## "Glorious Amateurs" at War

## Measuring the Effectiveness and Performance of the Office of Strategic Services

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erman antiaircraft shells eviscerated the fuselage of Capt. Stephen Vinciguerra's glider as it descended over Germany on 24 March 1945, the D-day for Operation Varsity, the largest airborne operation of World War II. Vinciguerra was atypical of company-grade officers in the U.S. Army. A special operator in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Vinciguerra led a sixteen-man OSS detachment tasked to support the Allied operation with intelligence collection and covert action. Two of Vinciguerra's subordinates, Helmut Steltermann and Robert Staub, were inside the tattered glider rapidly descending onto German soil. The two operatives wore German uniforms for when they landed. Their mission was to drive a captured Kubelwagen off the glider into the thick of the enemy rear area to gather information, sow chaos, and create mayhem.1

Despite the damage to the glider, the OSS team members got on the ground still breathing. However, their mission did not get off the ground. The anti-aircraft fire ruined the Kubelwagen and wounded Vinciguerra and Steltermann. German machine gun fire peppered the glider as it crash-landed, damaging men and material alike, and further exacerbating the mission's problematic start. The OSS operatives themselves barely cleared the landing zone under

direct German fire before finding cover and staying put, too wounded to continue. Their mission to infiltrate German lines, collect intelligence, and perform some light sabotage was a failure.<sup>2</sup> Despite significant investments in training and high hopes for success, Vinciguerra's OSS team failed. Even had they not suffered casualties in their glider landing, the OSS's relatively small team would have struggled to provide useful tactical intelligence in a fast-moving, large-scale airborne operation. The team's attempted theatrics and subterfuge were emblematic of an even more critical indictment; it was militarily ineffective.

The tribulations of Vinciguerra's team during Varsity date back to 13 June 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the first true, stand-alone intelligence organization in the history of the United States. With the stroke of a pen to a military order, Roosevelt created the OSS and placed it under the jurisdiction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). He gave the OSS two distinct duties. The first was to "collect and analyze such strategic information as may be required" by the JCS, and the second was to "plan and operate such special services" the chiefs required. The final part of Roosevelt's order appointed William J. Donovan as OSS director. Donovan was a decorated World War I veteran and millionaire Wall Street lawyer; and



Maj. Gen. William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, a World War I Medal of Honor recipient and prominent lawyer, was selected by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to head the office that eventually became the Office of Strategic Services in charge of strategic intelligence collection and irregular warfare activities. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office)

since 1941, he headed the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), an early, small intelligence and propaganda agency that worked directly for Roosevelt.<sup>4</sup> Over the next three years, Donovan built the OSS to be a "peculiarly complex and many-sided organization" with dozens of branches, thousands of employees, and worldwide operations, all directed toward fulfilling the duties directed by the president.<sup>5</sup> OSS activities during the Second World War varied widely in effectiveness and in their impact on the war effort.

Measuring the effectiveness of military or intelligence organizations is challenging. There is no universal definition of effectiveness; thus, most scholars who analyze it usually conjure their own definition. However, modern military doctrine from the U.S. Department of Defense has two suitable approaches for accomplishing this task: measures of performance and measures of effectiveness. Measures of performance are those indicators "used to measure a friendly action that is tied to measuring task accomplishment." These measures help personnel understand if they are performing actions

correctly, such as collecting clandestine intelligence or performing covert military action. Measures of effectiveness are those indicators "used to measure a current system state, with change indicated by comparing multiple observations over time." These measures assist personnel in assessing whether their actions are accomplishing a mission or having the necessary impact, such as informing and influencing decision-makers or impeding an adversary's military operations. The framework of measures of performance and effectiveness is useful for assessing how well the OSS performed its assigned duties and whether those tasks impacted the war's outcome. Throughout World War II, the OSS proved to be highly competent when measured against its performance, successfully and skillfully accomplishing a wide array of tasks, from foreign intelligence collection to special operations. However, when measured against its effectiveness, only OSS's collection and analysis efforts had an appreciable effect on the war effort, while many of its special intelligence and

special operations activities, like Vinciguerra's mission, had minimal, if any, impact.

Though Roosevelt's June 1942 order established the OSS as new agency, Donovan drew upon the foundation he had built with the COI. Established in July 1941, the COI was Donovan's brainchild. He had conceived the organization while serving as Roosevelt's personal observer to the British war effort after the fall of France in 1940. In multiple trips to Western Europe and the Mediterranean in the latter half of 1940, Donovan observed that Nazi Germany had a marked advantage in its employment of the psychological and political elements of war. Additionally, Donovan's travels and communications back to Washington highlighted the growing problem the Roosevelt administration faced with information collection and intelligence management.8 In a concise, somewhat exaggerated memorandum written in June 1941, Donovan advocated for establishing a "central enemy intelligence organization," which would provide the president with "accurate and complete enemy intelligence reports

upon which military operational decisions could be based." Just over one month later, the COI was born on 11 July 1941.

In the eleven months as the head of the COI, Donovan built the shell for what would later become the OSS. Well before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into the war, Donovan laid the groundwork for an effective wartime intelligence agency. He created the Foreign Information Service to produce and disseminate propaganda into enemy-occupied territories. The COI's Research and Analysis Branch was tasked with collating and analyzing information from all sources, including other U.S. government agencies and military services. Donovan even created the Special Activities Division with the intention of establishing both a clandestine espionage service and a covert action detachment. The COI was a paper tiger, and Donovan spent much of this period wrangling with the armed services and other parts of government for personnel and funding, and to define authorities and limitations.<sup>10</sup> However, the COI's brief existence was not all bureaucratic maneuvering. Under Donovan's direction, the organization dispatched a small team to North Africa, which consolidated the efforts of operatives already in place by the military and State Department. With some assistance from Britain, the COI effectively demonstrated the utility of a coordinated intelligence effort, especially one operating in enemy or neutral territory.11 The COI's activities in North Africa became a proof of concept for the operations of its successor, the OSS.

Now under the authority of the JCS, the OSS expanded rapidly in the latter half of 1942, though not without further administrative quarreling. Donovan had grand ambitions for the OSS as a part-military, part-civilian organization with a wide-ranging mission set, from analysis to covert action, with operational reach throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia. 12 The JCS, including Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall, worried about overlap and inefficiency between the OSS and other elements of the military and civilian wartime apparatus. It was not until December that the two bodies finalized the intelligence organization's duties and functions. The JCS directive gave the OSS the functions of establishing a military program for psychological warfare and compiling all political, sociological, and economic information required for

military operations. The directive also gave the OSS specific duties ranging from the creation of strategic surveys to the conduct of espionage and sabotage. It emphasized that the OSS's efforts were to support "actual or planned military operations" and that OSS operations required the knowledge and approval of theater or area commanders.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately for Donovan's grand vision, in this round of bureaucratic maneuver, the JCS restricted the OSS from operating within the Western Hemisphere, and the Army and Navy effectively prevented the OSS from obtaining anything more than severely limited access to signals intelligence such as Magic or Ultra intercepts.14 Still, Donovan achieved his goal of creating an organization capable of fulfilling the duties originally ordered by Roosevelt the previous summer.

In early January 1942, the OSS received JCS approval for the organizational structure and functions that would serve it for remainder of the war, with only minor adjustments. This structure melded the OSS's assigned duties among a series of detachments and branches. At the top was Donovan as director with a full complement of staff functions, from security to inspector general, with several billets for liaisons and other special assistants. The OSS had three deputy directorships. The deputy director of services was responsible for the administrative management of the OSS, including supply, finance, communications, and medical services. The deputy director of intelligence services had responsibility over the Secret Intelligence (SI) and Research and Analysis (R&A) Branches. The SI Branch was responsible for espionage in enemy-occupied or controlled territories.

maintaining contact with underground resistance groups, and various other information collection activities. The R&A Branch was responsible for collecting, compiling, and analyzing information from all sources to prepare intelligence products "as may be required for military operations." Finally, the deputy director of psychological

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The Special Erection Party (SEP) for Operation Torch assembles and tests Supermarine Spitfire Mark Vs at North Front, Gibraltar, in July 1942. The SEP was established at Gibraltar to prepare aircraft crated in Britain and shipped by sea for the reinforcement of Malta. On 28 October 1942, an unexpected shipment of 116 Spitfires and thirteen Hawker Hurricanes arrived in preparation of the Allied landings in North Africa (Operation Torch), and a further shipment was received a few days later. Despite shortages of personnel, the SEP, assisted by soldiers of the Malta Brigade, assembled, test-flew, and cannon-tested all the aircraft in time for the commencement of the operation on 8 November. (Photo by Lt. G. W. Dallison via the Imperial War Museums)

warfare operations contained the Morale Operations (MO) and Special Operations (SO) Branches. The MO Branch was responsible for creating and disseminating secret "black" propaganda for subversive purposes in enemy-controlled territory. The SO Branch's mission involved organizing partisan groups, engaging in guerrilla warfare, and performing sabotage in enemy territory. The OSS also possessed its own Schools and Training Branch, which was responsible for all manner of instruction, and a Field Photographic Branch for producing motion and still pictures of "strategic and confidential subjects." Organizationally, the OSS had seemingly everything it required to fulfill its mission of collecting information and performing secret services at the behest of the JCS.

During the autumn of 1942, back-and-forth regarding functions and lines of authority, OSS operatives

conducted the first missions that served as indicators of the organization's effectiveness and performance. Much of the OSS mobilized to support Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942. OSS elements that conducted intelligence collection and production demonstrated strong measures of both effectiveness and performance. The R&A Branch produced comprehensive studies of the target areas for planning and operational use. Personnel from the Field Photographic unit embedded with the invasion forces. The clandestine radio network, in place since the days of the COI, transmitted secret intelligence directly to Allied Forces Headquarters at Gibraltar. 16 Though these efforts did not make or break the Torch operation, they demonstrated that OSS could support military operations with appropriate activities and do them well. Conversely, SO Branch operations to support the pro-Allied underground resistance movements in Morocco and Algeria failed miserably. OSS had planned to use these resistance fighters to seize strategic locations and capture Vichy, France, leaders before the Allied invasion. The resistance fighters acted too early and without the armaments promised by OSS operatives. They achieved nothing more than their own arrests.<sup>17</sup> These special operations were

both poorly conceived and poorly executed. Still, the OSS's overall effort was enough for Marshall to inform Donovan that the organization had "rendered invaluable service, particularly with reference to the North Africa Campaign." The OSS was in business and would remain so for the remainder of the war.

Over the next three years, the OSS conducted various operations and supported activities in every major theater of the war. The R&A Branch assembled a team of approximately nine hundred scholars from various disciplines including history, economics, political science, and geography. These analysts produced reports at such a prodigious rate they often failed to find willing customers to read them. The SI Branch grew into a full-fledged intelligence operation with officers and stations in every major foreign capital. The MO Branch created vast quantities of black propaganda, mostly

directed at Nazi Germany. Finally, the SO Branch had perhaps the most famous wartime experience, as it conducted operations behind enemy lines in both the European and Pacific theaters. In Europe, the SO Branch paired with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) to create the "Jedburgh" teams of specially trained operators who parachuted into German-occupied France to assist in the Allied invasion in 1944. In the Pacific, an OSS detachment in Burma assembled a guerrilla force of indigenous fighters numbering in the thousands and used them for intelligence collection and sabotage against the Japanese occupiers.<sup>19</sup> A full analysis of every major OSS operation or activity regarding their effectiveness and performance is outside the scope of the article. However, key operations from each of the R&A, SI, and SO Branches demonstrate how well or not well OSS achieved the tasks Roosevelt and the JCS originally

assigned it.

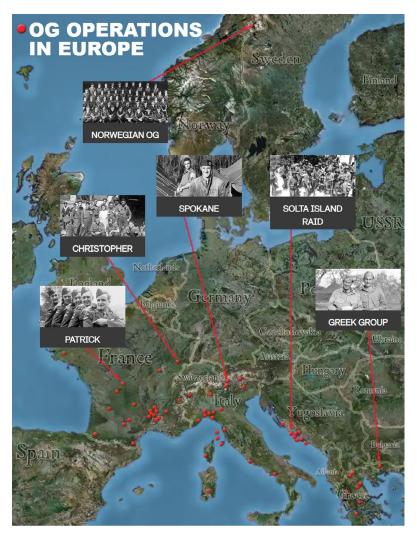
Throughout the Second World War, R&A teams produced thousands of reports and assessments on all manner of topics and themes. One of the most useful R&A detachments for assessing effectiveness and performance was the Enemy Objectives Unit (EOU), an "intrepid regiment of OSS economists" operating out of the United States embassy in London. Established in late 1942, the EOU was OSS's answer to the heated debate among the British and American air services over the proper and effective use of strategic bombing in support of the war effort. The EOU's raison d'être was to analyze all available economic intelligence and develop a rigorous science of air warfare. The EOU looked at the German economy holistically and developed a formula to ascertain the relative costs and benefits for bombing certain components of the Nazi war machine. Early EOU assessments informed the January 1943 Casablanca Directive that gave the British and American air forces strategic priorities for the combined bomber offensive (CBO).<sup>20</sup> However, EOU's greater intellectual contribution was yet to come.

The Casablanca Directive set German submarine production and its aircraft industry as the top CBO

## "SAUERKRAUT" MISSIONS PLAN EXECUTION Situation Operations Need for swiftness suggested use of small group of trusted German prisoners-of-war as agents to infiltrate lines. Subversive materials distributed and seen being read and pocketed by enemy soldiers, including SS men. Gen. Kesselring forced to deny authorship of "official" proclamations posted in his name. Intelligence brought back by agents aided in 8 mile advance of 5th Army, whose G2 suggested citation for conception of mission. Attempted assassination of Hitler provided unusual pshchological moment to attack morale of German Army, if appropriate propaganda could be circulated without delay. Objective To undermine the will-to-fight of enemy troops using subversive ma-terials based on new discourage-ment caused by discord among top Nazis. Implementation Operations making similar uses of prisoners-of-war are continuing. By passing agents directly through front lines to distribute freshly-conceived rumors, leaflets, fake orders and "official" proclamations as well as longer-ranged arousers of homesickness such as fake Ger-mar women's "Lonely Hearts Clubs". Personnel 3 Officers, 1 EM, 3 Civilians 10 German prisoners-of-war Printed materials from MO rear eche-ion, Rome, and captured German uni-forms, arms, and miscellaneous items. SECRET

Elaborate plans to produce subversive "black" propaganda like the "Sauerkraut" missions were the purview of Office of Strategic Services's (OSS) Morale Operations (MO) Branch in 1944. MO Branch was very successful at producing and distributing vast quantities of propaganda but with uncertain results and influence. (Photo courtesy of the OSS)

priorities. By early 1944, EOU analysts saw the potential in shifting strategic bombing toward German oil production. Though they were not the only Allied personnel to see Germany's oil vulnerability, these OSS economists applied their rigorous methodology to the problem, which gave the oil argument a significant boost among military leadership. The EOU calculations pinpointed the oil industry as the most lucrative target for disrupting German tactical and strategic operations in anticipation of the Allied invasion of Europe. Ultimately, the spring 1944 Allied bombings focused on German transportation in France and only temporarily attacked oil production facilities. The Allied air forces turned their attention to oil production in late spring with appreciable, though not war-ending results.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, in terms of measures of effectiveness and performance, the EOU and by extension, the R&A Branch, was successful. Applying the methodology of economics to the intelligence analysis of the German economy was the right task for the EOU to influence the war. Furthermore, these R&A scholars demonstrated their acumen by helping to identify critical components of the German industry, an indicator of successful performance. Though the EOU's contributions became entangled in the postwar



The Office of Strategic Services operational groups were small guerrilla units that conducted a variety of missions during World War II. They were trained in small unit infantry tactics, demolition, foreign weapons, parachuting, and guerrilla warfare and were tasked with organizing, training, and equipping local resistance groups for "hit-and-run" missions against enemy-controlled roads, railways, and strong points. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office)

debate over bombing efficacy, the detachment's efforts clearly impacted the war.

Like the rest of the OSS, the SI Branch grew exponentially during the war, both in size and production. While still under the COI structure, the SI Branch established stations and networks throughout the world. Its agents churned out reports at a prolific rate, from fifty total in May 1942 to more than five thousand reports per month by the war's end. Production of reports alone is not a suitable indicator of the SI Branch's overall effectiveness or performance. However, the activities of a single SI Branch station in Bern,

Switzerland, provide tremendous insight into the branch's performance. The OSS's Bern station began its operations after Donovan assigned Allen Dulles to the posting in November 1942. Its location within a neutral, landlocked country meant Bern station remained small until the August 1944 liberation of France opened an overland route to Switzerland. However, the relative isolation from the Allied war machine did not stop Dulles from building up a network of more than forty sources and building for himself a reputation among Bern's international community as an influential American with connections back in Washington. Some of Dulles's key sources were members of the German domestic opposition, and his reports back to Washington consistently described their intentions and activities, along with information as wide-ranging as Nazi secret weapons and Swiss war profiteering.<sup>23</sup>

In his station's reports over the last two years of the war, Dulles consistently advocated for the Allies to directly support the German domestic opposition. As early as August 1943, Dulles argued that Adolf Hitler could be overthrown if the Allies were willing to negotiate with a new, more moderate regime. Beginning in January 1944, Dulles started reporting the rumors that German resistance groups were planning to assassinate the Führer, and he continued along this

vein for months, stopping only just prior to the July 1944 assassination attempt. However, though Dulles generally reported accurately on the German political atmosphere, he consistently overestimated the intentions and capabilities of the resistance movement. Ordinarily, his reports contained no more depth, detail, or secret information than had they been written by a conventional diplomat. According to historian Max Hastings, "Dulles could have functioned just as effectively had he been US ambassador." More telling, Neal Peterson, the editor of Dulles's wartime papers, exclaimed, "One is hard-pressed to identify a



Members of Jedburgh Team Ronald (from left: Tech. Sgt. Elmer B. Esch, Lt. Shirley R. Trumps, Lt. Georges Deseilligny, and a fourth unidentified team member) prepare to jump into occupied France on 4 August 1944. Esch and Trumps were Americans, while Deseilligny was French. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office)

single example of a Dulles report in and of itself having a dire impact on a top-level policy decision."25 As indicators of the SI Branch's measures of performance and effectiveness, Dulles and the Bern station have a mixed legacy. His performance was satisfactory, if not brilliant, in that Dulles collected and reported on information from a variety of sources, even if few were truly the result of espionage. Conversely, there are few strong indicators of the effectiveness of Dulles's operation. His reports did not affect high-level policymaking, nor did they substantially influence or shape military operations. They likely informed assessments or surveys but did little to directly impact the war effort. They were heavy on intelligence production but with little meaningful influence. The case of Dulles demonstrates the OSS's problem with foreign intelligence collection. No matter how prolific the reporting, the types of information the SI Branch operatives collected was usually of dubious immediate or near-term value to the war effort. This struggle with effectiveness also manifested itself in the SI Branch's sister unit, which conducted special operations.

The SO Branch established a bevy of operational groups, units, and detachments to accomplish its mission of organizing guerrilla warfare and conducting operations behind enemy lines. The Jedburgh teams became the most famous after the war and are also the clearest case for measuring the SO Branch's effectiveness and performance. The Jedburgh teams were a combined operation of OSS, SOE, and the Free French forces. The three-man teams consisted of one OSS or SOE officer, one French officer, and one British or American enlisted radio operator. Their original mission was to parachute drop into France in the weeks prior to the Allied invasion of Europe in 1944 and, from

there, arm, train, and otherwise organize the French resistance.<sup>26</sup> The American members of the Jedburgh teams entered the OSS from across the U.S. Army and were, in the words of one historian, "a tough, gregarious, and often unruly collection of characters, including a few ex-paratroopers, prewar adventurers, and assorted intellectuals."27 Though rigorously trained and prepared, the first teams only dropped into France on 6 June 1944 to avoid revealing the Allied invasion plan to the Germans. This gave them little time to prepare the battlefield for conventional forces. Jedburgh teams continued to drop behind German lines in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands through September 1944. Larger OSS operational groups, like Vinciguerra's unit, eventually joined the smaller teams in enemy-occupied territory.

Throughout the summer of 1944, Jedburgh teams and operational groups entered enemy-occupied territory to link up with and fight alongside French partisans. In some places, such as the Brittany region of France, OSS operatives had tremendous success marshaling the French resistance to collect intelligence,

conduct ambushes, and capture key terrain in anticipation of the arrival of Allied conventional forces. However, many OSS operatives worked alongside resistance groups already highly organized and prepared, with little need for outside training or direction. The Jedburgh teams and operational groups were also unprepared to handle the fractious nature of politics in the French resistance, especially between the commu-

nist and noncommunist factions. Finally, the pace of the Allied advance meant many OSS operatives were behind enemy lines for mere days before conventional forces arrived—hardly enough time to establish and operate a robust guerrilla resistance.<sup>28</sup> Regarding its



The unofficial Special Force wing was worn by the Jedburghs. This insignia was also worn by some operational group teams in France. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office)

performance, the Jedburgh teams and the operational groups were moderately successful in France. They infiltrated behind German lines and coordinated with a variety of French partisan groups without undertaking serious casualties. However, they were only marginally effective in impacting the course of the war. The SO Branch activities did not alleviate the need for Allied conventional forces to conduct the hard fight out of the Norman hedgerows or through France and into the Low Countries. The Allies' lack of a comprehensive, integrated plan for the SO Branch employment all but ensured that the OSS operatives would only tangentially affect military operations, if at all.

These three case studies and the branches from which they derive provide only a small glimpse into the OSS's wartime operations. By the war's end, the OSS had approximately thirteen thousand employees, with 7,500 serving overseas. Its budget for fiscal year 1945 alone topped \$45 million.<sup>29</sup> Other OSS branches conducted important work, such as X-2 Branch's efforts in security and counterintelligence or the Research and Development Division's development of a long list of nifty gadgets and specialized weaponry.<sup>30</sup> However, it was the R&A, SI, and SO Branches that conducted the activities directly related to the OSS's core functions and purpose. As shown in the case studies above, each branch demonstrated strong measures of performance. Whether it was the R&A Branch's analytical products,

the SI Branch's source networks, or the SO Branch's unconventional operations, OSS analysts, officers, and operatives accomplished the tasks assigned to them. The OSS's measurements of effectiveness, whether they achieved a meaningful impact on military operations or not, were less balanced. With the efforts of the EOU, the R&A Branch clearly demonstrated the ability to shape and influence operations at the strategic

level, fulfilling its original mission. The SI and SO Branches had a more uncertain and less tangible influence. As seen in the case of Dulles and the Bern station, though SI officers may have submitted thousands of well-intentioned and accurate reports, they made little

impact on high-level policymaking. The SO Branch's activities, particularly the Jedburgh teams, performed admirably in their unconventional role, but ultimately, their efforts had no major impact on the Allied campaign in Europe. In the end, like many other elements of the Allied war machine, the OSS contributed only a small part to the final victory.

In a 20 September 1945 executive order, President Harry S. Truman officially terminated the OSS. The order moved the R&A Branch to the Department of State and the rest to the Department of War, with the intention to eliminate any elements not required for peacetime intelligence activities.<sup>31</sup> The OSS thus ended as it had begun, with a presidential order. In its wartime existence, the OSS moved aggressively to fulfill the tasks originally assigned to it by Roosevelt in 1942 and fulfill Donovan's vision of an intelligence organization that supported military operations. OSS branches like R&A and SI collected and analyzed information from the tactical to the strategic levels of war. The SO Branch performed secret services in support of ongoing military operations. The OSS had strong measures of performance. From the analysts to the operators, OSS personnel accomplished a wide variety of challenging and diverse missions. However, the impact of those operations and the measures of effectiveness were less certain and less significant. While the R&A Branch built assessments that influenced and informed operations,

many of the activities of the SI and SO Branches only impacted the war effort marginally, if at all.

The successes and failures within the OSS's performance and effectiveness form a cautionary tale for intelligence organizations, special operations forces, and military leaders at all echelons. Donovan invested heavily in his organization's ability to collect information, produce intelligence, and conduct special operations. OSS personnel across the board were highly trained and competent. They could perform their assigned duties expertly. However, OSS leadership gave little thought about whether those duties and missions were effective and worth the time, resources, and effort to

attempt. Most of the OSS's most notable and specialized missions, like the Jedburgh teams, contributed little to the course of the war. In the future, the military and intelligence organizations of the United States will not have the luxury of deploying highly trained agents and operators on missions of little potential utility. Military and intelligence leaders will need to husband these precious resources and use them in such a manner as to achieve maximum effectiveness, not just performance. For Donovan, falling short of his goals did little to tarnish the OSS's legacy or to impact the growth of the intelligence discipline in the United States. This will not be the case in the future.

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