

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

By Patrick K. O'Donnell

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O'Donnell has tracked down and interviewed more than 300 elite and mysterious former OSS (Office of Strategic Services) members and, for the first time, relates their incredible true stories of World War II--stories that may read like the best spy novels but are shockingly true. 16-page photo insert.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

No longer satisfied with gentlemanly intelligence gathering, with the advent of WWII the United States changed its espionage policy and opted for more daring tactics like decoding secret messages and detonating exploding cigars. Under the guidance of decorated WWI hero William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the Office of Special Services, the CIA's predecessor, assembled a motley assortment of agents who set the stage for the Allied armies' most important missions, like the invasion of North Africa and the storming of Normandy. Through first person narratives from a slew of OSS operatives, O'Donnell explores the thrilling world of spying before satellites and computer hacking boxed agents into cubicles. The WWII OSS hauled hardened criminals out of jail to burgle enemy embassies and culled spies from the Free French who fled to England and North Africa. The sophisticated seductress "Cynthia" used her sex appeal to gather ciphers for breaking Polish, Italian and Vichy codes from high-ranking military men. Elsewhere, Virginia Hall supplied the French Resistance with arms and continually sabotaged the Gestapo while limping with a wooden-leg. The book also chronicles psychological operations by the Allied "Sauerkraut agents" who demoralized German troops by spreading rumors of defeat, disease and desperation. The chapter on the OSS' covert weapons, like exploding baseballs and umbrella pistols, vividly recalls 007's pre-mission encounters with "Q." This book is far more than a simple historical survey and reads like a satisfying cloak and dagger yarn, making it a good choice both history and mystery buffs.

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From [Booklist](#)

O'Donnell, author of two books on U.S. elite units in World War II's European and Pacific theaters, turns to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and as in his previous books, writes from the perspective of the men--and in the OSS, some women--on the front lines. For the OSS, those lines were largely in German-occupied Europe, where operatives gathered intelligence and provided weapons, communications, and leadership to a wide variety of resistance organizations. The danger from the ruthless and frequently effective German forces was great, particularly for the local personnel. So, too, was the risk of being caught in factional quarrels in France and Italy and outright fratricidal slaughter in the Balkans. O'Donnell doesn't denigrate the OSS as do some other historians, who prefer other agencies and services that had turf fights with it throughout the war. Instead, he argues persuasively that the OSS made both material and psychological impacts on European resistance and, through it, on the Germans. *Roland Green*

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Review

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