



Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II's OSS

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A history of World War II espionage and covert operations activities, presented from the perspective of OSS agents, recounts numerous secret missions that contributed to the war's outcome.

Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II's OSS Details

Date : Published March 2nd 2004 by Free Press/Simon & Schuster, Inc. (first published March 2004)

ISBN : 9780743235723

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Format : Hardcover 365 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, World War II, Spy Thriller, Espionage, Military Fiction, Military, Military History

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From Reader Review Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II's OSS for online ebook

Tom Schulte says

Once again, O'Donnell presents a collage of oral history, collecting first-hand recollections on the WW II pre-CIA clandestine operations. Drawn from interviews and memories, the scope tends to be at the individual operation level. There are many underwater frogmen ventures that stand out, as they obviously did to Ian Fleming who drew inspiration from the training for them. Of course, not all succeeded and several operatives from the division-strength organization ended in Nazi hands, at times eyeless and hanging from meat hooks.

Kay says

Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs is a very straightforward narrative crafted almost entirely from the author's interviews of former OSS operatives. The training methods, dangers of infiltration, and successes and failures of specific campaigns are the substance of the book.

However, there is a lack of analysis and a tendency to take all the interviewees at their word that weakens the book, combined with too much flag-waving over America's first concerted intelligence gathering efforts. I wish there had been more background so that I could have better understood the big picture. As a reader, I found that stringing together one account after another palled after a bit, regardless of how sensational the material. A less episodic approach might have been more interesting.

Tony says

A most informative read!

Catherine says

This book does a good job of giving a general sense of the operations of the OSS's activities during WWII. I felt it tried to cover too much and it left me only with a general sense of things. It was somewhat fragmented because of the scope of the subject. There were stories of individuals that kept me interested, but I was left wanting more of their stories and feeling unsatisfied.

Jim says

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was the precursor to today's Central Intelligence Agency. The U.S. basically had to start from scratch at the beginning of World War II. At first the OSS relied heavily on the

British intelligence services for training. But "Wild Bill" Donovan, the OSS Chief, created a culture of innovation and by 1943 the OSS was pretty much on a par with British Intelligence. Along the way, the OSS battled rivalries with the FBI and military intelligence as well as turf battles with British Intelligence.

This book features quotes and stories from numerous interviews with surviving OSS members. There are chapters covering OSS operations in various theaters (mostly in Europe and North Africa) as well as chapters on the diverse functions performed by the OSS (sabotage, spying, training partisan & resistance fighters, underwater demolitions, psychological warfare, propaganda). You also hear of harrowing escapes from the Gestapo and German troops as well as stories of OSS members who were captured. Many were tortured, some were executed and some escaped.

The OSS even played important roles in arranging the surrenders of German forces at the end of the war in Europe.

I recommend this book to anyone wishing to learn more about the OSS.

Nicole says

As a history piece, it does a good job of staying true to its source material and incorporating in primary sources. However, as a book that is supposed to tell the stories of the people and organizations it features, it does a poor job of truly bringing out the importance of each event. It's bogged down by large block quotes that prevent the book itself from being an interesting read. Instead of writing in his own words what occurred in each event, the author appears to have decided to let the quotes do the talking, which can be very tedious, especially where the original speakers may be poor orators themselves. Overall, it's a good history source, but with awful pacing and creativity.

Cindy says

You would think that a real life book about espionage would be interesting, but nope. Maybe it's because the author has to leave out too much, or because there is not enough good source information, so the author has to guess. But both of these were hard to get through. Too much boring detail to get through and not enough pictures. Too much politics, not enough action.

This one was about the OSS, organized by division. WAAAAAY too much detail. There were maps, but I was still confused about what was going on. The most interesting part to me was about the 'amphibious squadron' - sorry, I had a Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow moment. But you know what I mean, the forerunners of the Navy Seals. I also liked the part about how the OSS got started. But I basically skipped around in this one.

Collin says

This book was an easy read. I was expecting more of a textbook historical look at OSS, but was pleasantly surprised with a collection of personal narratives that read more like a spy novel. The contribution by OSS agents in WW2 was impressive and surprising to me. My interest in this subject matter was peaked after

seeing the movie "the good shepherd". I can see why one would be disappointed in this if you were looking for a outline summary of the OSS but this collection of personal histories was well worth the effort to read the book. I would love to see a movie based on this book!

Eric says

Excellent book on the history of OSS operations during WW2. The chapters are organized mostly by location (Greece, France, North Africa, etc...). The author conducted hundreds of interviews and spent two years combing recently declassified OSS archives. This is the first time many of the stories have been told. Each chapter could be its own volume so I was left wanting to know more about the individuals and the individual operations. I listened to this on CD on a recent road trip. Had I been reading it I would have stopped continually to Google people involved. I may need to get a copy of the book just so I can figure out how to spell a lot of the names in it and look them up.

I did look up one name, Felix Kersten, Himmler's masseuse. The book credits him for being one of the unsung heroes of WW2 and states that he attempted to broker a peace between Germany & the West wherein Himmler would overthrow Hitler and Germany would side with Britain & the US against Russia. He also prevented thousands of Jews from being killed. Wikipedia says Kersten's claims are exaggerated and can't be corroborated by other documentation.

I'm going to assume that this discrepancy is due to no one bothering to update Kersten Wikipedia entry with the info gleaned from the recently released OSS data that O'Donnell used to write the book.

Melissa McShane says

After reading this book, I think the subtitle should have been "The OSS: At Least We Tried." The author does his best, but the subtext paints a picture of an organization balked at every turn, whose missions rarely turned out as they should. To be fair, much of this was due to the fledgling spy organization receiving very little cooperation from the information-gathering arms of other military organizations, but it's hard not to admit that the OSS played less of a part in winning the war than I think O'Donnell would like.

However. This is not a book about the OSS as an organization; it's about the men and women who took part in its many, many operations throughout the European and Pacific theaters of war. And those stories were fascinating. If the OSS failed, it was rarely because its operatives were stupid, inadequate, or cowardly. The OSS recruited and trained hundreds of men and women who undertook sometimes deadly missions; in some cases, those men and women simply disappeared from history after being captured. O'Donnell conducted so many interviews it's amazing the book is as short as it is. Much of it is simply the words of the survivors, and those stories are truly gripping. This is not an exhaustive history, but as a collection of personal records, it's remarkable.

Meagan says

I read a few chapters and put it back down. It's interesting -- and yet morbid! So focused on war (which is to be expected)...I just found it depressing after a while.

Jeff Andersen says

Neat stories. Similar to "The Jedburghs", just not as flashy. These people had serious grit that seems to be rarely found in today's culture.

Amelia says

The author recounts the beginnings of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a precursor to the present day CIA, based on archival information made more compelling with personal accounts derived from over 300 interviews with surviving OSS personnel. It's a fascinating perspective on WWII history and spycraft that may complement any reader interested in these topics.

Roger Barnstead says

Really enjoyed this work. Things I had never heard before.

Phrodrick says

Bottom Line First:

Patrick K. O'Donnell has brought together some interesting first person accounts of America's WWII military spy organization the Office of Strategic Services. His book *Operatives, Spies and Saboteurs* is a readable if light weight construction of what individual survivors did while undercover in World War II. For the casual reader, this is history absent any academic fluff or grand theory and filled with the deeds of men and women who acted heroically and are haunted by the excesses of total war.

Partisans were rarely forgiving of Nazi's or their supporters and the Nazis remain as vicious as all other documents confirm. Some readers may wonder at the stories untold because the speakers are long gone. Given the lack of attention to competing allied underground forces some of the claimed achievements are perhaps made by a friendly author rather than the results of deeper analysis.

My conclusion *Operatives, Spies and Saboteurs* is a good beach read history and shallow to the point of distracting to the serious scholar.

To the degree that *Operative, Spies and Saboteurs* honors the deeds and lives of people who took great risks and too often paid that last full measure it succeeds. History is not just for the experts and the detail curious. Accessible history serves its role by bringing to light the things people did, that people need to remember as

a matter of respect. There are heroes among us; no less so because they could not be famous even if fame was a reward they might have wanted.

That said O'Donnell has little to tell us about allied secret services. He acknowledges the relationship between Bill Donovan as the founding head of OSS and Sir William Stephenson, his counterpart and agency mentor from 'across the pond'. It comes as a shock when the OSS is joined by Italian underwater units (The Italians had some of the most effective underwater attack units of all the major national forces in WWII). A later story about the exfiltration of the virtually intact Finnish secret service was not recounted with sufficient detail. These people came with valuable information but there is little case made that the OSS or the US derived much benefit. Even worse the Finns delivered the information that would have allowed us to read important parts of (then Allied) Soviet coded messages but 'officially' all related copy was returned to the surprised Soviets. (Copy being the operative word)

The point of view remains with operating agents and we get little of the view from OSS headquarters or allied command. O'Donnell twice suggests that the German success at launching the Battle of the Bulge was in part due to a decision by First Army HQ to refuse OSS units the necessary operational permissions. This is two large statements,(The why for 1st Army's decision and the possibility of OSS detection of massing German forces) and worthy of much greater discussion. There is no such discussion.

Among members of the military it is a matter of pride that this or that service branch is the first ashore or into a battle field. This book adds to this mix of chest thumping and exchanges of pride that sometimes the irregulars were there first and that the gleaning from their work was an increased survival rate among the fighting troops who arrived next.
