him to a toupée-making specialist at Elstree Film Studios, the cover being that he was being prepared to take part in a film to be made by the Army Film Unit.

To get an idea of size Rose was first tried with a toupée belonging to a well-known actor (Max Miller, but I do not think that this should be published) and the actor himself came into the room while the work was in progress. I was anxious as Rose was a garrulous man but, as far as I can remember, I think he spoke little or no English, so that was a safeguard.

I must say that the camouflage did make a radical change in Rose's appearance. This was the only time that I ever saw a man off on a mission from a London railway terminal. Many of our Section officers turned out to bid him farewell at Paddington, when he left in a reserved First Class compartment with young Peter Ferry for Mount Batten airfield, en route for Gibraltar. The familiar everyday appearance of the crowded station gave an unreal atmosphere to the proceedings. Once or twice I was afraid that Rose might take off his toupee and hold it up for inspection by an admiring crowd, or that he might wave it from the window as the train pulled out.

Claser was caught (suspectedly betrayed) in circumstances unknown to me, and I am now led to understand that he died in a German Concentration Camp in 1945.

These notes would not be complete without a mention of Delmaire the Courier for, in my opinion, he was unique among agents.

It is difficult to describe him accurately after more than twenty years, and I have to rely on impressions remaining. He was generally referred to us as Gypsy, but I do not think that he was of Romany stock. Perhaps he was what gentry of the road in this country would call a didikai, or a mumper. Or, maybe he was the retarded son of peasant parents, who lived at home without employment.

It would be utterly impossible to learn from the man himself what he was, and there lay his very great value as an agent.

I remember Delmaire as a man in his early twenties, short, round-shouldered, and with wiry,

dark hair - eyes rather vacuous, and a nut-cracker jaw. His expression gave an impression of benign benevolence towards the world in general combined with humour and a rather fatuous smile.

His voice was rather raucous, and could be heard far off. His accent was thick enough to cut with a knife, and he was very talkative, with an endless flow of rather meaningless comment on everything around him and of babbling repartee. I often found it extremely difficult to know what he was talking about, and this was not only due to his accent.

His Belgian friends among the agents claimed that he was mad, and he appeared to cause them unceasing amusement. I do not think that he was by any means mad; at most I would have termed him a little "simple", with an underlying intelligence and cunning of his own sort, perhaps more of an instinct. I have never met another man like him in my life.

Delmaire was provided with a cover story to meet his circumstances, and it had to be very simple and short in detail. From the first it was apparent that he had no use for it. In any case he would be incapable of assuming a role foreign to him, not able to memorise his story, and too illiterate to give it much study. What he wanted to be was just himself, with a new name and Identity Card to match, and then he could cope with all comers.

In common with all other agents at that time he was given his final interrogation on his cover by that famous spy-catcher: Colonel Oreste Pinto.

Pinto questioned him for about half an hour, receiving abortive, rambling, meaningless answers at every point. At the end of that time he turned to me and said: "I can make absolutely nothing of this man, and I do not believe that the Gestapo could either. He is perfect for his work."

Before the departure of agents it was customary for an officer of our Section to treat them to a really good dinner in London. On this occasion I took Delmaire, Léon Maus, and another man to the Coquille Restaurant in St. Martin's Lane. I think that Delmaire would really have been more at home in a Transport Café on the Great North Road, but he was not one wit abashed by his unusual surroundings. He kept up an endless commentary on décor, the profusion of table cutlery, and the food, which kept us in fits of laughter. I was in civilian clothes, but I was a little worried at the close attention, which he drew to our table from the restaurant staff. I can only hope that they thought that I was entertaining a Circus Clown, and that might have fitted for he might well have been in place in the Ring.

Delmaire duly parachuted, and I understand that he carried out a number of valuable missions, carrying large sums of money to other agents in the field, and generally proving the ideal Courier.

My comments and description of Delmaire are merely intended to show what a strange manner of man he was, and are not meant in any sense to be derogatory. For I had nothing but admiration for a man who could perplex Colonel Pinto in the Interrogation Room, and could carry out his allotted tasks so well. I hope that he is alive and that he is still rambling benevolently about the roads of Belgium.

The names and missions of many agents have escaped my memory over the years, but I call to

mind two first class Organisers; André Wendelen, a clever young Brussels lawyer, who thought nothing of undergoing the rigorous training and taking up his mission with only one kidney, and Comte Philippe de Liedekerke (spelling?), an intelligent and capable young man. Both these men carried out missions and returned safely to England during my service with S.O.E.

9. METHODS OF DESPATCHING AGENTS (BELGIUM)

General considerations:

The geographical situation and size of Belgium presented special difficulties where the delivering of agents to their operational areas was concerned.

The Country is small and highly populated, thus presenting difficulties in finding isolated landing points for parachutists.

The coast line is short, and was highly defended by the enemy, which rendered landing from seacraft, such as was feasible in Scandinavian countries, out of the question.

The French Mediterranean coast, where such landings and subsequent infiltration were feasible, was a very long way indeed from Belgium, and a highly dangerous journey by land was subsequently involved.

There remained a second way, in addition to parachuting, of arriving actually in Belgium itself, namely by the landing of a small, specially suitable aircraft.

Thus, to sum up, the alternative methods were as follows:-

- a) To land in Belgium by parachute
 - b) To effect a landing in Belgium by aircraft
 - c) To land on the Mediterranean coast, infiltrate, and travel by land through France.
- a) Parachuting was the method used by the majority of agents, who were fit enough to do so.

Dropping points were decided and pin-pointed, sometimes on the agent's choice of ground, which he knew and near where he had a safe address for his first night whilst he found his bearings, and sometimes by arrangement with a Reception Committee of agents already in the field. Cylindrical containers, enclosing explosives, W/T Sets and other operational gear need, were usually dropped at the same time on separate parachutes. A special Packing Station was used by S.O.E (MS. Section) to prepare these containers. More often than not dropping points were arranged in heavily wooded country, and were very difficult for a pilot to locate without the lights put out by a reception committee. Mistakes occurred in the early days, and some men were dropped miles from their pin-points, having to rely on Captain Clarke's fieldcraft lessons and their own ingenuity (see Notes on Beaulieu) to arrive at the proper place.

I have already dealt generally with the Despatching School at Audley End in the early days. The following was the approximate operational drill:-

- (i) Agent has his last meal in England at school (evening).
 - (ii) Don civilian field clothes, and undergo security search, removal of all non-operational personal possessions, brushing out of pockets (to remove incriminating residues, such as English tobacco dust), handing over of Cover Story, verification of identity papers, checking of field equipment - all done by Country Section Accompanying Officer.
 - (iii) Agent with Accompanying Officer and Operations Section Officers leave school for aerodrome by car, in time to arrive about an hour before take-off.
 - (iv) Agent dons "striptease" over his clothes (pockets for chemical heating pads to keep him warm) and "crash bowler", receives small digging shovel.
 - (v) Agent introduced to R.A.F flying crew, and finally verifies dropping point on map with pilot.
 - (vi) Agent enters bomber (a Whitley in my day) and is settled comfortably in sleeping bag on the floor amidships, in care of the Despatcher (usually R.A.F N.C.O). TAKE OFF.
 - (vii) Half an hour before jumping Despatcher rouses agent to eat his sandwiches and drink hot coffee.
 - (viii) Five minutes before jumping pilot puts on interior red jumping warning light. Despatcher fixes parachute to static line, and opens round floor hatch. Agent sits with his legs over the edge of the hatch.
 - (ix) Dropping point (allowing for wind force) - pilot puts on green light, and Despatcher taps agent on shoulder. Agent stretches himself, rigid and vertical in the centre of the hatch hole, and falls out, his parachute being opened by the static line in the aircraft. Usually for a second he remains stationary in the aircraft slip-stream, and then begins to drop.
 - (x) On landing the agent gathers up the ropes of his chute to prevent himself being dragged, removes his "striptease" and buries it with the chute, using the small shovel. Then he goes to locate any containers, which must be concealed at once, pending removal from the dropping point.
- b) The landing in Belgium by plane involved special training for the agent, and involved considerable risks for personnel and material.

It was normally only used for the returning of agents to England after a mission, and not more than two men could be carried at a time. An outward landing of agents in Belgium

would necessitate there already existing a specially trained agent in the field, with a knowledge of airstrip selection and preparation, to act as reception.

A reason for taking a man in would be that he was not physically fit for parachute jumping but was valuable and needed quickly. Usually V.I.P agents might be brought out, men carrying vital information or materials and needed quickly in London, since the land escape route could take months.

The plane used for these operations was the old Westland Lysander, originally designed for army co-operation. The reason for the choice was that the Lysander could land or take off with an exceptionally short airstrip. It was very slow and had a short fuel range, which had to be extended by the fitting of supplementary fuel tanks, which made it slower and heavier still.

The pilot was in a single-seater cockpit, and a rear cockpit could house two agents, sitting with their backs to the pilot and facing the tail.

The armament of the Lysander was originally an air-cooled Lewis Gun in the rear cockpit, enabling one to fire over the tail at a pursuer. No gun was fitted in the plane that I saw used for our agents (though presumably the agent would be at liberty to irritate a following enemy pilot by taking pot shots at him with his .32 automatic pistol!). So the plane was a slow and utterly unarmed prey against any fighter intervention.

The Lysander operation was based on the complete and well-rehearsed team work of the individual pilot and the agent, so it was essential that they should get to know and have complete confidence and trust in each other.

For this purpose it was usual for the selected pilot and the agent to stay together for a few days at one of the Special Training Schools, and I once attended such a gathering at S.T.S.43 (?) The Vineyards, Beaulieu.

In the mornings the pilot would give the agent informal lectures on the selection of suitable landing strips, length, width, natural obstacles to be avoided, position in regard to the prevailing wind, the siting and type of lights to be put out etc.

In the afternoons the party would go to a landing strip at Christchurch, where the Lysander was kept in the care of a mechanic, and the two men would practice many times. The pilot would take off alone, and the agent would lay out landing light signals in the approved manner. The pilot would land, and the agent would douse lights, climb into the plane, and take-off would be repeated. Speed, skill and agility were required of the agent, only gained by practice, and I believe that the time aimed at for the plane to be stationary on the ground was under one minute.

I asked the pilot in question once whether he had many "near shaves", and replied casually that he had once hit a telegraph line, and had returned to base with about 30 yards of wire wrapped round one of his wings.

- c) Landing on the Mediterranean coast and infiltration through France was not a method used very much by the Belgian Section, although I believe that it was used successfully and frequently by the French Section.

In fact I do not remember any agent except Commandant Claser using this route, and that with fatal results.

The usual arrangement was for an agent to be flown to Gibraltar and there shipped in a felucca (a small coastal trading sailing ship) or in a Naval craft.

The long land journey to Belgium was fraught with danger. Vichy France could be probably as dangerous as German-occupied territory, and there were two heavily guarded control lines to be crossed: the "Green Line" (we called it) which passed at its northerly point through Chalons-sur-Saône, and looped round, leaving a corridor from Northern France through to the Spanish Frontier, in the South-West, and, further up, the "Red Line" which near the northern French coast, followed roughly the line of the River Somme.

Escape routes southward followed roughly the same journey, but ended at the Spanish frontier (more about these in later notes).

The two main disadvantages of this method for the Belgian Agent were:

- i) A long and perilous journey in a strange land, and
- ii) A long delay in reaching the operational destination.

NOTE:

On occasions our agents were also parachuted into France, generally in cases where they were required to work there for us.

10. THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION OF S.O.E UP TO SEPT. 1943

My earliest days in S.O.E were spent under two successive civilian heads (CD), and then later (I cannot remember exactly when) Major-General Colin Mc V. Gubbins, Head of the M. (Military) Section became Head of the whole S.O.E organisation.

Prior to this, it had been my personal impression that the organisation had consisted of two well defined and rather separate wings: the Country Sections, under civil direction (above section level mostly) composed of a mixture of civilian and military personnel, and the Military (Training) Section.

With the advent of Major-General Gubbins it appeared to me that this gap was gradually closed, and that the whole organisation became more homogeneous and rather more military. Civilians tended (but not by any means in all cases) to disappear, or to re-appear in uniform, and officers of all sections later were encouraged to undergo special staff courses and, where physically fit, to go through parachute jumping training.

In fact it appeared that the organisation was being welded into a force which would be prepared, if required, to go into occupied territories at the same time as the leading allied forces. This may be an exaggeration, but it is as I viewed the situation.

Commencing, I think, in 1942, there was a big expansion and growth of the organisation summarised as follows:-

- a) A big increase in the size of the Country Sections, and of other sections already in existence. I shall deal with the growth of the Belgian Section in particular in later notes,
- b) The forming of new Sections, designed to give greater facilities for the preparation of agents for the field, and for the provision of supplies needed.

I believe that the existing Supplies (MS) Section was greatly extended. If I am correct (this should be checked) the original packing of containers was done in a small way at the Despatching School. Now a special Packing Station on its own was inaugurated for this purpose, the packing of containers being very highly specialised work.

Documents

In the early days the supply of false Identity Cards and other documents was obtained from our sister organisation "C" and there was a representative at our Baker Street HQ. to whom one applied.

The types of document available to us was extremely limited and not easily obtained. I always felt that "C" treated us as a rather young, inexperienced, careless and irresponsible relative, liable to waste and "blow" very valuable documents, which perhaps, in part, we were to start with. "C"'s liaison representative required, before agreeing to supply an Identity Card, to have a detailed knowledge of our agent and of his intended task, which I did not feel was suitable or good security.

Now, to satisfy an increasing demand and need, our own S.O.E Documents Section was formed, and Lieut. (later Major) Ince would come round to the individual Country Section to discuss its immediate and later needs for documents.

The role of the Documents Section was purely that of perfect reproduction of genuine papers. They had no knowledge or concern with the purposes of uses of the papers, and it was devolved on the Country Sections to supply genuine documents for reproduction.

For instance, in the case of Identity Cards, the Country Section would provide a pro-forma of the particulars to be put on the false card, and the Documents Section would inscribe these on the card, in handwriting exactly like that on the original, genuine card.

The Documents Section opened its own Station for this work, which included producing exact replicas of the paper used in the original, genuine documents. I unfortunately never had time to visit the Forgery Station, but I was told that it employed on its staff an "expert" guest from H.M. Prisons. If so, he did a very, very good job. I believe that it was possible, as a test, for a visiting officer to produce his cheque book, and to have a cheque made out to himself so perfectly that it would be honoured without question by his bank.

Operational clothes for agents

In the Belgian Section, the initial supply of clothes for use by agents in the field was very primitive. We begged or purchased through our various channels all the genuine Belgian suits obtainable from refugees arriving in this country. It was then a question of saying to the agent: "Take a look at the bundle in that corner, and see if there is anything that fits you." The suits were often very worn and disreputable, and I felt rather like a rag and bone man. Moreover, as time went on, the supply of clothes began to run out. The system was very unsuitable in any case, and was not calculated to inspire confidence from the prospective agent.

Now S.O.E formed a special section under a very clever tailor long skilled in the art of making continental clothes. The agent was measured, given a choice of material to his taste, and properly fitted with his own suit. The suit would bear the forged trade tape of a Bruxelles (or other town to fit his cover story) tailor. In addition, shirts, underclothes, ties, socks, and shoes of the correct type were all supplied. Cigarette cases, cigarettes, tobacco, and many other perquisites could also be supplied, and the agent was at liberty to make his own selection, according to his taste, in the Stores Room at our cover flat.

Camouflage

It was obviously necessary to make W/T Sets look as unlike sets as possible, for at times they would have to be carried about in the open by Operators. This work was started upon, and soon it was realised that many other operational materials could benefit from being camouflaged.

One day I received a visit from a Major Wills, who asked for suggestions with regard to any materials or objects that our Section would like camouflaged and invited me to inspect his already manufactured wares in a little "show room".

The Camouflage Section, thus started, was at first housed in modest atelier not far from the Albert Hall, but it was expanded rapidly, and when I left the former Major Wills (now Lieut Col) was running a small, full-scale factory on the North London outskirts.

This was a fascinating side of the work, and the greatest skill and ingenuity were shown to produce goods that would look right in the field.

Of a wide variety of goods I remember in particular most realistic lumps of coal, containing

explosives, wine barrels from which wine could be drawn and the level tested with a dip stick, and yet about 75% of the interior space was empty for storage of clandestine materials, hideous (to my taste) pottery statues and objets d'arts, containing all sorts of sabotage materials. The camouflage of W/T sets was perfected to a very fine art.

Escape Section

This Section was started by Major Humphries to provide for escape of the agents of West Europe Country Sections from the field to England.

Escape routes, lines and organisations take a very long time to build up, and are liable to constant set-backs through links becoming "blown". Moreover, there was a vast number of land lines in France and Belgium, run by the resistance movements in the countries, by their nationals in London, and by various branches of British Intelligence. The men operating these lines were apt to make contact with each other, so that lines became tangled and consequently much more liable to enemy infiltration.

During my time with S.O.E I do not remember that any of our Belgian agents had got out through the Escape Section, but they may have done so later. Shortly before I left our own Section was attempting to organise its own escape line through France, as we had some agents of British nationality, not committed to the Belgian cause, available for the purpose. I do not know what the eventual results were, but it would have been intensely useful to have a line available for the sole use of our men.

11. THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE BELGIAN SECTION, UP TO SEPTEMBER 1943

In earlier notes, I have traced the brief history of the Section up to the time when Major Claude Knight became Head and Captain (later Lieut. Colonel) Hardy Amies joined to take over our Training sub-section.

After this came a time of great expansion, though I may not be able to trace it step by step in chronological order.

Captain Jocelyn Clarke left the Section shortly after, and the Operations sub-section was then taken over by Captain (later, I believe, Lieut. Colonel) Ivor Dobson. I have already mentioned Dobson in notes on the Holding School at Newport Pagnell. Before the war, he was a shipping agent in Antwerp, had lived many years in Belgium, and had also gained considerable experience of our agents in training through his work as a Conducting Officer. He was also one of only three officers that we ever had in the Section who speak Flemish fluently, which was a great advantage. It was always my regret that I could not speak this language, and it was a minor handicap in my work, for the text of all agent's Cover Stories, whether they were Flemish or Walloon (French speaking) had to be supplied to them in French.

Operations were now being organised on a larger scale with many more agents, and it was felt that the tasks of keeping contact with men in the field, preparations of missions, and briefing was too much for one officer, so the situation was relieved by the formation of an Operational Planning sub-section given to a new arrival: Captain (later Major) Louis Raemakers (spelling?),

with a Personal Assistant: Miss Gilliat-Smith.

Major Knight's work now necessitated two junior Secretaries, in addition to his personal one, and some former Conducting Officers (Lieuts. Kidd, Ferry & Robinson?) were brought into Headquarters to assist Major Amies, for the work of making training arrangements with the Training (M.) Section of S.O.E, keeping other agents in storage or in London hotels on leave, and generally organising the lives of a large number of men was a heavy one.

My own sub-section was growing too, and I was now responsible with Flight-Officer Koslowska (see earlier notes - hereinafter referred to as Mrs Cameron) for Cover Stories, Documents, Clothes, the Cover Flat, and Intelligence on two subjects: firstly suitable industrial targets in Belgium, and secondly living conditions in Belgium.

I continued to take charge of Cover Stories and Documents personally, and a Mrs Dorothy Thompson (no relation) joined me as Personal Assistant, to work on Cover Stories under my instruction. Mrs Thompson died later, and was replaced by a W.A.A.F officer. In addition I acquired two secretaries for the cover work, which involved taking Shorthand dictation in French. I should mention my Senior Secretary, Miss Margaret Ridyard, for she taught both herself and the junior secretary to do French Shorthand - a formidable task, and she was quite indispensable to me.

This re-arrangement released Mrs Cameron for more valuable work, and she now had her own department under the control of my sub-section. A much larger Cover Flat in Queen's Gate was taken on, and in this was placed a permanent Secretary (a W.A.A.F A.C.W, later commissioned) who was under the control of Mrs Cameron, and who was there all the time. In this flat we had a Conference Room for receiving our Belgian colleagues and others, several interviewing rooms for agents, and locked store-rooms for agent's operational clothes and equipment.

In addition Mrs Cameron also had her own personal Secretary, for work on the intelligence files, and she herself did a great deal of valuable interrogation work on the subject of living conditions in Belgium with agents returning from the field.

It has no general relevancy in the history of the Belgian Section, but I would mention that Mrs Cameron's own brother: Louis Lee-Graham was recruited as an agent for the French Section. On his flight to the field the bomber crashed (or was shot down?) in Northern France, and for many despairing months there was no news of him, it being thought that he was lost. However, I believe that he eventually came up and returned to England, but Colonel Buckmaster would know more about that. During this time his sister worked coolly and efficiently under a great strain.

At this juncture a few notes on Cover Stories & Documents may not be amiss.

The Cover Story was needed for three reasons:-

- a) To provide the agent with false identity and a false background to replace his won,
- b) To provide a reasonable and innocent explanation of what he was doing before enemy

interrogation, and

- c) To increase the agent's morale with the thought that he can explain away what he was doing when stopped.

I should explain that it was never hoped that the Cover Story could stand up to prolonged interrogation and to deep investigation by the enemy security forces, and of course it was quite useless for a man actually caught in the act, but it was hoped that it would get a man out of tight corners in snap controls etc.

The Story gave a man a new name, his own date of birth usually, a new place of birth, new parents, a new upbringing (including schools) and dealt with other matters, such as military service (regiment etc) an account of what he had been doing since the occupation of Belgium, and of what he was doing when stopped.

All this, like Dr Goebbels' propaganda, had to have a modicum of confirmable facts and information to make it seem convincingly true, so that a listener would say: "Well that's certainly true, so the rest must be."

The first evidence of truth would be forged documents: Identity Card, Demobilisation Papers, German Ausweis permits, sometimes German-stamped railway worker's passes, and if possible a food card and bread coupons.

Food cards and bread coupons were a particular difficulty, as originals were very hard to obtain for copying. It was not that the agent vitally needed these in order to eat, for a man with plenty of money could eat well on the Black Market, but the absence of such papers when searched would be highly suspicious.

In addition we considered that most men would look more normal with a little love life and interest, so letters and photographs of girls were provided for men who wished it.

The photographs initially provided some difficulty, but one which was solved for us involuntarily by one of our trainees.

Unknown to us at the time, a man on leave in London from one of the schools contrived to insert an advertisement in a Quebec newspaper: "Lonely Belgian soldier wish to find girl pen friend."

The resulting replies were intercepted by our Security, and of course the man could not be allowed to have them. We were, consequently, put in possession of a vast assortment of letters most of which enclosed photographs of attractive young French Canadian girls, often signed on the back (and we had others signed ourselves!).

Of these many were suitable to provide fictitious girl friends for our men, and they could choose from a selection the girl that they preferred.

I do not suppose that many French Canadian girls will ever know how usefully they unwittingly contributed to the allied war effort in their youth!

The building of a Cover Story was a long and pains-taking process. It started after preliminary school, when the man would be interviewed and questioned on everything to do with his childhood and pre-war life. His own views, suggestions and objections would be sort (some had none, others many). And he would be asked about places that he knew, but where he had not actually lived, about schools and regiments that he had not been in but in which he had known people. He might have a friend at the Ecole ----, and might have heard from him the name of the Headmaster. The Cover Story could then relate: "I was at the Ecole ---- from ---- to ----. I remember that the Headmaster was M. Fossard etc. etc.

In cases where a man could supply no useful colour information of his won we were usually able to do so. For instance we knew the whereabouts of many regiments during the last days of 1940, where they were demobilised etc. If it suited a man's story to say that he had stayed in say Lille or Lyon, we could supply town plans, photographs, and general information, which he could memorise.

Periodical interviews were held with the man, at schools or in the London Cover Flat, until the Story was moulded into shape and completed.

The finished Cover Story text was normally in French, and was related in the first person as to an interrogator.

"I am Jean Marie Dufour, born at Tourcoing on the ----19--, son of ----, who was a ---- (the parents were usually stated to be dead). I had two elder sisters named ---- & ----. I was educated at ---- and ----. I did my military service in the ----" and so on.

A copy of the text was given to the agent, and it was his to study and memorise until his departure. Sometimes he might bring up new suggestions and objections, and then the story would be modified or completely re-written.

The final stage was the Cover Story Interrogation, in which the interrogator acted as a member of the Gestapo. In the early days of the Section Major Knight brilliantly managed to obtain the unofficial and voluntary services of Colonel Oreste Pinto to interrogate our men, and this was carried out either at M.I.5 Interrogating Centre or in our Cover Flat, I myself being present as a silent witness, and a very nervous one too, for I always had the sensation of being interrogated myself.

Although Pinto (Mr Jackson to the men) was not of S.O.E, I cannot conclude a note on this subject without some allusion to him, for it was undoubtedly through his counsel and instruction that my Cover Stories ever developed from a feeble little tale to an intricate, technical subterfuge. At every interrogation that I attended I learnt something new, something which helped to eradicate weaknesses and to improve the Story of the next agent.

Pinto was a great believer in the technique of the "story within a story", which meant that, if the agent felt he was being too hard-pressed in interrogation, he would seemingly break down and confess to some smaller crime, such as Black Market activities, theft, smuggling etc, in order to divert attention. This system was used in most of my later Stories.

Pinto was a middle-aged man, with greying hair and a sallow complexion -I never thought he looked too well. I lunched with him several times, and he was a pleasant companion and very interesting.

I believe that Pinto was himself an agent in the First World War, so he had seen both sides of the picture before he became what General Eisenhower is alleged to have described as "The world's greatest spy-catcher" (a description with which I heartily concur).

I think that his qualities as a Security Officer were derived from:

1. An innate instinct and intuition for spotting what was suspicious and untrue,
2. A deep knowledge of the agent's "trade", based on personal experience, and
3. An extraordinarily detailed knowledge of the lay-out of most of the larger towns in Europe, down to small streets and hotels.

In the interrogation room he was quite terrifying, as he sat with the Cover Story text before him and shot out his questions.

The first thing that he usually did was to make the agent turn out all his pockets, then he would examine the contents and the pocket linings minutely.

Then he would ask the man if he spoke English, which the man would usually deny. A few minutes later he might suddenly scream at the man in English: "Get me that ash tray from the side table", and woe betide the man who did so.

I could usually tell when Pinto had put his finger on a weak spot in the story: he would slow down, speaking rather softly and reflectively. Then he would leave the matter, and I would instinctively pray that he had accepted it. A little later he would come back to the point for another little probe, and again leave it. By this time I would know that we were in trouble, although the agent might be unaware of it. He would return to the weakness a third time, and ask the man a question with an air of mocking surprise. Finally he would look at the discomfited man for 20 or 30 seconds, and then he would lean back in his chair and emit the most ghastly, mirthless laugh of amused incredulity.

Some agents, who had not done too well, were upset and disconsolate by the end of the grilling, and then Pinto would show his kindly side. He would tell the man that he had done quite well and that he thought he would be perfectly all right in the field, but that there were a few weaknesses which must be rectified He would then expound the weaknesses to us both and give his advice as to how they should be remedied, and the agent would leave encouraged and relieved. In very bad cases he would give a second interrogation to the man a week or so later.

Later, Pinto left the British Service and entered the Dutch Service, after which we were no longer permitted to avail ourselves of his help.

S.O.E then started its own Interrogation Section; the officers were most pleasant and helpful, but they could not have the flair or the experience that Pinto had, and I missed him badly.

I have already dealt with the subject of operational clothes, and there is nothing to add here.

There remains the question of the small personal equipment which the agent carried. In some cases he would be asked in advance whether he would like certain items, and choices varied.

A day or two before his departure an appointment would be made with the man at the Cover Flat, and the equipment would be laid out for his inspection and approval, explanations being given of the uses of certain items.

The equipment might contain some or all of the following:-

- a) A personal weapon, usually a .32 automatic pistol, if possible of Belgian make: F.N. (Fabrique Nationale de Herstal),
- b) Benzedrine tablets for use temporarily in moments of emergency in strenuous operations
- c) Poison capsules, which could be fixed and held in the mouth, for personal destruction in desperate circumstances,
- d) Poison stabbing pens for silent liquidation of opponents,
- e) Micro-cameras,
- f) Miniature Radio Receiving Sets and
- g) Camouflaged transmitters for W/T Operators.

12. SOME BRIEF NOTES ON SECURITY

I hope that these notes will not have to be used, as they are the views of an outsider, and they could be far better written by a member of the Security Section, if one can be found.

I think that the Head of the Security Section in S.O.E was a Commander (?) Senter (verify), and I remember two of his staff: Major Peter Lee and Major Mott.

According to my own ideas the main security angles were:-

- a) S.O.E London Headquarters and the staff
- b) Agents in London, and
- c) The Special Training Schools and Stations.

As previously mentioned, 64 Baker Street was a fairly open address, trading under the advertised name of Inter-Services Research Bureau. Among the remaining houses were Norgeby House, Michael House (the normal Head Office of Marks & Spencer), Dorset Court

(early Headquarters of the Training Section) and, after my time, Montague Mansions (entered by a first floor corridor from Norgeby). All these were closed houses, and correspondence would never be addressed to them but through the cover addresses.

Agents were not allowed to know of these houses, and were received always at the Cover Flat of the Country Section, though I did once walk out of Norgeby House straight into the arms of two of our men, who were walking up Baker Street, but they would not necessarily know that I was not merely visiting the house.

All S.O.E officers entering Norgeby House had to show a special pass every time - it didn't matter if one had only been out of the building for 10 minutes and was well known to the Guard. Visitors without passes would be kept in the Hall until the officer that they wished to see had been contacted and had given approval.

Visitors were usually members of other branches of the Intelligence Services and, later, some of the closer members of the Allied Services.

Telephones are perhaps one of the greatest risks - there were "red" and "black" lines available for outside calls, the caller being warned by the Operator if he was on an open line before he started to speak. A scrambler line was also available. The Country Sections could only speak to the Training Schools on open lines, which made conversation extremely difficult. Calls were only made very occasionally, however, generally to speak to Conducting Officers, and a type of cross-talk grew up among Section officers, which would have been virtually impossible for an outsider to decipher.

When offices were vacated in the evenings it was a serious security offence to leave any written matter not under lock and key in the steel cabinets provided, and all keys had to be returned to a central office. For instance the leaving out of used blotting paper would get the offender into serious trouble.

At Norgeby one officer was on duty all night (one's turn came round about every two months on the roster) with one civilian Night Duty Officer. The latter were elderly, retired men, who did a week's tour of duty at a time.

Apart from taking messages and supervising the troops on Air Raid Precautions, it was the duty of the Night Duty Officers to visit and search every room in the five floors of Norgeby House in the course of the evenings.

Each officer, accompanied by a Guard with a waste paper collection sack, would scan the room, test the locks on the cupboards, and pull open every desk drawer for inspection. Any incriminating evidence would be removed.

The waste paper sacks were locked up for the night, and taken next morning to a collecting centre, from which the paper was removed elsewhere to be pulverised.

All in all, I think that the security of the houses was good, and I never heard any S.O.E parallel with the story of the London taxi driver who was asked by a fare to take him to ---- Club in St James. He scratched his head for a moment, repeating: "The ---- Club? The ---- Club? Oh, of

course, I know: opposite MI5." I have no evidence of the veracity of this story, and it was probably made up.

I only know of one breach of security by one of our Section officers, and this was a junior officer in charge of an Agent in London who indulged in loose talk. I believe that he was court-martialled and very severely punished. Oddly enough the informants in the case were alleged to be two ladies of easy virtue in a pub. A sense of duty lies in strange places.

The security supervision of the large number of agents in London, on leave from the schools and for Country Section interviews presented a much more difficult problem.

As I mentioned in my earlier notes, the numerous hotels used by agents were covered, and I believe (although I am not certain) such that it was customary to post a Field Security N.C.O. in most hotels.

It was not possible, however, to control the men when they were out and about in the streets, restaurants, pubs etc. Careless talk in these places would usually come to the ears of the men of the ordinary, outside London District Field Security Sections, of which there were three, and in 1941 certain rumblings did, I believe, reach the London District Security Office about the behaviour of a few men, not, to my knowledge, belonging to the Belgian Section.

The security arrangements at the Special Training Schools and Stations must have been an easier matter, for the situations were usually isolated and the trainees had little or no contact with the outside world, except on recreational visits to neighbouring towns, when they were accompanied and closely watched by an F.S N.C.O.

The problem, therefore, was mostly one of security between agent and agent.

I believe that the normal cover of training schools vis-à-vis the local inhabitants was that of an Allied Commando Training unit, but this may have varied from school to school.

There is one security aspect: that of the discarded agents, men who were found unsuitable for the job, who were found too indiscreet, or who merely "turned sour" and did not themselves wish to carry on.

It was obviously impossible to return these straight to a Belgian army unit or to civilian life, as they knew too much for it to be safe and were very likely to brag about what they had been doing.

For such men it was sometimes necessary that they should remain isolated from the outside world for a time, until the knowledge that they had was too out-of-date to be considered of value to the enemy and until other agents, with whom they had associated in the schools, had been gone sufficiently long on their missions.

For these purposes there existed an institution known to us as the "Cooler". Fortunately very few of our men ever had to be sent to the "Cooler" and I know little about it, never having visited it and not knowing its whereabouts.

Being sent to the "Cooler" was not itself a punishment but merely a security measure, and I always understood that it was an occupational school where men could pass the time until it was considered safe to sent them back to the outside world.

13. CONCLUSION

I believe that it was in August 1943 that Major Claude Knight finally relinquished the command of the Belgian Country Section, in which he had been since the very early days of S.O.2, and Major Hardy Amies took over as Head.

I followed a little later, in September, leaving my sub-section in capable hands and running on oiled wheels. There was a tentative suggestion that I should take on the combined Cover Story work of the Belgian and Dutch Sections, but I was very dubious about this, as I did not speak Dutch and had absolutely no knowledge of the country and its problems, and I did not feel that it would be fair to their men.

The change to an "open" job in Italy (via North Africa) was in a way something of a relief, for living a secret life separates one from one's outside friends (there is so much that cannot be discussed in life) and becomes rather oppressive after a long time. At times I often only felt completely at ease among the members of my own Section, with whom I could talk freely.

Nevertheless, if I had my time over again, I would undoubtedly wish to join S.O.E as before. It was undoubtedly the most interesting experience of my life at the time, and I approached it with utmost enthusiasm, in fact I lived for nothing else.

I have heard people refer to S.O.E as "The Racket" and, derisively, "Cloak and Dagger", but to me it was nothing of the sort; it was sincere and enthusiastic effort by a band of men, many with little or no previous experience of this type of work, to build up a worth-while, if unusual part of the Allied war effort.

Often we had to grope our way and to profit only by experience, and the Belgian agents were our men, with interests to be considered and put first, just as though they had been our own British soldiers commanded by us in a unit.

At the time when I left S.O.E it was not possible to assess fully the results of the work and building that we had done during the first two years. I believe that the principal results came later, and I look forward to hearing about them when the Story of S.O.E is published.

The work of the so-called "Secret Service" embodies little or none of the glamour attributed to it by fiction; it is often hard, relentless, pains-taking work leading frequently to utter frustration as organisations carefully built over the months are shattered, and to near heart-break when men that one has come to know and like meet a sordid and painful death, or languish in the Concentration Camp.

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