

SECRET

- 11 -

OPERATION OF THE INFORMATION SERVICE

Every day at about noon special messengers would turn up at any hideout with the information collected over night and assembled at their headquarters during the morning. It was made up into a bulletin of three to five pages of precise information.

One of the main and most constant items became the daily road count covering the traffic movements of the Germans on all the main highways in and out of Rome. To collect this properly was an extremely complex job requiring fifty or sixty men, and sometimes more, to cover the roads alone. They worked in regular eight hour shifts at vital points on all the highways, jotting down every detail of every vehicle that passed, including type, contents, insignia, kind of troops, caliber of guns, etc. etc. It required extremely close observation to note what was being transported in ambulances bound for the front, to see whether covered trucks contained personnel, materiel, gasoline or ammunition.

It was a gruelling job, done in all kinds of weather and under constant risk, especially at night when it was difficult to venture out after the curfew.

From the various men on the highways a series of constantly changing messengers collected the information at different meeting places. The information was jotted down on scraps of paper.

SECRET

SECRET

- 12 -

These bits of paper were then brought to a zone headquarters, which was also constantly being changed.

From the zone headquarters the collected scraps of paper, together with all the other collected information, both of a military and political nature, were brought to a central headquarters--which also changed at frequent intervals.

At the main headquarters Franco, or one of his men, unknown to the others except by a pseudonym, would pass two or three times a day and pick up the total collection of assorted information--which regularly filled a good sized brief case. From there it was taken to a final and smaller headquarters of Franco, unknown to anyone but themselves and the two or three others who worked there with them.

For several hours in the morning the information was sifted, checked, controlled, boiled down, and finally written up into the short snappy items which formed the daily bulletins that were brought to me.

Actually, this work took place in the back room of a German book store ^{directly} opposite the Excelsior Hotel of which Franco was nominally in charge. All morning long four or five clerks and secretaries worked in the front office handling the regular business unaware of the fact that in the back offices a complex espionage organization was in ^{operation} function. Most of the errand boys and workmen,

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
Authority AND 84309A
By DL NARA Date 1-26-09

SECRET

- 13 -

and sometimes quite a few of the customers were actually members of the military underground assigned to guard the places or to act as escorts for the couriers. They often carried strange parcels containing handgrenades, revolvers, and sometimes sub-machine guns, and sometimes their manners with the real customers were not altogether polished. But the regular workers never seemed to notice anything; and we sometimes laughed, and sometimes felt a little guilty when we thought of their surprise if one day the SS walked in and arrested the whole bunch.

When the bulletins were completed they were brought down to me. Apart from the complex but fairly routine job of watching the main roads, the various zone headquarters handled a vast and assorted volume of information.

It had always been my theory that the best way to gather intelligence in Italy was with a widespread organization of eyes and ears all over the country.

The rest of OSS preferred to work with the small group of professional Italian army spies. Personally I did not have much faith in the professional spies, and eventually proved pretty conclusively that for reasons of their own, they often invented large portions of their intelligence, or gathered it from the

SECRET

CLASSIFIED
Authority AND 843099
By DL NARA Date 1-26-09

SECRET

- 14 -

recesses of their boudoirs, their convents or the back corridors of the Vatican.

As it was, there were socialist eyes and ears in practically every office, on every street corner, in the farms and villages between Rome and the beachhead, on the carts and trucks that jugged along the country roads; among the laborers who built the military installations for the Germans; among the fisherfolk and sailors-- everywhere in fact that human beings lived and worked, and where the Germans had to pass.

At some headquarters the farmers who brought their wares to the black market in the city would describe in detail German concentrations in their neighborhood, minefields, gun emplacements, gasoline dumps, the progress on the local fortifications; and, when faced with little sketches of insignia, would shake or nod their heads.

At the main hospitals where the wounded from allied bombing raids in the Alban hills were brought, the doctors would non-chalantly gather details from their patients about who was hit and where, and what the targets were around them. And when the internes went to help the civilian wounded in the little towns that nestled around the Alban hills they brought back detailed accounts of German installations within spitting distance of the beachhead.

SECRET

SECRET

- 15 -

Children, far back from the front, playing in the fields within eyeshot of the long range German guns would tell their parents, and their parents in turn would tell their neighbors, and the information would be carried to Rome in the minds of the peasants as they brought their baskets of goat cheese to the market. Once they had been questioned about what they knew, they gathered information more carefully and precisely on their following trip.

Thus dozens of carefully camouflaged ammunition dumps, gas dumps, gun emplacements, tank concentrations, and other military installations would be radioed to OSS and VI Corps headquarters and disposed of by the incessant bombing and strafing of the air corps.

When the Allies wished to know the effects of their bombing, especially on the railroads, and how the railroad traffic worked, the socialist railworkers would bring us almost daily an official copy of the State Railways report on train movements and interrupted lines, and it was not difficult for them to know what was in the closed train compartments that moved to and around the city of Rome. They traveled in them, or watched them, as their daily duty.

Over a period of six weeks we collected and transmitted over a hundred descriptions of german regimental and divisional insignia.

SECRET

SECRET

- 16 -

But that was not all. Franco infiltrated his men into every possible source for information. One of our best sources, a trained intelligence officer who spoke fluent German, acted as liaison between the fascist command of the Open City of Rome and later Kesselring's headquarters. Thus with a little ingenuity and a small amount of risk, he was able to get access to the German operational maps from which we obtained the complete German battle order at the beachhead, as it developed; the disposition of their real and phoney tanks and guns, their intended feint attacks, and the direction of the main attacks whose object was to split the beachhead and force it to evacuate.

Our only worry about such information was that the Allied G-8 might not believe we really had it. Access to very valuable information was gained through two German socialist officers in headquarters, but we did not dare intimate the source, lest it dry up.

We also had men working in the large hotels in Rome who, through their constant contact with the Germans, could reflect their general morale, which served as a useful barometer for the progress of operations on the beachhead.

And we had a man well up in the state censorship office; so that little passed through the mails we did not know about.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority AND 843099

By DL NARA Date 1-26-79

SECRET

- 17 -

One of our men worked in the Fascist Republican counter-espionage organization, known as the SID, and he was not altogether unhelpful. It prevented our falling prey to their double agents, of which there were hundreds, always trying to pass themselves off as partisans, and ^{to} gain our confidence by passing on tidbits of information.

With northern Italy and some of the central Italian Partisan groups we had regular couriers. On one occasion, Franco and the agent (who acted as liaison to the Germans), both of whom spoke fluent German, took a trip practically to the French frontier disguised as fascist republican officers--busily inspecting German installations and troop movements.

In Northern Italy they prepared to tie in all their local party organizations for the time when and if the Germans gradually withdrew. Unfortunately, OSS headquarters would not let me make use of them, though I assured them the same service from Turin, Milan and Bologna that they were then receiving from Rome.

Within the city of Rome there was naturally very little of a political nature that was not known to us. Both Franco and especially an agent known as Giuliano assisted at the meetings of top council of the Committee of National Liberation, and one of Franco's main jobs was to constantly visit the regional headquarters of his party.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
Authority AND 84309A
By DL NARA Date 1-26-29

SECRET

- 18 -

In the various ministries, and in the local jails we had our men. At Regina Coeli one of the ^{residents} wardens and a doctor worked directly for us. It was hard for anyone to be caught without our knowing about it within a matter of hours. One of Franco's close friends was an SS NCO at Via Tasso.

Soon after I arrived I also established contact, and set up a system of communication with the American and British Ministers in the Vatican.

Together with the daily bulletins on military intelligence I received detailed bulletins of all that was of interest to the political and partisan world, including reports from all over Italy on sabotage and attempts on German personnel.

From the padre who assisted partisans executed by the Germans, we were able to obtain the names of the deceased-- sometimes when they were unknown to the German authorities themselves.

As there was such a variety of sources we often bumped into isolated bits of information entirely by accident. It was thus that we learned from a down and out professional Italian army cypherer who had worked in close contact with the Germans, the setup of the main German radio cypher system, and the fact that they were intercepting our plane to ground radio messages.

SECRET

Authority MND 843099
By DL NARA Date 1-26-79

SECRET

It was also that way that we learned of the impending
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Tenth Mas Plotilla attack on our ships off the beachhead and
were able to inform them in time to smash the attack.

And we also got such tips as that of the Italian envoy
who was going to Spain to negotiate for the escape to Italy
of interned naval units.

And so, all this information, boiled down to the bare
facts, and properly qualified, was brought to me daily at
about noon. It then took me about two hours to check it all
with past information, find localities on our maps, and draw
up the cables of the most urgent information for transmission
to the base radio.

The completed cables, written on ^{thin} tissue thin paper, were
then tightly folded and carried by special messengers, inside
their socks, or slipped through a ring on their finger where
it could be easily swallowed. They took the messages to a man
waiting at a prearranged rendezvous a few blocks away. This
man, who didn't know who I was or where I lived, carried the
message across town to meet another man at another prearranged
rendezvous who in turn took it to wherever the radio station
happened to be hidden. Thus the central messenger knew neither

SECRET

SECRET

where the message came from, nor where it went to. If they caught the radio there would be absolutely no way they could trace the message back to us--and vice versa.

A couple of hours later through the same channel, I would receive the message from the base, usually in the form of queries for more or specific information, to arrange for the parachuting of equipment to us, to select the times, places and material wanted, to arrange for special messages to be broadcast via BBC, and to lay all kinds of plans.

Our main trouble was that we had infinitely more traffic than the radio could possibly bear.

Later in the afternoon the whole process was repeated for a second contact with the base. Invariably the contacts ran ten or fifteen times longer than OSS procedure allowed for. But there was nothing we could do about it. Owing to bad weather and the lack of planes we could not get another set dropped to us, and thanks to Coniglio's and Sorrentino's efforts, couldn't get hold of any other set in the area.

I wanted very much to set up another radio just to handle all the Partisan and political information for the benefit of MO and PNB. But with one radio it was out of the question. We couldn't even take care of the purely military information.

SECRET

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority AND 843099

By DL NARA Date 1-26-09

dumps and gas dumps, new or emergency landing fields for fighter aircraft, transmitting stations, CPs and regimental and divisional headquarters, all appeared in different colors on the maps. And in our little suitcase the colored files and their contents multiplied. There were soon between twenty and thirty of them, marked "German insignia", "Gun emplacements" "ack-ack" "mine fields" "gas and ammo dumps" "counter espionage" "relations with partisan groups" "daily political info", etc. When the files began to get too thick, background material would be removed and buried in the secret hideout in the cellar.

Franco came in almost every day, and every third or fourth night when he was not inspecting one of the scattered political headquarters, he would spend the night with me. With him I would have long discussions about the organization, and we would make decisions. I would then explain in detail the information wanted by our side, and he would explain the methods and difficulties of obtaining it from his end.

Though he and his men did all the work, they desperately needed someone to work for who knew what was wanted and what to do with it when he got it. He and his men also needed the technical training and knowledge of communications and OSS equipment that we had to work with.

SECRET

Authority AMU 843071
By DL NARA Date 1-26-09

SECRET

But my main job, I suppose, was acting as a buffer, to try to soften their disappointment in Allied promises that never materialized, to try to keep their morale high enough to keep at the job which every day became tougher, with guys being tortured, or shot, or blown to pieces for collecting information for people who never seemed to keep their promises in return.

It was never a matter of money. All but the few top men received one dollar a day for their trouble. The top men, about five or six of them, received two dollars a day. And on this they all had to live and support their families, for it was a full days job.

It was not an easy job to explain away the difficulties OSS had to overcome and why they could not drop the equipment necessary for them to carry out the espionage and sabotage activities they were so ready to give their lives to carry out.

It did not make sense to them that we should send across the lines such men as Ceniglio and Sorrentino who passed themselves off as General Clark's personal representatives, or representatives of the Fifth Army, and who were patently and clearly out to serve no other interests than their own.

It was hard to cope with their growing realizations that the allies didn't give a damn about the partisans, would use them so long as they served their purposes, but would other^{wise}

SECRET

SECRET

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Authority **NND 843099**
By **DL** NARA Date **1-26-09**

treat them no better, and sometimes a good deal worse than their fascist brethren.

But, luckily, they were mostly men who did what they did out of some deep-felt conviction.

To the men around me, it sufficed to talk frankly and sincerely. But I noticed they had a somewhat harder time talking to all the little men that really did the work. Almost daily they would bring me pathetic appeals from the more ingenious Partisans whose faith in us as Americans was still child-like and untrampled-on.

Why they continued to work for us God only knows; but in spite of everything they continued to bring in more and more valuable information and stretch their organization further and deeper afield.

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