

OFFICIALLY REVEALED THIS MORNING

The Exciting Story of The S.A.S.

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE



Col. Stirling

THE swiftness of the advance in France has thrilled and astonished the world. Those who have known active soldiering have perhaps been puzzled by the lack of effective German resistance once a breach in their lines had been made.

But this disorganisation of German resistance in depth is not an accident, nor is it due to the inefficiency of the Germans. It is part of the result of a comprehensive British and French campaign which had been waged behind the German lines long before the break-through of the main army occurred.

Success

IN a great measure the success of the break-through was due to the success of this campaign, which wrought havoc to German forces in France from one end of the country to the other.

Great credit is due to the Maquis for these results. The story of these intrepid resistors will one day be told in full.

BUT THERE HAS BEEN ANOTHER BODY AT WORK INDEPENDENTLY IN FRANCE WHOSE IDENTITY UNTIL RECENTLY HAS BEEN KEPT SECRET—A BRITISH UNIT OF PARACHUTISTS CALLED THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE AND GENERALLY REFERRED TO IN THE ARMY AS THE S.A.S. AND IT IS LARGELY DUE

his idea to the 8th Army G.H.Q., and he and Lewis started a school in the desert called "Stirling's Rest Camp," where the first 73 volunteers from the 8th and 11th Comandos were assembled and put through a curriculum of training devised by Lewis. Recruits, officers, and men alike were given identical instructions; the foundations which a man had to possess or acquire were these:

1. He must be a parachutist.
2. He must be expert with all kinds of small arms and well practised in close combat.
3. He must have more than average skill at navigation.
4. He must be tough enough to jump off a truck at 30 miles an hour, and enduring enough to march 100 miles with a heavy pack.

Above all it was the school's aim to produce individualists. Each man must be able to face any contingency and make decisions alone. It was Stirling's ambition that his officers and men should be interchangeable. Special stress was given to teaching the use of high explosives and night work.

Meanwhile the existence of this new unit was kept officially secret.

First operation of the S.A.S. took place on November 18, 1941, and was directed against the Me. 109's of a German aerodrome. It was a memorable disaster. The S.A.S. jumped from planes in a 30 m.p.h. wind, just about double the maximum safe speed, and in torrential rain.

They were scattered over an enormous area, and when the survivors finally got together, after a long march, to meet the Long Range Desert Group, they were found to have lost about 50 per cent. of their numbers. Whatever happened, Stirling and Lewis knew that with their second operation they had to succeed or finish.

The most dangerous time for the S.A.S. was not during an operation but on the return journey, when the Luftwaffe sent out pursuit planes to take revenge on the British buccaneers.

Mayne and Stirling countered these new measures of the Germans by altering their tactics. Whenever possible, they still put their "Time-pencils" and Lewis bombs on the planes. At other times, as in the attack on the Sidi-Enich drome, near Mersa Mutra, in which 21 jeeps were used, they drove round and through the planes in different formations, strafing them and their guards with incendiary bullets.

During one of these early operations the S.A.S. had the misfortune to lose Lieut. Lewis, co-founder with David Stirling of the unit. He was killed by a chance shot from a German plane on his return from a job.

In Behind

DURING the famous Eighth Army push, the S.A.S. were operating behind the German lines all the way and harassing the coastal road from Tripoli to Sart. From then on, the policy of the S.A.S. was determined directly under Montgomery.

To meet the need for a link-up between the First and Eighth Armies, they set off to try and break through. They succeeded, and were the first men to do so. But in the course of this operation Col. Stirling, commanding officer, was taken prisoner. He is still a prisoner of war to-day in Germany. It is interesting to note that all captured S.A.S. were immediately removed to Germany, and in no circumstances allowed to remain in North Africa.

The S.A.S. were given the honour of starting the invasion of Sicily. Their task was to make an assault landing to eliminate the coastal batteries. They destroyed four batteries and took 500 prisoners.

Four days later they were landed farther up the coast.

They were then re-embarked and landed farther up the coast at Bagnara, where they took the first German prisoners of the Italian campaign.

Expansion

THE effectiveness of these operations called for expansions of the unit. Early in 1943 further units of the S.A.S. were formed from the nucleus of a small force which had been used to raid the coast of France.

Stirling's ideas now came into full effect in the mountainous and closely populated country of Italy.

During this advance, the emphasis on initiative and independence which marked the training of the S.A.S. paid high dividends. Led by a young cavalry officer, who had previously escaped from Greece, they harried the enemy ceaselessly. One of the expeditions described their progress as a stalking match, which was won by the quickest man on the draw. Once they surprised a German unit preparing an ambush for them. The ambush was ambushed.

A French squadron commanded an Italian train and drove it through enemy country to a concentration camp where they captured the guards, released the prisoners, and brought the whole party back by train, including the Italian colonel commandant. They were helped in this expedition by an ex-trooper of the 9th Lancers, Pte. Brown, who had volunteered as a parachutist at 38 years of age.

The operation to destroy an important railway bridge was, perhaps, the smoothest ever made. After being landed on the coast by the Royal Navy, a small S.A.S. party mined the bridge and then lured the carabinieri, who should have been guarding it, on to the bridge just in time for it to blow up. Nineteen Fascist carabinieri vanished with the bridge. The S.A.S. suffered no casualties.

There is a story told by an S.A.S. sergeant-major, ex-Co'd-stream Guards and Comandos, about an officer of the

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Un escadron français commanda un train italien et le conduisit à travers le pays ennemi jusqu'à un camp de concentration où ils capturèrent les gardes, relâchèrent les prisonniers et ramenèrent tout le groupe en train, y compris le commandant, un colonel italien. Ils ont été aidés dans cette expédition par un ancien soldat du 9e Lanciers, le Pte. Brown, qui s'était porté volontaire comme parachutiste à l'âge de 38 ans.

Ex-trooper of the 9th Lanciers,
Pte BROWN est:

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