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OPERATIONS OF THE FOURTH (FRENCH) OPERATIONAL GROUP  
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES, IN FRANCE,  
17 AUGUST TO 20 SEPTEMBER 1944.  
(OPERATION LINDSAY) (SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Section Leader)

Type of operation described: GUERILLA WARFARE

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Incl 4

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### Note:

The above list of references were for the most part read by the author for background material. Occasional reference will be made to these sources, but the bulk of the material will be from the author's own experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

On the seventeenth of August 1944, a small group of American soldiers parachuted far behind the enemy lines with a mission of assisting the French underground to harass and destroy the Germans that infested their country. This tiny band of men were members of the Fourth (French) Operational Group of the Office of Strategic Services. The many interesting experiences they encountered while in France are definitely worthy of comment.

INCEPTION OF O.S.S.

Prior to our entry into World War II, we watched the conflict in Europe and in the Far East to make sure we would not become involved. Although we were as a whole isolationists, there were enough men with adequate foresight to make plans so that we would not be caught totally unawares. One of the plans that was firming up was the establishment of an organization similar to that of the Gestapo (ABWEHR) (1) of the German Army and the Kempei (2) of the Japanese Army.

President Roosevelt called upon William J. Donovan to organize and head this very secretive branch that was to become known as the OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES (O.S.S.). (3) Major General Donovan, better known as "Wild Bill Donovan" who led the "FIGHTING 69TH" in World War I, (1) A-2, p. 119; (2) Personal knowledge; (3) A-7, p. 10.

proceeded to enlist both civilian and military personnel with the needed skills and backgrounds to mold this special type of organization. (4)

#### CONCEPT OF O.S.S.

O.S.S. had peculiar missions that are hard to classify. They were so varied in nature and extent that it is hard to give any one word the job of covering such a scope. In addition to intelligence, research and analysis, which were its biggest contributions, combat missions played no small part in the victory achieved. Some of the combat jobs were to destroy vital installations; to destroy enemy personnel; and to equip, train, and lead the underground in uprisings and acts of sabotage.

Other peculiarities of this new and different type of organization were that they had women doing sabotage and intelligence work; they had special (practically unheard of) weapons that were needed for the odd missions they were called upon to undertake; and that for the most part the work in the field was extra hazardous duty behind enemy lines and of necessity on a voluntary basis. (5)

O.S.S. did not work with standard army units, but got its orders directly from Washington, D.C. or the very top man or men in the theater in which they were operating.

Within this highly complicated organizational structure, we find a component called Operational Groups. They were composed of four officers and thirty enlisted men who were carefully selected and trained. (6) Each group was or-

(4) A-2, p. 119; (5) Personal knowledge; (6) A-3, p. 90.

ganized into a particular language-speaking unit. The one we are primarily concerned with in this monograph is the Fourth (French) Operational Group and its operation in France from 17 August to 20 September 1944. This mission was given the code name of "OPERATION LINDSAY".

#### GENERAL SITUATION

The Allied Forces, having landed on the beaches of Normandy and Southern France, began converging on Germany. It was believed by SHAEF that when a rapid push began and the Germans were retreating, they would render certain vital installations useless to the allies. One such establishment was the hydro-electric plant in the Truyere River Basin. This key point supplied the electrical power for the major portion of southern and central France. It was very important to the French people and to the Allied Armies in their operations through this country.

#### BRIEFING FOR OPERATION LINDSAY

The Truyere Hydro-electric Plant consisted of a series of three large dams, a generating station and a switching station all located within an area whose radius was approximately ten miles. (See Map B) The briefing experts believed that enemy damage to the dams would not be too severe because of their sturdy construction. (7) Similarly, the generating station, although very important, could be repaired or more likely replaced within a matter of weeks. Thus we see that the key to this utility was the switching station. It was made up of a large number

(7) The briefing personnel was made up of Frenchmen who actually worked on the construction of or operated the plant.

of condons to support high tension lines; huge oil vats that were used as insulation for the transformers; and a very complicated control house that was the key to the entire area. Actual photographs of the area and the component parts of the switching station were on hand at the briefing.

Previous arrangements had been made through other elements of O.S.S. that were operating in France to have the Maquis (8) form the reception committee for this operational group in the selected drop zone near Sauvat. (See Map A) The OG's (9) would then secure further information through local intelligence concerning the current enemy strength in the area and the disposition of the German forces garrisoning this switching station. The FFI (10) was to assist in the accomplishment of this mission as soon as they had been contacted.

The group was to be flown to their drop zone under cover of darkness in conjunction with a regular bombing run. B-24's were to be used to dispel any suspicions the Germans might have that personnel was to be dropped in the designated area. The belly turrets of these planes would be removed and the men would jump out of the holes thus created in the bottoms of the ships. Containers, with parachutes attached, carrying demolitions, ammunition, rations, additional weapons and supplies that would be needed for this operation would be loaded in the bomb racks. Com-

(8) French word for bushmen, the name applied to the active participants of the French underground; (9) term applied to individual members of Operational Groups; (10) Free French of the Interior.

munications with the home base in England were to be established by using British Jed sets. (11)

Upon completion of the initial mission, the group was to contact the Benjoin Mission (12) which was to assist them in selecting various other targets in this general area as the situation developed. It was to continue to peck away at the enemy in this area until such time as the Germans were driven out and transportation was available to effect the return of the group to its parent unit.

#### ENTRY INTO FRANCE

On 16 August 1944, the first section of the Fourth (French) Operational Group left Harrington Field in England for their drop zone in France. Four planes were needed to carry the personnel and equipment on this particular night, but only one got over the target and four men jumped. The following night, 17 August, at 2110 hours, remnants of the first section and all of the second section departed for the same dropping area. This flight consisted of six B-24's, three of which reached their destination, enabling fourteen additional OG's to descend. After identification between the reception committee and the aircraft had been established, each plane made two passes over the field. Packages and containers with supplies were discharged by parachute during the first pass. The second pass was used for the actual personnel drop.

The jump was made near Sauvât, France (See Map A) at (11) small, compact, suitcase type radio with considerable range used by similar British units; (12) made up of one British, one French and one American officer operating behind the lines for the purpose of directing sabotage and other harassing actions.

0205 hours on 18 August 1944. Casualties on the drop consisted of one broken ankle, one strained back, one broken collar bone, one severely sprained ankle and one with torn ligaments and a partial rupture. These injuries received what medical attention could be provided by the doctors of the underground within a comparatively short time. In addition to injuries suffered by personnel of the unit, a considerable amount of equipment was damaged on the descent. The three radios which made up the only means of communication with London were so badly broken they could not be put to any effective use. Hence the members of the small group were cut off from the outside world.

The group slept in a barn on the edge of the dropping field that night and were on their way to Mauriac by day-break the following morning. This town housed only French patriots and was to be the Headquarters for these Americans while they were in this area.

#### INITIAL MISSION

The major portion of this group left Mauriac on 19 August and arrived near the village of Brommat approximately two thirty the same day. (See Map B) The smaller country roads had to be used because the enemy was very active on the main highways. Their mission was to save the switching station of the Hydro-electric plant in the Truyere River Basin which was located in this vicinity. Upon arriving on the high ground a few miles north of the village, they found the Maquis had already surrounded a considerable number of Germans who were operating in this area and in control

of this switching station. The enemy was located in a chateau (13) some four hundred yards away and offering stubborn resistance. Even though the culprits were greatly out-numbered, they would not surrender to the Maquis. They knew their fate would be instant death because of their treatment of the French underground.

The American group took positions overlooking the enemy. They dispersed their men on a comparatively wide front to give the impression of a much larger unit; set up two machine guns and two British three-inch mortars; fired a few rounds from all of the weapons they had with them; and then delivered their ultimatum by telephone. They told the Germans that the American Forces were in the area and that they should surrender by four-thirty or they would move in and spare no one.

Realizing they would be surrendering to the Americans in the area (14), the enemy began their destruction of vehicles, weapons and equipment at about four o'clock. At the appointed time, over one hundred fifty Germans laid down their arms and turned themselves in as prisoners of war.

Because of the size of the group comprising Operation Lindsay, they could not keep these prisoners. Therefore, the FFI took charge of them with the understanding that they would be treated properly. Later information revealed that most of these Germans were put to work on reconstructing roads and bridges in another section of France.

#### CONTACT WITH BENJOIN MISSION

Following the completion of the initial mission, the (13) French castle; (14) The OG's wore American flag brazards on their arms and exposed themselves frequently to enemy observation.

group discussed defensive plans for the switching station with the underground forces and departed for Aurillac, (See Map B) Here they spent the night and returned to Mauriac the following day.

Information was received through unknown underground communication channels that the Benjoin Mission could be contacted at Vieillespesse. (See Map C) After having actively participated in a liberation ceremony, the small band left Mauriac to check with this mission regarding possible future action.

#### HARASSING ACTION AT ST. FLOUR

Local intelligence at Vieillespesse revealed that two German forces were attempting to unite for reasons of security because of the growing resistance in the area. A group of about eight hundred was trying to join forces with an enemy armored column moving south from Clermont-Ferrand along Route Nationale No. 9. Once this combination was established, they would make their way back to Germany as a mutually supporting tank-infantry team.

The members of this Operational Group moved out on the morning of 23 August 1944 to a point approximately six miles south of Vieillespesse. Here they took up positions astride Highway Nine just north of the city of Saint Flour. A unit of four hundred Maquis were to be employed with half of their forces on either side of the group's position so as to extend the line and prevent any envelopment that would stop these Americans from holding the road. The British officer requested that the one machine-gun crew accompany him and set up on the extreme right flank. These

three men remained in position after being abandoned and were captured by the Germans.

The section leader moved to a bend in the road on the forward slope of the hill where he could get the best observation on the advancing hostile troops. (See position no. 1, Map C) He took a 2.36 Rocket Launcher and one other man with him to fire on any vehicles that might precede the column. After remaining in position for an hour with apparently no movement to the front, three other members of the team joined him at this OP. By this time the observing group was standing in order to better search the woods in the cross compartment to their front.

At this time the enemy opened up with four machine guns concentrating on the five up-right Americans. Mortar fire began to come in on this group and was later shifted to the reverse slope of the high ground in an attempt to clear the road of any resistance blocking their progress on the highway.

The five men on the forward slope hit the ground and were protected only by the slant of the road on this turn. One of the men was hit in the calf of the leg but all managed to take their distance and move back over the hill by the use of a ditch on the inside of this road bend.

Once back where he should be, the section leader ordered the direct fire weapons to fire covering the woods. The mortars were to begin registering on the left corner of the barn to their right front. (See position no. 2, Map C) He had to move <sup>to</sup> the high ground on hill B (See Map C) because of the intensity of the enemy fire just forward of the mortar positions. After peering over the crest of

this hill and making the first adjustment, the enemy massed its fire on hill B, making it untenable for the officer there. He then ordered the mortar crew to place area fire on the farm buildings and began to back down and rejoin the rest of his party. As he was moving off of his hill, he noticed remnants of the Maquis disappearing over another hill some 2,000 yards to the rear and began to pull his men off the position. Amid heavy machine gun and mortar fire, the group was finally assembled, loaded on a small French truck and began its movement to a successive delaying position about a mile and one half to the rear on this same highway. They had traveled only four hundred yards down the road when a hail of machine gun bullets began converging on the truck. With the accelerator all the way to the floor, they raced through this wall of fire with the projectiles ricocheting off the retreating vehicle. No casualties resulted, but it was evident that the Germans had almost completed a double envelopment when the advance to the rear was being executed.

Members of Operation Lindsay finally caught up with the Maquis and again set up on the high ground about a mile and a half in rear of the first position. Here they again awaited the approach of the enemy. (See hill C, Map C).

It was felt that some action should be taken to impair the advance of the armored column moving from the north. Thus the section leader and one of his sergeants loaded eighty pounds of 808 (15), twelve anti-tank mines and a number of tire bursters on a French car and proceeded (15) A British explosive with a very high rate of detonation.

to crater the road in the vicinity of Vieillespesse. After considerable difficulty in burying the charge in the hard surface highway, they finally succeeded in creating a formidable obstacle by augmenting this barrier with the anti-tank mines and tire bursters they carried with them.

Immediately they moved to Vieillespesse on foot where they were rushed to hiding places in the cellar of a French home. This action was prompted by the German patrol that was searching the village for them at the time. At three forty-five in the afternoon they left their hiding places and joined the rest of the group at Rezentieres. The group, now consisting of only sixteen Americans, went to Peyrusse which was a small town situated well up in the mountains. They spent the night here after securing medical attention for the wounded man. The following two days, numerous attempts were made to recapture the three OG's lost in the action near Saint Flour.

#### SUBSEQUENT HARASSING ACTIONS

On 27 August 1944, the group arrived at Clermont-Ferrand where they joined forces with a company of French Moroccans: (16) Together they continued to peck away at the enemy by ambushing his columns. They would lie along the roads and wait until he was within one hundred yards of their position; open fire with all of their weapons; and then hurriedly disperse to concealment inside a near-by town. On these ambushes, machine guns would fire in bursts

(16) These French Moroccans had escaped from Germany through Luxembourg after having been prisoners of the Germans for four years. At this time they were fighting in France as a part of the FFI.

of belts and the mortars would search up the road, expending the maximum amount of ammunition during the brief firing periods.

The Germans suffered a great number of casualties as a result of these actions, but perhaps the greatest effect was on the morale of Hitler's supermen in the area. It seemed to them that whenever they moved, they lost men, but could never find the responsible persons. For a time, they didn't know where to move for safety. If they remained in one location, they still had considerable casualties, so they finally took the necessary losses and left the area.

Many German patrols sent out to reconnoiter routes of advance or combat the small units attacking them would be captured by this Operational Group and turned over to the FFI. Among other accomplishments, this group captured an armed hospital unit which consisted of over one hundred men and thirteen vehicles.

The group discovered that the enemy was assembling near Brout-Vernet, a small town about thirty miles north of Clermont-Ferrand, and proceeded to disrupt their peace of mind in that area. They established positions on the northern edge of the village and sent the mortar crew out across the crest of the hill to engage a truck park and a wooded area that contained the foot troops. The small French car sped down the road, unloaded three men and a mortar and roared back to a position of safety in the town. This mortar crew set up, fired three rounds into the truck park, moved to positions some twenty-five yards nearer the road and discharged their remaining six rounds into the wooded assembly area. The timing was very good on this

little action. As the final mortar rounds left the tube, the French car was again dispatched, picked up the men and their weapon and raced back into the town amidst a shower of small arms fire. No one was injured on this action which was a miracle. Later, reports estimated forty Germans killed and wounded and three vehicles demolished beyond repair.

On 9 September, Operation Lindsay moved to Saint Germain-le-Pey and prepared to engage the enemy in a near-by town the following day. This action was called off because the Germans had more than four hundred French citizens imprisoned in a church in the town that was to be the objective. They sent word that if they were attacked, they would machine gun these hostages. That night, the Moroccans slipped out and slit a few throats but didn't fire a shot. Two small bridges in the vicinity were destroyed to increase the difficulty of enemy movement. The following day the Germans moved out on the road in an attempt to leave the area, but were again caught by a few more rounds of the group's British three-inch mortars.

#### ATTACK NEAR DECIZE

The next two days were spent canvassing the area as a patrol in an attempt to seek out and destroy any minor German groups that may have been left behind.

The OG's and approximately one hundred fifty Maquis arrived at Decize on 12 September. This French town was situated on the Loire River. (See Map D) Southwest of the river, thousands of German troops were waiting for an opportunity to return to the homeland. The bridge in this

area was the connecting link in their return route.

Forty Germans were housed in a chateau on the far bank of the river to make sure the large bridge across it was kept intact. As the Americans approached the chateau, they were asked by a French officer to set up their mortar. He told them that one of the Maquis was in a position with good observation on the enemy and would adjust for them. After firing twenty-six shells with constant corrections in range and deflection, it was discovered that this Frenchman was chasing a small group of Germans all around an open field. The group then moved its position, using one of the four remaining rounds for registration, and got three hits on the chateau. This erratic firing must have demoralized the enemy in the building because the combined force then closed in with very little resistance and captured forty more Germans.

They moved back across the river; demolished the bridge; and set up strong points to prevent the enemy's escape to the homeland through the Belfort Gap. (17)

After placing harassing fire on German troops in St. Germaine, the group organized a strong point in and around Cossaye. They felled trees to block the major roads in the area and covered these improvised road blocks with machine guns and other small arms. Booby traps with comparatively large explosives added to these somewhat meager barriers. Strict vigilance was maintained both day and night with very few shots being fired. A handful of Germans, believed to be a reconnaissance party appeared on two different oc- (17) A-8, Part II, Annex 3, p. 4.

casions.

On 14 September at 2100 hours, they received word that some 20,000 Germans had surrendered in the area. The group remained alert until this news was confirmed the following morning. The actions at Decize and Cossaye were against an attempt by the advanced party of this large enemy force to make their way across the Loire River and return to Germany through the Belfort Gap. The resistance offered by these O.S.S. personnel and the members of the French underground was one of the factors which influenced the German general to surrender his 20,000 troops at Orleans. (18)

#### RETURN TO ENGLAND

The task assigned this group was completed on 15 September 1944. Being very anxious to return to their parent organization, numerous attempts were made to contact London for a method of transportation out of this area. The three radios the group entered France with were damaged beyond repair when they made the parachute landing. Thus other means of communication were finally used at Orleans. The London office had given this detachment up for lost as no word had been received from the group during their stay and reports from other O.S.S. agents in the area indicated that they had either been killed or captured.

London instructions indicated that aircraft would be available at either Toulouse or Limoges. When these instructions were received, the OG's were at Orleans which was a considerable distance north of these two cities. (See Map A) Because Paris was only a short distance away and (17) A-5, p. 188.

their supply of gasoline was low, they decided to make their way to this important city. Here, they felt sure, they could secure transportation back to England. They arrived on 17 September and returned to London on 20 September in a C-47 that was returning to England on a mission of resupply.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The importance of sabotage and espionage cannot be overlooked in waging a successful war. The Germans in this section of France had to be constantly on the alert because of the actions of this small group. The resistance which seemed to arise from nowhere was like a thorn in the pathway to their success. The morale effect brought about by this situation cannot be measured by any tangible means. To be continually harassed by an unseen enemy creates a mental effect that is detrimental to an efficient fighting force.

The local intelligence received from the French underground was exceedingly valuable. Enemy locations, dispositions and strengths could have been used by a larger unit to very good advantage. If this force had been that of a battalion or regiment in size, it could have wrought untold casualties to the German army and thus weakened the total hostile strength to a much greater extent. However, a large number of American soldiers could have been located and combatted by systematic action.

The co-ordination and consideration of both of these Allied forces was extremely important to the success of this mission. If the French had withheld information and failed to support this American group, they might not have

accomplished very much or come out of the action alive.

Passive resistance and strict security enabled the Operational Group to employ the principles of surprise and deception in their numerous harassing actions. Detailed instructions for each engagement could be given to the members of such a small unit in a short period of time and just before the action was to begin. This prevented the enemy from securing timely information prior to the actual encounter.

The members of Operation Lindsay were well trained soldiers who could not always understand the unprecedented actions of the Maquis on many occasions. If both elements had been schooled in military doctrine, there would have been a much better understanding of each other's actions as the situation developed.

The initial mission of capturing the switching station near Brommat was accomplished by what might commonly be called bluffing. Because the troops were employed on such a wide front and moved about considerably, they created the false impression of being a much larger force. The positive action and impressive demands made in the ultimatum implied that the American force was definitely capable of completely destroying the enemy in that area.

The action at St. Flour would probably have been more effective had the group moved farther forward and surprised the enemy with its limited volume of fire. Thirteen men could not reasonably expect to delay approximately eight hundred enemy for any extended length of time. The surprise element was lost when the Germans observed the five

Americans on the forward slope.

The unorthodox employment of the mortars at Decize confused the enemy to such an extent that they were unable to determine the strength of their opponents. This situation was brought about purely by the lack of intelligent use of the weapon by the Maquis.

The employment of Operation Lindsay can best be measured by comparing losses. It is estimated that the Germans suffered approximately one hundred killed and wounded and lost over four hundred captured. The Americans, on the other hand, received one minor flesh wound and lost the three that were captured exclusive of the injuries suffered during the drop by parachute. This comparison would not be complete without considering materiel losses. The Germans lost a considerable amount of weapons, three trucks that were actually accounted for and the use of other existing installations in the area. In comparison with the American losses, which were practically nil, these facts contribute to the value of this mission.

The individuals of the Fourth (French) Operational Group who participated in Operation Lindsay justified their existence many times over in respect to their accomplishments. The actions described in this monograph definitely contributed to the comparatively early and complete victory in France.

#### LESSONS

The lessons to be learned from a study of "OPERATION LINDSAY" are:

1. Small groups operating behind the lines in enemy

territory where the populace is sympathetic to our cause contributes substantially to the main effort.

2. Local intelligence received from native civilians in the area is extremely important to the tactical plan of any unit.

3. Sabotage and espionage are vital in successful warfare.

4. Co-ordination, consideration and co-operation are necessary between Allied forces in the successful accomplishment of the over-all mission.

5. Security and surprise are extremely important in guerilla warfare.

6. Discipline and training demand special attention in the preparation for small unit actions.

*ould be better stated*  
7. Aggressive action steeped in assuredness will often deceive an opposing force.

8. Well-planned, unorthodox tactics enhance the possibility of overcoming an enemy by striking where and when his tactical plan is weakest.

9. Thorough briefing and detailed instructions must be given each individual of a small unit engaging in isolated raids.

10. The minimum number of men necessary to successfully accomplish the mission should not be exceeded in guerilla type actions.