

Author's Preface

How could I not be interested when the National Park Service invited me to write about the OSS?

The fascinating men and women in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in World War II included daring spies and rowdy daredevils who parachuted behind enemy lines to undermine their ruthless regimes. Movie star and working seaman Sterling Hayden evaded German patrol boats to supply anti-Nazi guerrillas in Yugoslavia; Maryland socialite Virginia Hall ran espionage networks and resistance groups among the *maquis* in France. Twenty-five-year old William Colby from St. Paul, Minnesota, who had dropped out of Columbia Law School to enlist, destroyed a major railroad line and bottled up thousands of German troops in Norway. Reginald ("Reg") Spear, a 20-year-old Californian, was sent on several dangerous missions in the Far East: spying on Japanese fortified islands, determining conditions of American prisoners of war in the Philippines and tracking down a missing agent in China. When Tokyo announced Japan's surrender, John Singlaub, leading a small OSS team, parachuted into a POW camp holding captured Allied servicemen, rescuing them from possible annihilation by fanatical Japanese officers.

But it was not only the dangerous, daring work in the field by agents, saboteurs, guerrilla leaders and their radio operators that comprised the activity of America's first centralized intelligence agency. Foreign area specialists from universities combed published and unpublished records for valuable economic, political, and strategic data, among them William L. Langer, H. Stuart Hughes, and Gordon A. Craig. German-born actress and singer Marlene Dietrich recorded songs to accompany the OSS's propaganda beamed at undermining the morale of German soldiers. A tall, lanky young woman named Julia McWilliams worked as a file and registry clerk in the OSS regional headquarters in China. Later, she married a fellow OSSer and accompanied her husband, Paul Child, to Paris where she learned French cooking, returned to the United States and became famous as author and TV chef, Julia Child.

OSS had cryptological and communications specialists who developed and employed the codes and ciphers, the short-wave transmitting equipment, and the clandestine communications networks that enabled the secret organization to function effectively. OSSers built a portable, short-wave, wireless telegraphy (W/T) transmitter/receiver system that fit into a suitcase, and by 1944, they had developed an ultra-high frequency voice communication system which could link an agent on the ground with a hand-held transceiver with an aircraft circling six miles above. A young electrical engineer named Jack Kilby, who served with the OSS Communications Branch in India and China, continued the OSS philosophy of thinking outside the box, and in 1958 while working for Texas Instruments, he invented the integrated circuit, which formed the basis for the microchip industry.

During the war, OSS developed scores of gadgets, secret devices, weapons, and munitions. They ranged from flexible swim fins and self-contained underwater breathing devices to buttons, shoes, and pipes with secret compartments, and a variety of lethal inventions including single-shot, cigarettes and fountain pens as well as flashless pistols and machine guns. Among the special munitions, one innovation was a batter nicknamed

“Aunt Jemima” that came packed in Chinese flour sacks, to deceive the Japanese. It could be harmlessly baked in an oven, but with a fuse attached, it became a powerful explosive that OSS saboteurs could blow up a radio tower, railroad line, or even a bridge with it.

Modeled in part after the British Special Operations Executive and the Secret Intelligence Service, OSS shared the kind of reputation for derring-do and innovative gadgets made famous by the James Bond films based on the novels of Ian Fleming. A member of the British Special Operations Executive during the war, Commander Fleming had been one of the consultants that London had sent temporarily to the United States to advise the Americans on the creation of such secret wartime services. The character of Commander James Bond (007) may be fictitious, but the organization was not and neither was the gadget specialist of the books and films, “Q,” who was based on the head of SOE’s technical branch. “Q’s” counterpart in the United States was chemist Stanley P. Lovell, head of OSS Research and Development, whose invention of so much lethal weaponry and diabolical gadgets earned him the sobriquet, “Professor Moriarty.”

The OSS was a combination of socialites, business and professional people, scholars and scientists, movie stars and athletes, and mostly just regular although highly intelligent Americans, as well as even a few safecrackers and forgers, who were sprung from prison to apply their skills to the secret war effort. It included a host of then well known names such as Henry Ringling North of Circus fame, Russian Prince Serge Obolensky, who had married into the Astor fortune, two of the three Alsop brothers, and numerous Vanderbilts, Mellons, Du Ponts, and Morgans, but also baseball star and linguistic genius Moe Berg and champion fullback and professional wrestler “Jumping Joe” Savoldi. OSSers ranged from right to left in their political views, and they worked with a political spectrum of resistance groups in Nazi-occupied Europe.

To conduct a new kind of warfare, an unconventional war in the shadows, the OSS recruited very few professional soldiers. It was a partly military and partly civilian operation, and even most of those in uniform had been shortly earlier been civilians. But these “glorious amateurs” prided themselves on being able to think innovatively and act independently. Their leader, who encouraged this, was, William J. (“Wild Bill”) Donovan, a legend himself. On his uniform, he wore the star-spangled white and blue ribbon of the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Meuse-Argonne offensive in World War I. This self-made Irish American, who rose from the shadow of the dockside grain elevators in Buffalo to a top floor view on Wall Street, proved a courageous and inspiring leader in both world wars.

So when the National Park Service asked me to find out what Donovan’s organization had done in two of its National Parks in the Second World War, I was more than happy to accept that challenge.

The Park Service knew that the OSS had taken over what is now Catoctin Mountain Park, north of Frederick. Maryland and Prince William Forest Park near Quantico, Virginia, but it wanted to know what the super-secret organization had done in those parks between 1942 and 1945. It sought to fill in that missing part of the parks’ history and inform the public as part of its interpretive mission. What precisely had Donovan’s organization done inside the parks in those years? How that had related to the war effort? And how it had affected the parks both during and after the war?

My quest for answers led to many different sources of information. Most voluminous were the records of the OSS itself, held for nearly half a century by the CIA

and only relatively recently declassified and deposited—more than 5,000 cubic feet of them—in the National Archives II at College Park, Maryland. The National Park Service records at the National Archives and at the parks themselves were also useful.

Additionally, my search led me to the papers of several key figures, from Donovan himself at the U.S. Army Military History Institute in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the National Archives II, to Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Roosevelt Presidential Library at Hyde Park, New York, and Harry S Truman at the Truman Presidential Library at Independence, Missouri, the papers of Wallace Reuel and Arthur Goldberg at the Library of Congress, Allen Dulles at Princeton University, and M. Preston Goodfellow and General Albert Wedemeyer at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, California. There were valuable oral histories, not just from OSS veterans at the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, the Veterans Project of the Library of Congress, but also from wartime National Park Service Director Newton Drury at Berkeley and Prince William Forest Park superintendent Ira Lykes at Harper's Ferry. From the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis I obtained the personnel files of by Lykes and Catoctin park superintendent, Garland B. ("Mike") Williams. Crucial insights were provided by surviving OSS veterans. I personally interviewed nearly forty of them plus more than a dozen sons and widows, and I toured the two parks with several of the veterans.

The OSS had used the parks as primarily as training camps. In their isolated woodlands, secured from public scrutiny, recruits for Donovan's organization, especially operatives who were going to be sent overseas into the war zones, were put through courses of physical toughening, psychological preparation, and skills that would help them to survive and accomplish their missions, many of which would be behind enemy lines. My research quickly revealed that not only was there no study of the OSS in the National Parks during the war and its legacy afterwards, but there was no scholarly study of either OSS training or its relationship to the missions of the OSS overseas and its contribution to victory.

Consequently, this study does not simply explore the training camps of "Wild Bill" Donovan's organization in the two National Parks. It also assesses the effectiveness of the training OSS agents received and how they utilized it in their dangerous and often heroic exploits overseas. It explores the legacies of the OSS, upon the parks themselves, upon the veterans, and upon the organizational heirs of the OSS. For the OSS in its training, its organization, and its missions, was a forerunner of both the Central Intelligence Agency and the today's Special Operations Forces. Understanding such origins and legacies as well as the seemingly paradoxical relationship, at least during World War Two, of the ordinarily peaceful sanctuaries of the National Parks and the murky, violent world of spies, saboteurs, and guerrillas is a major aim of this book.

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