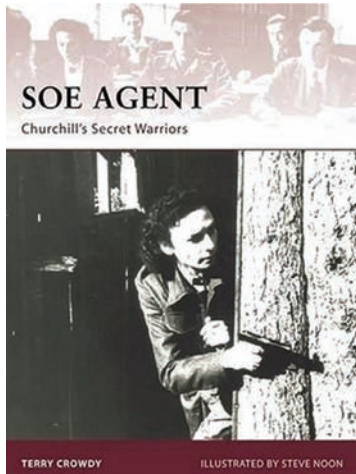


SOE AGENT: CHURCHILL'S SECRET WARRIORS

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The organization otherwise known as the Inter Services Research Bureau (ISRB) located at 64 Baker Street in London was the base of one of the most secretive organizations of the Second World War. As a creation of the unlikely relationship between right-wing Prime Minister Winston Churchill and left-wing Minister of Economic Warfare Hugh Dalton, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) emerged as a successful tool of resistance against the German occupation of Europe. Tasked by Churchill to “set Europe ablaze,” the SOE facilitated resistance elements against Nazi occupation.

In a brief, yet detailed profile of the SOE, Terry Crowdy presents an historical account of the recruitment, training, deployment, and effectiveness of SOE agents during the Second World War. This account traces the creation, development, and evolution of the SOE, outlining the organizational structure, directorates and sections of specialization, such as intelligence, signals, finance, and supplies. In a catalogue of notable successes (and failures), Crowdy identifies the key tasks of the SOE agent, namely the infiltration and exfiltration of agents behind enemy lines, training and supplying resistance movements against German occupation, establishing contact between the resistance groups and Allied High Command, and undertaking the assassination of high profile targets. The SOE training program was based upon pre-war manuals on guerrilla warfare and partisan leadership to train agents in the specifics of combat and paramilitary activities, demolitions, airborne missions, clandestine living, resistance to interrogation, propaganda, secret communications and code work, and industrial sabotage. This discussion documents the operational relationships which made the SOE effective, such as coordination with the Royal Air Force (RAF) to provide supply drops to resistance elements, parachuting agents into occupied territory, and identifying targets for destruction. Multinational collaborative efforts were demonstrated in Jedburgh teams, comprised of the SOE, operatives from the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and from Charles de Gaulle's Military Intelligence (MI) agency. However, complications in SOE's interagency relations were also noted, including the rivalry between the SOE and the Secret Intelligence Service known as MI6, and issues between the RAF and SOE concerning the precision of targets. Contrary to conventional thought, although SOE missions were risky, operatives had a better chance of survival than those in Bomber Command. Estimated at a 50% chance of survival, Crowdy states that the actual survival rate was closer to 75%.

The contents of this text are organized into topics and sub-topics, beginning with a discussion on the role and creation of SOE, followed by a discussion on agent selection and training, including special missions and weapons employed in special operations. Brief summaries elaborate upon specific details of interest, such as certain combat training methods, the assassination of Heydrich, and profiles of special operatives (such as a feature on female Agent Pearl Witherington). In addition, Crowdy provides a chronology of significant events and operations in Europe from 1938 to 1946. The text is augmented with photographs of exercises, weapons, and archive letters, with explanatory notes. Watercolour illustrations attributed to professional historian artist Steve Noon depict special activities of SOE discussed in the text. Supplementary appendices appear in the back,

which detail the specifics of SOE F Section Circuits in France, 1941-44, and Women Agents Sent to France, 1941-45. Following these is a list of reference material on the SOE and a subject index.

The references demonstrate a well-researched effort, documenting works by specialists in the field, such as Michael Richard Daniel Foot, expert in military intelligence and covert operations, and author of several monographs on the SOE; and Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, former leader of the French section of the SOE. Other references include public records from the British National Archives and singular works on SOE operational history by other military historians. Any biases in this work are undetermined as this account is relatively based upon archival and historical research. However, the discussion is not footnoted, so it is difficult to determine where certain details originate to check for validity.

The author Terry Crowdy is a British military historian whose sparse academic background is offset by numerous well-researched publications on French military history, resistance and revolutionary warfare, and topics of espionage under Osprey's Warrior and Men-at-Arms series. Crowdy's other Osprey publications document Second World War deceptions, such as: *Deceiving Hitler: Double-cross and Deception in World War II* (2008); espionage history, *The Enemy Within: A History of Spies, Spymasters and Espionage* (2008, 2006); and military screw-ups, *Military Misdemeanours: Corruption, Incompetence, Lust and Downright Stupidity: True Tales of Military Mischief* (2007). In addition to an impressive publications record, Crowdy has experience working on the Fort Amherst restoration project, which demonstrably enriched his research interest and background in Napoleonic Wars and the French Revolution.

This book is a useful resource for anyone interested in expanding their knowledge and study of guerrilla warfare and secret operations of the Second World War, and is suitable material for the general public and academics alike. In particular, this text documents a number of the great efforts and sacrifices undertaken by volunteer special operators in a time of great crisis.