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Forgotten Voices of the Secret War

Roderick Bailey

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FORGOTTEN VOICES

FORGOTTEN VOICES OF THE SECRET WAR

AN INSIDE HISTORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE
IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

RODERICK BAILEY

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Author's Preface

The Imperial War Museum has long been concerned with preserving the records and memories of men and women with experience of recent war and conflict. *Forgotten Voices of the Secret War* draws on hundreds of hours of interviews in the museum's sound archive that tell of the exploits of the Special Operations Executive, a secret British organisation set up early in the Second World War to encourage subversion and carry out sabotage in enemyoccupied territory.

During its short, six-year existence, SOE helped channel vast amounts of arms and supplies to tens of thousands of resistance workers and guerrillas. It dispatched hundreds of its own agents, men and women, to provide training and encouragement, destroy key installations and harass enemy forces. In Europe, SOE was the principal Allied force engaged in stimulating and supporting resistance movements. By the end of the war, its reach was global and its deeds ranked among some of the most daring and dramatic carried out by Allied forces.

What follows is a narrative history of SOE told through personal testimonies: snapshots of life in SOE and of the cloak-and-dagger work in which agents engaged. With official permission, almost two hundred survivors tell their stories here, speaking freely about their experiences and bringing fresh perspectives to bear on this remarkable organisation. The popular image of SOE may remain

dominated by the efforts and sacrifices of its agents in occupied France, but the museum's oral history recordings, hitherto barely tapped, reflect very fully the spread and diversity of SOE's activities and the variety of personnel involved. Interviewees include Britons and foreign nationals; civilians and servicemen; officers and other ranks; instructors who taught agents specialist skills; technicians who developed specialist weapons and equipment; staff at secret headquarters as far apart as London, Cairo and Colombo; aircrew and naval personnel who transported agents and stores into occupied territory; agents who were dispatched to attack specific targets, from vital enemy lines of supply to Germany's atomic bomb plans; agents who were sent out to arm, train and fight alongside groups as different as the French resistance, partisans in Yugoslavia and tribes in the Burmese jungle; and agents who survived brutal treatment after falling into enemy hands. Indeed, this book seeks to underline both the complexities of SOE and the realities of behind-the-lines work, from the terrible risks run to the appalling reprisals on occupied populations which agents' actions could precipitate. There are stories here of treachery and tragedy and of some of SOE's greatest disasters. There are tales, too, of the dilemmas encountered as SOE sought to work with individuals and groups focused as much on civil war and revolution as on fighting the Axis.

Roderick Bailey

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Introduction
by Sebastian Faulks

The story of the Special Operations Executive, the secret army set up by Winston Churchill at the low point of the Second World War to 'set Europe ablaze', is one that, however much you know about it, never loses its power to make you gasp – in admiration, amazement, humour and disbelief. You could argue that in its mixture of cussedness, heroism and amateurishness, SOE epitomised all the most memorable aspects of the British war effort.

Memoirs can be unreliable, often tending to vainglory, reticence or deceit; official accounts can also be defective. All the more reason to value the oral witness collected by the Imperial War Museum, a pungent sample of which has been selected by Roderick Bailey. 'I was invited, aged just over 21,' recalled Julian Amery, 'to start a revolution in Albania against the Italians and given a budget of about £50,000 to get on with it.' That is the authentic SOE tone: 'Don't know what I'm doing, let's start tomorrow.' But later, Amery touches on the contribution made by even the most harum-scarum SOE operations: 'Even if we couldn't help these countries, if we could divert the Germans from what they were doing or planning to do against us, that would be a plus.'

The training was tough and sometimes hilarious: Outward Bound with a touch of Ealing comedy. At its best, as in the

intensive month in the Highlands, it was not only good practical preparation, but also gave agents the sort of other-worldly confidence they would need in the field. Childish fear persisted. Robert Ferrier recalled that in order to shame the more timid men into making a trial parachute jump, dispatchers made sure the trainee women jumped first. No *Boy's Own* device was infra dig so far as the boffins of SOE were concerned: booby-trapped rats, exploding cow-pats – anything that might annoy the Germans.

The dangers in Europe were terrible. The agents, if caught, were not treated as regular prisoners of war; they faced torture and death in a concentration camp. It is impossible to recall in tranquillity that one of SOE's bravest women agents was betrayed to such a fate in Paris, not by her own shortcomings but by a French woman jealous of her looks.

One or two survived even concentration camps. Robert Sheppard gave an account of being in Dachau: 'I wanted to keep my dignity as a British officer. I thought, "I won't let them destroy my personality" . . . We were starving, we were dressed like clowns, but we always wanted to keep dignified in front of everybody. It was the last part of our duty in the war . . . I think many of our friends and comrades from the camps of all nations remember this. Difficult sometimes.'

Good agents came in different guises. Here is Robert Wade in Serbia, on seeing the five Yugoslav partisans he was meant to be leading get shot down: 'So I thought, "Well, you can't do it on your own, Wade – return!" My word, it was awful.' By contrast, Benjamin Cowburn revealed an extraordinary level of cool efficiency, shuttling across the border of Occupied and Free France in a hollow compartment beneath the engine of a locomotive. His book *No Cloak No Dagger*, a masterpiece of gritty

understatement, is for my money the best of all SOE memoirs.

The French Section of SOE, while it contained many men and women of almost unbelievable courage, was disaster-prone. One of its best organisers, Henri Déricourt, was a double, perhaps treble or even quadruple agent: a bad lot in any case, a man addicted to deceit. The radio protocols were frequently ignored by wireless operators in the field and, less forgivably, by Baker Street – by the people who had invented them. Not all the women were as cool and resilient as Violette Szabo, while many of the men grew bored and depressed by their double lives and took unforgivable risks to find company in public places. In Holland, the entire network was captured by the Germans.

A problem faced by agents in all countries as they tried to organise the nationals into resistance units was that there was not much appetite for guerrilla action, for blowing up trains and factories. The German occupiers were quick to trace local suspects and, if they couldn't, took exemplary reprisals against the innocent civilian population – usually ten or more killed for each German life taken. Not every factory owner producing steel or pneumatic tyres under German rule was keen to open his works to sabotage, and SOE action was actively discouraged by its British sister organisation, SIS (MI6), which regarded them as interfering amateurs whose loud bangs merely drew attention to their, and SIS's, presence.

It was different when there was real fighting going on alongside. SOE spread far beyond its initial European mission. In Burma, the nature of the terrain meant there was less distinction between what the regulars and irregulars were doing. The small Lysander aircraft – in symbolic terms the SOE's Spitfire – was still in operation, though later in the war it was used in Burma as much to lift

out Japanese prisoners as to drop in SOE personnel. The valleys were short and tight and the Lysander needed four hundred yards in which to land, measured out by eight bamboo markers at fifty-yard intervals. If the landing area was too short, Maurice Roe recalled, they just squeezed the markers down to forty-yard intervals and trusted the pilot. 'What could you do? These were tight valleys.'

In some ways the war in Burma was more up SOE's street, because the operatives didn't have to spend lonely months of planning and recruitment; they could get stuck in. 'The extent of the damage and mayhem that we created amongst the occupying forces in Burma was really quite something,' said Ron Brierley. 'Maybe the lessons one had learned in Europe were more readily translatable into a country that certainly does lend itself to guerrilla warfare.'

Even here, there could be boring or gloomy moments. Richard Broome said they were driven to making board games with what materials they had. The Chinese in their small battle group managed to improvise a mah jong set, and in return the British made 'Monopoly': 'It was a bit wild to see these Chinese sitting in the middle of the Malayan jungle, buying and selling Piccadilly and Leicester Square.'

SOE was an extraordinary organisation: distrusted at home, betrayed abroad, leaky, rash, frequently – and fatally – in breach of its own basic security rules. And yet . . . You only have to read a dozen of these oral witnesses to see that the quality of the men and women SOE recruited far outshone the failings of the organisation. Here is sacrifice; here is raw, selfless, bloody-minded courage, not always wisely applied, but applied, as the French would say, *à l'outrance*.

And when they were good, they were very, very good. They harried, they disrupted, they fought and, perhaps

above all, they inspired. You could ask no better summary of the value of SOE than that volunteered by General Eisenhower, whose assessment in 1945 was that the disruption to German troops caused by SOE-led resistance throughout Occupied Europe 'played a very considerable part in our complete and final victory'.

Sebastian Faulks

1939–41

We were totally amateurish, totally one hundred per cent amateurish, and it couldn't have been otherwise.

By the summer of 1940, Britain was reeling from Germany's lightning conquests of Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and France. Invasion from across the Channel was expected daily. Turning the tide seemed impossible and ways of hitting back were few. There was, however, one idea of growing interest to British leaders: the concept of encouraging the occupied peoples of Europe to harass the Axis from within. And in July 1940, days after the fall of France, SOE was formed, with Winston Churchill's famous exhortation to 'set Europe ablaze'.

SOE inherited many of the plans and personnel of two short-lived organisations set up in 1938. One was Military Intelligence (Research), a secret War Office department whose job had been to investigate irregular ways of causing trouble in enemy-occupied countries. Among MI(R)'s officers was Colin Gubbins, a dynamic and visionary Scot in his forties who had written handbooks on guerrilla warfare – he had fought in Ireland – and was to command SOE for the last two years of the war. The second organisation was Section D, a department of the Secret Intelligence Service. Section D had been concerned mostly with action in countries that seemed likely to come under Axis control and attack.

MI(R) sent men to Poland in 1939 to do what they could to hinder the German advance. Others went to Scandinavia to

counter German intentions there and try to help the Finns when Stalin, who would stand aloof from the struggle against Hitler until 1941, sent the Red Army to seize Finland. MI(R) even inspired the idea of setting up stay-behind parties to resist a German occupation of Britain. Elsewhere, particularly in the Balkans, as Italian and German threats and influence grew, Section D officers sought also to lay plans for action and boost anti-Axis spirit. When MI(R) and Section D were wound up, SOE pressed on with several of their schemes until the German juggernaut swept the British out of the Continent altogether in the spring of 1941. Few of these ventures met with success and many served merely to underline the amateurism and inefficiency of these early secret bodies. But they did at least blood a few SOE officers and lay some foundations for later work.

POLAND

Colonel Roly Sword
British military attaché, Warsaw

On the morning of 1 September, I was rung up by the consul in Katowice saying, 'There are firey balls flying in the sky, I think it's started.' He was talking about flares, and the Germans, of course, had invaded. Very shortly after, German bombers came over and bombed us in Warsaw. They didn't bomb the embassy, where I was, but they bombed the outskirts. There was quite a lot of flak flying around and noise and things and we had to liaise all the time with the Polish General Staff as to what we were going to do. And I had arranged with Gubbins, who was the G1 of the military mission, to liaise with the Poles and attach British officers to the Polish Army behind the lines to help them blow up bridges. Unfortunately war broke out first and Gubbins didn't arrive until the third, when England declared war.

Captain Peter Wilkinson
MI(R) officer with British Military Mission, Poland

During the four days that we were in Warsaw, Gubbins and the head of the mission, General Carton de Wiart, were desperately trying to find out from the Poles what they needed from the British, not that the British were in any position to provide it. Almost all the Polish war industries had been in the western territories, which had been bombed and destroyed; consequently, they wanted everything. The situation was so serious that Gubbins decided to send back Captain Tommy Davies, via Lithuania or Latvia or somewhere, to report directly to the War Office, really stating the full horror of the situation which no telegram could possibly convey. Of course one had to keep up a very brave face on both sides: the Poles couldn't admit to their allies the desperation of the situation and nor could we, really, apart from a nod or a wink to intimate that we realised and knew and understood.

Everybody was absolutely overtaken by the rapid advance of the Germans. I, for instance, in the original orders, was down to cover the Western Front, no less, as a liaison officer, but in point of fact there was no Western Front left. And so, when the mission withdrew, as it did from Warsaw on 5 or 6 September, I found myself in charge of the baggage.

HU 83162

Polish civilians after an air raid on a Warsaw suburb, September 1939.

The traffic was unbelievable, every sort of civilian and military vehicle, Poles on foot, Poles on bicycles, and of course the thing got absolutely snarled up. Gubbins and I went on ahead, in our British uniforms, to try and sort things out. We found that only about three trucks had got stuck in the road and it just wanted a little bit of intelligent coaxing to get the thing straight. And while we were there a Polish officer emerged and Gubbins shouted to me, 'Look out Peter, he's going to shoot!' so I dodged behind a car. He'd drawn his pistol, which he was persuaded to put away; then he said, 'Well, what the hell are you doing here, you British, ordering Poles about? A fat lot of help you've been to us.' And I must say we could hardly deny the fact.

Colonel Roly Sword
British military attaché, Warsaw

Carton de Wiart and a small group, including myself, decided that we'd stay on as long as we could but finally it was decided that the whole of the mission would evacuate Poland into Romania. I was in the leading car and I had to go across a river at Kuty, dividing Poland from Romania, and the Romanian military attaché stopped me on the bridge and recognised me and saluted and said, '*Bonsoir, mon colonel. Comment ça va?*' I said, '*Je ne suis plus un colonel maintenant*' – 'I'm not a colonel any more.' I'd taken off my uniform and cap. He said, 'Oh, I understand.'

We thought we were going to be interned, so I went off to see the checkpoint people. And as they were taking my particulars, they said, 'What are you?' I said, 'Well, the British Embassy.' And they said, 'That's funny. You're the third British Embassy that's passed this morning. Where are all the generals?' I told them we hadn't got any generals. In the meantime we'd dressed up old Carton de Wiart as far as

we could in plain clothes and gave him a passport as Mr Carton the author. I was Mr Sword the statistician.

Captain Peter Wilkinson
MI(R) officer with British Military Mission, Poland

Carton de Wiart was all for going in full regimentals. He was a magnificent officer. He'd been in the Guards so everything was impeccable. And when we got to the first sentry on the other side he stood up and addressed him, first in English and then in French, saying there were only three sorts of Romanians: they're either pimps, pederasts or violinists, and bloody few are violinists. Fortunately the Romanian sentry, thinking this was mutual regard, saluted and we passed through.

Colonel Roly Sword
British military attaché, Warsaw

Next day we made our way to the British Legation in Bucharest, which, of course, was British soil, so we were home and dry.

SCANDINAVIA

Captain Andrew Croft
MI(R) officer, Norway

They wanted me to be in charge of a little War Office mission with a view to getting arms through the then neutral countries of Norway and Sweden into Finland, in support of the Finns, because the Russians had attacked them. Malcolm Munthe was my second-in-command and we had to proceed to Bergen, where a number of ships full of armaments and aircraft arrived, and we managed to get various weapons of war, aircraft and so on, through Norway and Sweden up to Tornio. Before Christmas 1939, when the

first ships arrived in Bergen, until 21 January, about eight shiploads of stuff passed through my hands.

We had our problems. We provided vast quantities of ammunition, rifle ammunition, and our rifle is, of course, .303, or the equivalent of 7.7 millimetres, and theirs was the equivalent of the German one, 7.6 millimetres. But the Finns were out to kill and were damned good marksmen and they just filed down the cartridges by .1 of a millimetre or whatever it was. Very effective.

Captain Mervyn Walter
MI(R) officer, Norway

In January 1940 I was sent to Norway with two other British Army officers, Andrew Croft and Malcolm Munthe, to do a reconnaissance of the ports and railways in Norway with a view to assessing their logistic capacity for war. When we arrived in Stockholm we were told by the British military attaché that four British naval officers had been put into prison by the Swedish government because they had been monitoring the supply of special Swedish iron ore to Germany, and that if we were discovered we were on our own and nobody had heard of us.

The method of reconnaissance was straightforward. At that time Britain and France were sending large quantities of war stores to Finland and these stores were mostly coming through the Norwegian ports of Oslo and Bergen and the smaller ports like Trondheim. By going to these ports, to check up on the cargoes coming through, we were able at the same time to do a reconnaissance of the capacity of the harbours, their facilities, their warehouses, their power supply and so on.

We took the railways section by section. In each section we noted down the crossing loops, the watering points, workshops, turntables and also the tunnels and bridges and

we recorded on the relevant sheet of the railway timetable, by a series of dots, the facilities and in that way built up a picture of the line. From time to time we returned to Stockholm and tore out these sheets of the railway timetable and they were then sent to London.

Croft and Munthe spoke between them Norwegian, Swedish and I believe some Finnish, and their job was to talk and my job was to keep my big mouth shut and get the technical data which was the purpose of the visit. By seeing me look for this and look for that, they gradually learned, so we all three worked together. During our journeys from time to time we met up with two or three people who seemed to be doing at the stations what we were doing. We came to the conclusion that they were German transportation officers, like myself, doing a reconnaissance of the Norwegian railways.

Captain Andrew Croft
MI(R) officer, Norway

There was a top-secret telegram that Munthe and Croft were to report to a Captain Palmer at the Bristol Hotel in Oslo. There we got our instructions, which were to greet the British Army arriving in Norway. Malcolm Munthe at Stavanger, myself at Bergen and Palmer at Trondheim. I had an easy cover story for being in Bergen: cleaning up after the armistice and peace in Finland; cleaning up the ships that were still unloaded.

Gerry Holdsworth
MI(R) officer, Norway

Malcolm Munthe, Axel Munthe's son, succeeded me in Stavanger. I went to Oslo. And the Germans arrived at Stavanger and Malcolm, assuming it was the English fleet he could see in the gloaming at night, went down to the end of the quay and did 'da da da-da da da' with his torch. Well, I

don't suppose it helped particularly. He was very surprised when the chaps came ashore in different tin hats to what he expected. Malcolm was half-Scandinavian, of course, spoke Norwegian, and he realised that this was no place for him and he took to the hills.

Captain Andrew Croft
MI(R) officer, Norway

The first I realised about the invasion, which I expected of course, was seeing a fish shop with a blackboard. Instead of the price of fish it said, 'German fleet cruising north through the Kattegat.'

That night I slept rather badly and at 3.30, I remember, I heard the dull booming of a gun, so I got up immediately, dressed and went to Tyskebryggen quay which was the inner port where my ships had unloaded their stuff for the Finns earlier on. I saw a Norwegian ship, a fjords steamer, offloading a whole lot of Norwegian troops; no guns, just rifles, horses, hay, straw. I asked them where they were going – one knew the language of course – and they were going up to Voss. No intention of defending the town.

It was then ten to five. German aircraft came over at a height of not much more than a hundred metres dropping leaflets. Immediately thereafter, just below me, about thirty yards away, came a large boat full of Germans. They landed and progressed towards the centre of the town in threes, led by three officers. I remember the middle one carrying a standard or banner. Very lightly equipped all the soldiers were, with the usual grenades stuck into their jackboots.

I then went to my hotel where I saw a German, who had been staying in the hotel, giving orders and instructions. He was one of the spies who had been there and who one knew about. I got to my bedroom, just had time to put on my large, fur-lined overcoat and get my British passport and

some money and the only decent shoes I had, not boots, and went out through the back door. I went to a friend of mine and he gave me a map and a compass and a loaf of bread, which I stuffed in one large pocket, and a bit of meat in the other. I went on and had quite a journey: 150 miles in five days.

Ronald Turnbull
Section D officer, Denmark

I was woken up early in the morning by the sound of aircraft. Quite frankly the Danes were not usually out at that time. I looked out of the window and there on the aircraft flying happily overhead was what the Germans called the *Hakenkreuz* – the swastika, the twisted cross. What on earth was happening? Then I realised. Someone phoned me. He was a British journalist for the *Daily Sketch*. 'Turnbull,' he said, 'we're trapped.'

I phoned the Brazilian Legation and checked that Dr Gastão was there. He said, 'Stay there, I'll send a car for you'; and Brazilians, when their Foreign Service puts on a show, they put on a show. He got his chauffeur with a large limousine, the Brazilian flag flying, and got through all the controls, I think the Germans didn't really know what to do, and he picked me up. He didn't take me direct to the legation; he took my things to the legation but he took me up to the Danish Foreign Office, accompanying me as a minister. He did a very good job. Brazilians are very prickly; they won't allow any nonsense even if they haven't got any authority whatever. He took me in and handed me over to the head of one of the sections of the Danish Foreign Office. Very soon, Howard Smith, my own minister, arrived. That was when I saw Dr Munch, the Danish [Foreign] Minister, having obviously been interviewed by Renthe-Fink, the German Minister, and, having received an ultimatum, coming out into the corridor, going into the bathroom and

being sick. I heard it quite clearly. He must have been absolutely horrified by the whole thing.

Nothing happened to us. The Danish attitude was, 'All right, we can't do anything about it. But this is force-majeure and you will respect our sovereignty'. That's why they said to the Germans, 'You can't fiddle around with the British Legation or the French Legation. Just let them alone. They are our responsibility. And if they can't stay, we ourselves will take them out through Germany, Holland and Belgium.' We were exceedingly well treated thanks to the Danes.

After about five days and a lot of partying and farewells we got on the train and were taken out. That was the occasion I was asked to look for a Pole called Freund, which is German for 'friend'. We went knocking on doors, knocking at daytime compartments, and I remember saying 'Freund?' and the Germans saying, 'Ah, freund? Ah, ja.' It was all rather ridiculous. It was still the Phoney War. You had the first burst of activity and then everything had settled down to nothing, practically. The legation in The Hague took us all in, our opposite numbers, and I spent the night there with a very nice couple.

Then we got on the train back to the UK.

Peter Tennant
Section D and SOE officer, Sweden

George Binney had come over as a representative of Steel Control to buy special steels, ball bearings, machine tools and so forth, from Sweden and Norway. He did the rounds and set up an office. Then the Norwegian invasion started, and there was George, cut off in Sweden, unable to come back even if he'd wanted to, but also unable to ship back supplies. So, as a man of typical initiative, he decided he'd break the blockade himself. He went to our minister, Victor

Mallet, and said, 'What about this?' Mallet said, 'Don't be such an ass. It looks like the war's coming to an end.' That was the time, you know, when people were caving in at home, it was very, very dicey. So George said, 'Well, as far as I'm concerned, the war's never coming to an end until we've beaten them. If they succeed in invading us, we'll have to fight the war from Canada, we shall continue. And I am going to start my ships.'

George got his ships together. They were partly British, partly Norwegian. Then came the question of crews. There were various crews who had come off British cargo ships sunk by the Germans in Narvik and they weren't particularly keen to go on such a dangerous expedition again. George said, 'All right, we'll see who else can come – Norwegians and Swedes,' and he got a mixed crew in the end. They got five ships ready to go, loaded them and put explosive charges on board, so that they could sink them if necessary, and then moved from Gothenburg up to Brofjord, up the coast, to lie in wait and choose an appropriate moment to go. When the right moment came there was a slight snowstorm, George decided to go out and then they got through and were met by the Royal Navy, at a certain point in the North Sea, and escorted to Kirkwall, with a complete load of supplies, which was a wonderful achievement. It was as much as a whole year's supply of steel from Sweden in peacetime. The supplies got down to SKF, the Swedish ball bearing factory in Luton, where they were very welcome indeed. George was knighted for the achievement. He went to a private dubbing at Buckingham Palace and the King asked him to tell him the whole story, which he did. And there the King said, 'You know, there are a lot of remarkable people who I can't decorate or thank in any way because they're really neutrals, but they're taking part in this.'

THE BALKANS

Basil Davidson
Section D and SOE officer, Hungary

I was a journalist. I had joined Section D on the understanding that I would be sent to the Balkans, which was a part of the world I knew something about, especially Yugoslavia, having lived there. They decided to send me to Hungary. I said I'd never been to Hungary – a totally different language – and didn't know anything about it. Of course, to that I got a rather rusty answer that there was a war on and that I should do as I was told.

This was the end of '39, beginning of '40. Italy had not yet come into the war and the Germans had not yet invaded France. So I went by train to northern Italy and from northern Italy into Yugoslavia and across Yugoslavia into Hungary. In Milan I was joined by another Section D operative, a very excellent man called Ian Pirie. He had a lot of big blue sacks which he put in the luggage rack and he said, 'We've got to get those across the frontier and they mustn't be looked at.' Fortunately they weren't looked at because he had diplomatic immunity. Then he revealed to me that they consisted of high explosives.

Our job in Section D was to go to various countries which were not yet under Nazi or Fascist control but which might easily become so, which might be invaded or might be turned into satellites, and Hungary was one of those. It was, in fact, pretty well a satellite, so there was almost nothing to be done there. I was sent to run a legal news agency, supplying news from the Ministry of Information to the local papers, and also to set up a clandestine printing press. And of course I hadn't the foggiest idea of how to do that.

Captain Peter Wilkinson
MI(R) and SOE officer, Hungary and Yugoslavia

Financed by Section D, in February 1940, I set out on a tour of inspection, in great comfort, travelling on the Simplon-Orient Express, which still maintained its standards. I had one nasty moment leaving Italy, at the Italian–Yugoslav frontier, where there was an extremely stroppy Italian control who seized my rather virgin-looking passport and started questioning me on it. Among other things he asked me what its number was. Well of course I didn't even know the number of my proper passport let alone this one that had just been issued to me. To which he replied, 'Well, naturally not, because it's false.' Morale was beginning to sink. However, since I was on my way out of Italy and I had a service visa he didn't feel inclined to make trouble and that was that.

I went first of all to Budapest, which I must say looked absolutely miserable in the February weather with the cold central European wind and flaky snow coming down, and I saw the Section D chaps there. I also saw the military attaché and the ambassador who all agreed that if it could be arranged the best thing to do would be to hire an assistant military attaché who could handle all the subterranean work from the sanctity of the legation.

I came back via Belgrade where I went through the same arrangements. But I had a ridiculous incident because I arrived very late at night at the main station and there was a legation car which took my confidential bag off me