

## OSS



On 11 July 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Coordinator of Information (COI). Its mission was to collect, analyze, and disseminate foreign intelligence, psychological warfare, propaganda, sabotage, advise and assist in the formation, equipping, training, and employment of guerrilla groups.

In June 1942, COI was disbanded. Responsibility for overt propaganda was assigned to the newly created Office of War Information (OWI), which also took control of the COI-created radio broadcast 'Voice of America.' Covert activities were assigned to the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS), an agency placed under the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Prior to the formation of the OSS, the various departments of the executive branch, including the State, Treasury, Navy, and War Departments conducted American intelligence activities on an *ad hoc* basis, with no overall direction, coordination, or control. The US Army and US Navy had separate code-breaking departments: Signal Intelligence Service and OP-20-G. (A previous code-breaking operation of the State Department, the MI-8, run by Herbert Yardley, had been shut down in 1929 by Secretary of State Henry Stimson, deeming it an inappropriate function for the diplomatic arm, because "gentlemen don't read each other's mail") The FBI was responsible for domestic security and anti-espionage operations.

For the duration of World War II, the Office of Strategic Services was conducting multiple activities and missions, including collecting intelligence by spying, performing acts of sabotage, waging propaganda war, organizing and coordinating anti-Nazi resistance groups in Europe, and providing military training for anti-Japanese guerrilla movements in Asia, among other things. At the height of its influence during World War II, the OSS employed almost 24,000 people.

From 1943–1945, the OSS played a major role in training Kuomintang troops in China and Burma, and recruited Kachin and other indigenous irregular forces for sabotage as well as guides for Allied forces in Burma fighting the Japanese Army. Among other activities, the OSS helped arm, train, and supply resistance movements in areas occupied by the Axis powers during World War II, including Mao Zedong's Red Army in China (known as the Dixie Mission) and the Viet Minh in French Indochina. OSS officer Archimedes Patti played a central role in OSS operations in French Indochina and met frequently with Ho Chi Minh in 1945.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the Special Operations community benefited from OSS. Colonel Aaron Bank, a former Jedburgh, formed the U.S. Army Special Forces in 1952. Bank recruited WWII combat veterans of airborne units, the First Special Service Force, and the OSS, for Special Forces

### **Special Operations:**

Set up as the American equivalent to the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Special Operations (SO) branch was to "effect physical subversion of the enemy," in three distinct phases: infiltration and preparation, sabotage and subversion, and direct support to guerrilla, resistance, or commando units.

The U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) also claims an OSS lineage. Donovan's special operations teams, for example, supplied partisans with weapons to fight the Nazis in Yugoslavia. His Detachment 101 organized guerrilla attacks against Japanese military targets in Burma

### **Operational Groups:**

The multi-faceted mission of the Operational Groups was to organize, train, and equip local resistance organizations, and to conduct 'hit and run' missions against enemy-controlled roads, railways, and strong points, or to prevent their destruction by retreating enemy forces.

Unlike OSS Special Operations (SO) teams, the Operational Groups (OGs) always operated in military uniform. They were trained in infantry tactics, guerilla warfare, foreign weapons, demolition, parachuting, and had attached medical

personnel. A country-specific OG had four officers and thirty enlisted men. But in practice, sections sent into the field were often half that size.

The OSS also fielded more than a thousand highly trained, foreign language-speaking paratroopers, skilled in sabotage and small-arms tactics, who were used in small groups to harass the enemy. These Operational Group commandos, called OG's, fought behind the lines in France and Italy

#### Jedburghs:



The unofficial Special Force wing was worn by the Jedburghs. This insignia was also worn by some Operational Group (OG) Teams in France.

The mission of the Jedburgh teams was to supplement existing SO/SOE 'circuits,' to help organize and arm the resistance, arrange supply drops, procure intelligence, provide liaison between the Allies and the Resistance, and to take part in sabotage operations. Project Jedburgh was a joint Allied program, with the OSS Special Operations (SO) branch, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the French *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA) involved. Eighty three American, 90 British, 103 French, 5 Belgian, and 5 Dutch personnel were extensively trained in paramilitary techniques for Jedburgh missions. Ninety-three Jedburgh teams parachuted into France and eight went into The Netherlands. A model team consisted of one French, one British, and one American serviceman. Every team had at least one officer and a radioman, but team sizes varied from two to four men

The Jedburgh with the closest connection to Army Special Forces was Colonel Aaron Bank, first Director of Special Forces (SF) and Commander of the first operational SF group, the 10th SFG. Many of the tactics and techniques used by Jedburgh teams were adopted for training early Special Forces in the 1950s.

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Colonel Aaron Bank, a former Jedburgh, formed the U.S. Army 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne) in June 1952. Bank recruited WWII combat veterans of airborne units, the First Special Service Force, and the OSS, for Special Forces



Jedburgh teams suit up in England prior to boarding a 'Carpetbagger' B-24 Liberator drop aircraft, August 1944

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So as not to alert the Germans to the exact invasion date, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, did not permit Jedburgh teams to parachute into occupied-France until the night of 5/6 June 1944. For the next three months thereafter, Jedburgh teams supported attacks on enemy lines of communication and reduced the destruction of key infrastructure by the retreating Germans. Their actions, like those of the OSS Operational Groups (OG), forced the Germans to divert significant military assets away from major battlefronts. As Allied forces overran the Jedburgh areas of operations, their missions were terminated.

Like many OSS veterans, several former Jedburghs had successful post-war careers. William E. Colby, who also commanded the Norwegian OG, served as the CIA Director from 1973-1975. Major General John K. Singlaub led the Studies and Observation Group (SOG) in Vietnam from 1966-1968. The Jedburgh with the closest connection to Army Special Forces was Colonel Aaron Bank, first Director of Special Forces (SF) and Commander of the first operational SF group, the 10th SFG. Many of the tactics and techniques used by Jedburgh teams were adopted for training early Special Forces in the 1950s.