Uncommon Courage

Foreword

These are the stories of gallant people whose names deserve to be engraved forever on Canada's roll of honour. Some of them did not survive – were captured, tortured by the Gestapo and then executed. These are stories, simply told, of real heroes, hitherto unsung but no less inspiring despite the passage of time.

Many Canadians fought behind the enemy lines in the Second World War as agents for the British organizations that, stealthily, slowly at first but with growing effectiveness, operated escape routes and sabotage networks in occupied countries. Of these whose names are know, details of their activities are often sketchy, but, as this account points out, all were people of rare courage and dedication. They all knew, without exception, that, if captured, they could not look for the smallest protection from the Geneva convention. And they knew, also, that the risks of capture were high.

Modern warfare, as exemplified by the Second World War, is something the human race has never before experienced. No longer confined to professional armies with rules for conduct and surrender, whole populations are now caught up and engulfed in its toils and agony – men and women, the young and helpless, aged and infirm. Terrorism is a weapon deliberately conceived and put to use. In their blitzkriegs against Poland and the low countries, the German Army drove masses of terrified civilian refugees ahead of them so that they would clog the roads and impede the advance of the Allied forces coming to engage them.

As one country after another fell to the Nazi occupation, a darkness and silence descended, followed shortly by the curfew, the pre-dawn round-up, and mass deportations – all in the name of the new order.

But the leaders of the new order did not reckon with the indomitable courage of the individual. The urge toward freedom is irrepressible. Multiplied many times, it generates a force which cannot be measured in terms of tanks or machine guns firing hundreds of rounds a minute. Many times in the past it has slowed the onslaught of a tyrant and help bring about his downfall. Tolstoy in *War and Peace* referred to it as the mysterious force of X.

I was priveleged in World War II to have played a role in helping this force to be generated and brought into play. Those who went forth did so as individuals, knowing they would receive no quarter. Most of those who were captured perished after ghastly tortures. But more and more stepped forward to take their places.

I am glad that this tribute to a rare brand of courage and heroism is being published by the Canadian Department of Veterans Affairs. It is testimony to the belief that wars will

ultimately cease – not because war becomes too terrible to endure, but because no matter how terrible war becomes, the free spirit of men and women, as exemplified in these brief but moving records, will always survive and rise again like gleaming sparks from the ashes.

William Stephenson

WILLIAM STEPHENSON

William Stephenson is a Canadian who was the chief of British Security Coordination – a world-wide intelligence operation set up by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during the Second World War. With its headquarters in New York City, its aim was to challenge the spread of Nazism throughout the free world by engaging in underground warfare.

Stephenson, whose code name was "Intrepid," acted as an intermediary between Churchill and United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the crucial final years of the war. After a long period of continued secrecy, historians have now acknowledged that this operation provided an essential back-up to military and political measures in the fighting of the Second World War.

While the undertakings of the British intelligence agencies were traditionally cloaked in secrecy, the exploits of secret agents have long been familiar to the world through the James Bond series of spy novels, parts of which were based on activities of the intelligence operation headed by Stephenson. Their author, Ian Fleming, was an aide to the chief of British Naval Intelligence and actually worked with and received some training from William Stephenson during the Second World War.

Stephenson was knighted after the war for his role in the intelligence operation. His fascinating story is counted in the book A Man Called Intrepid, *published by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich in 1976 and written by another William Stevenson who worked with Sir William but is no relation to him.*

Introduction

We all know that many Canadians fought with the Allied forces to defend democracy during the Second World War. Many of these people were killed or wounded and all made tremendous sacrifices serving their country.

Not so well known are the contributions of a small, but unique, group of Canadians who served the cause of freedom in a different way – those who volunteered to be secret agents. These brave men and women worked behind enemy lines in German-occupied Europe and Japanese-occupied Asia supporting the efforts of the underground Resistance movements. These Resistance movements were made up of local people fighting against Fascist powers trying to take over their countries.

Although Canadians from all backgrounds volunteered to go behind enemy lines, secret agents came primarily from three groups: French Canadians, immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe, and Chinese-Canadians. Between the years 1939 and 1945, they served in France, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italy, Burma, Malaya and Sarawak. Unlike their counterparts in the military forces, they received no public recognition for their extremely dangerous work. They had no rousing send-offs. For the name of their game was secrecy – and the outcome depended on individual acts of courage.

Canadians who became secret agents during the Second World War served with two British secret organizations: The Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) and M.I.9 (Military Intelligence).

S.O.E. was the larger of the two organizations, with almost 14,000 members at its peak of operation in 1944. In the words of Winston Churchill, its task was "to set Europe" – and later Asia – "ablaze." It was established in 1940 to fight the Facist invaders of Europe and Asia from within the occupied countries. Specially-trained S.O.E. agents were smuggled into these countries where they linked up with members of local Resistance movements, trained them, and organized them into a fighting force to harass and weaken the enemy before the Allied advance.

M.I.9 was a smaller organization, concerned with Allied prisoners-of-war and Allied airmen shot down over enemy territory. Its function was to help them escape, by supplying agents and their helpers with money, radio communication and supplies.

Once accepted by either of these organizations, agents underwent a course of rigorous training in preparation for the dangerous tasks ahead. This included training in parachute jumping (most agents parachuted into enemy territory at night), using high explosives, climbing mountains, elementary Morse code, techniques of killing noiselessly, and the art of blending in with the local population. Agents were thoroughly briefed on their new identity and were given local contacts, a code name, forged identity papers, ration cards and work permits. The trainees were watched closely and assessed for such key qualities as endurance under stress, self-reliance, resourcefulness, discretion, good judgement and language skills.

The stories which follow are only a handful taken from the many that are known. The common thread which runs through them all is courage – an ingredient these people demonstrated in large measure. Some of them also gave their lives. It is hoped that by publishing several of their stories here, this small group of extremely courageous Canadians will finally get some of the recognition they so deserve.

Operations in France

M.I.9 - Partners in Evasion

Four young French Canadians, all of whom had volunteered for the army soon after Canada entered the war in 1939, came to serve with M.I.9 by way of the raid on Dieppe by Allied forces in August 1942. The raid resulted in more than 3,000 Canadian casualties. Almost 1,000 of them were subsequently taken prisoner of war (POW) by the Germans.

Conrad LaFleur, Robert Vanier, Guy Joly and **Lucien Dumais** were part of this group of POWs. They all managed to escape from the Germans and get back to England. Incredibly, all four men then decided to return to France as secret agents with M.I.9, helping others to escape.

The secret service career of one of these unusual Dieppe Veterans **Lucien Dumais** – is a good example of just what these people were doing behind enemy lines and the risks they took to help others. Lucien Dumais of Montreal was a tough, 38-year-old sergeant of the *Fusiliers Mont-Royal* when he was captured by the Germans at Dieppe. After escaping and returning to England, he underwent four months of combat training with the British First Army in North Africa. Upon his return to England, dissatisfied with the routine of Army camp life, he volunteered for service with M.I.9. And so his path crossed with that of another Canadian whose craving for action and adventure led him to join the secret service.

Tall, dark-haired **Raymond LaBrosse** was 18 when he first went overseas in 1940 as a signalman with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. The British secret service agencies were chronically short of good wireless radio operators, especially those fluent in French. LaBrosse was approached by M.I.9 and subsequently became their first Canadian agent. His first mission into German-occupied France, however, ended abruptly when the network was infiltrated by the Gestapo and LaBrosse was forced to flee the country. He was eager to get back to France and renew his efforts.

LaBrosse had qualities which suited him to this type of work – outstanding courage and good sense, combined with a quiet and calm nature. He proved to be an excellent partner

for the forceful, tough and articulate Dumais and together they formed "one of the best teams M.I.9 sent into occupied France."[1]

Lucien Dumais and Raymond LaBrosse formed the backbone of Operation Bonaparte which was in turn the key part of a larger escape network called Shelburne. This was to become one of the most successful escape networks of the Second World War.

Before leaving for France, the two Canadians underwent intensive training in everything from ju-jitsu to building and operating wireless radio sets. They were given fountain pens which fired tear gas, buttons which hid compasses, large amounts of francs and forged identity papers. For security reasons, each had his own code unknown to the other.

They were landed by Lysander aircraft at night in a meadow about 80 kilometres north of Paris. It was November 1943. The war was going into its final phase as Allied forces prepared to push the occupying Germans out of France. Upon landing, the two agents went their separate ways – Lucien Dumais as "Lucien Desbiens", a mortician from Amiens, France and Ray LaBrosse as "Marcel Desjardins", a salesman of electrical medical equipment.

Their task was to locate Allied airmen shot down over France and see that they were safely escorted out of the country. This could not be attempted without the cooperation and collaboration of many local people. With so many people knowing about the activities, the changes of betrayal were very great. Dumais and LaBrosse had to rely on instinct and judgement in setting up the vast network of volunteers necessary to carry out this monumental task. It is to their credit that "after the war, German records revealed that the Gestapo never really came close to destroying the network, which demonstrated the excellent security of the organization."[2]

"Safe houses" had to be found where the airmen could await departure. They had to be fed and re-clothed – a difficult task as both food and clothing were strictly rationed in occupied France. Doctors had to be recruited to treat any sick or wounded airmen, and printers located who were willing to produce false identity papers at a moment's notice.

To ensure that they didn't give themselves away to the Germans as they travelled openly by train from Paris to the coast, the airmen had to be taught how to act like French labourers, right down to the way they smoked their cigarettes. One small slip could be fatal. Guides had to be provided to evacuate the escapees in stages to Paris and on to the Britanny coast where they would be picked up by British gunboats.

LaBrosse travelled around the countryside looking for safe places from which to exchange coded messages with M.I.9 Headquarters in London. These communications were vital in order to make arrangements to get these people out of the country safely. He was constantly in danger of being picked up by German radio-detection equipment.

A small, isolated beach close to the village of Plouha on the Britanny coast was finally selected as the point where British gunboats would pick up small groups of airmen and

carry them 140 kilometres across the English Channel to safety. When the rendez-vous had been arranged, a group would gather in a small stone farmhouse belonging to one of the Resistance workers and located close to the beach. It became known as the "House of Alphonse."

The first successful evacuation was carried out on the moonless night of January 29, 1944. All arrangements had been painstakingly worked out through coded radio messages. An expectant group huddled around the radio in the old farmhouse listening to the news on the British Broadcasting Corporation's French Service. Right after the newscast, the following message crackled out:

Bonjour tout le monde à la Maison d'Alphonse

This was the go-ahead signal for the evacuation mission. Sixteen airmen and two outward-bound British agents filed slowly down a steep cliff to the beach. A flashlight was shone out to sea in an agreed-upon signal. The group waited nervously. The Germans were carefully patrolling this stretch of coastline, increasingly on the alert for an Allied invasion. The moments of silently waiting on the dark beach were especially nerve-wracking. In a short time, however, three small rubber rafts appeared out of the blackness. Arms, money and supplies were quietly unloaded and the rubber rafts with their human cargo slipped silently out to the waiting British gunboat.

Dumais and LaBrosse, of course, stayed behind to continue their daring work. As the Normandy invasion approached, more and more Allied aircraft were flying over Europe and there was an increasing need for the escape network. By the end of March 1944, 128 airmen and seven agents had been safely escorted to England thanks to the Dumais and LaBrosse team. In total, 307 Allied airmen owed their liberty to Shelburne and its key operation, Bonaparte.

It is noteworthy that the Shelburne network never lost one of its precious cargo. In fact, the only casualty was the House of Alphonse which was eventually burned down by the Germans who suspected it was a Resistance hideout.

After the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, it became increasingly difficult for civilians to travel by train as the Allied forces had damaged the rail lines in northern France. Although there were no more evacuations to be made, both Dumais and LaBrosse chose to remain in France to help the resistance workers. They organized, equipped and actually fought with them in attacking German convoys trying to get to Normandy.

After the liberation, Dumais remained in France and continued to weed out agents the Germans had left behind. Ray LaBrosse was detached to the Paris section of the British Intelligence Service. Later, both received the Military Cross as well as French and American decorations. Both returned to their families in Canada and picked up the threads of their considerably more normal lives. Not all the secret agents were so fortunate.

S.O.E. - Canadian Heroes in Action

Of an estimated 1,800 S.O.E. agents sent into occupied France between 1941 and 1945, only 25 men or two percent of the total were Canadians. According to author Roy MacLaren, however:

. . . the ratio of Canadians to other volunteers cannot be a measurement of the individual courage required to jump in the night into an alien land held by an enemy aided by informers. Of the twenty-five Canadians, seven were captured and executed, a higher proportion than for S.O.E. in France as a whole. But this statistic too is of little real moment; ultimately what matters is the resolve of those Canadians . . . [3]

Those who volunteered for work with S.O.E. in France were engaged in such diverse activities as sabotaging military installations, industrial demolition, ambushing and harassing troop movements by disrupting lines of communication and transportation. Some also served as arms instructors and radio operators.

Gustave Daniel Alfred Biéler was the first Canadian to volunteer for this type of work with S.O.E. Originally from France, Biéler had emigrated to Montreal when he was 20 and became a Canadian citizen ten years later in 1934. In 1940, as an officer with the *Régiment de Maisonneuve,* he left his wife and two young children to sail for Scotland. He volunteered for S.O.E. service 1942. At 38, he was the oldest in his training class and was called Grand-dad by the others.

After four months of training, Biéler parachuted into France southwest of Paris. His landing in France, however, did not go well. He severely injured his back in his fall and was forced to spend many months recuperating. As soon as he was able, he used his convalescence period to recruit agents for his sabotage network. The network was to receive arms dropped in by S.O.E. and use them to blow up trains and rail lines and disrupt German troop movements. He eventually oversaw the operation of 25 separate armed teams which systematically blew up rail lines and switching boxes and destroyed and derailed German troop trains in northern France.

Biéler was a warm and affable man, highly regarded by his French co-workers. He became known for the extreme care he took to avoid hurting the local population in his operations and regretted the indiscriminate damage that the bombing often entailed. Unfortunately, Biéler stayed a little too long in France, long enough for the Germans to pick up his network's radio transmissions from St. Quentin. In January 1944, the Germans closed in on Biéler and his radio operator, a 32-year-old Anglo-Swiss woman, Yolande Beekman, and arrested them in a small café in northern France.

*Four months Biéler was tortured, but the gestapo learned nothing from him – except respect for his courage and dignity. When he walked to his death in September he was accompanied by an SS guard of honour. Instead of being gassed or hanged, he was shot – the only known case of an officer in these circumstances executed by a firing squad.*4

In the view of **Gabriel Chartrand**, another Canadian agent who worked with Biéler and managed to survive his own dangerous assignments, Biéler was "the great Canadian war hero."[5]

Canadians were also key participants in another successful team, this time involved in more active underground warfare with S.O.E. The leader of this team was **Jacques Taschereau**, one of two Saskatchewan born volunteers to serve with S.O.E. Taschereau's family moved to Montreal where he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as an apprentice mechanic in 1927. He went on to serve with a militia unit and also flew as a bush pilot in Labrador and Quebec. In 1943 he was identified as a possible candidate for S.O.E. training. He went on to master all the tricks of the secret agent's trade and become a top-notch worker.

Taschereau could raise his hands when confronted by an armed man and with a quick twist of his wrist, whip a knife from the back of his shirt collar and strike a target dead centre at a distance of 15 feet.[6]

Taschereau was dropped into France in June 1944 in the company of **Paul-Émile Thibeault**. Thibeault, an ex-Golden Gloves boxer from Montreal, had been a sergeant with the *Fusiliers Mont-Royal* when he volunteered for S.O.E. service. His job on the team was to train Resistance workers in the use of arms and in making explosives.

The other two members of this four-man team were the radio operator, **James Larose,** a U.S. naval lieutenant whose grandparents were French Canadians and **Gustave Duclos**, who reversed the usual procedure as he was a native of France pretending to be a Canadian to protect his family in France should he be captured by the Germans. The team members lived in the forest of Soulaines and concentrated mainly on blowing up trains.

In moving under the noses of the Germans, Taschereau adopted a variety of disguises, including that of a funeral director and a carpenter. One night, disguised in the dark blue uniform of an engine driver of the French National Railway and accompanied by a picked group of saboteurs, Taschereau managed to enter a roundhouse and place bombs in twenty-two locomotives. Others of his sabotage units were engaged in blowing up rail lines, soon at a rate of almost one a day (having, wherever possible, forewarned the drivers to jump off their trains at a certain point).[7]

When the Germans were finally pushed out of France, ten of the Canadians who survived their hazardous service in occupied France volunteered for S.O.E. operations in southeast Asia.

S.O.E. in Yugoslavia and the Balkans

When Yugoslavia was invaded by the Germans in April 1941, many Canadians who had been born in Yugoslavia, or whose parents had been born there, volunteered to go in as secret agents to assist in the country's liberation from the Nazis. To find people of Yugoslav background who spoke Serbo-Croatian, S.O.E. actively recruited among Yugoslav emigrants in Canada.

Most of the Yugoslav-Canadians recruited for intelligence work were hard-working tradesmen and labourers in their thirties and forties. They were predominantly members of the Communist Part of Canada or of left-wing unions. An estimated 20 Yugoslav-Canadians went into Yugoslavia with S.O.E. and two with M.I.9.

In Yugoslavia there were two rival guerrilla parties within the Resistance movement: a right-wing group called the Chetniks led by Draza Mihailovic and a communist Partisan group led by Tito. The Allies eventually supported Tito's Partisan group which, despite its communist nature, proved to be more reliable and determined in their resistance to the Germans.

The first Yugoslav-Canadians to parachute into western Croatia in Yugoslavia were **Paul Pavlic**, who had been a shipyard worker in Vancouver, **Peter Erdeljac**, a stone mason and **Alexandre Simic** who was an Anglo-Serb. Their mission was to establish a communications link between Tito and British headquarters in Cairo. Pavlic and Erdeljac knew the area well from their childhood and, by visiting the local Partisan headquarters, quickly set up the required radio link between Tito and the Allies.

The determination of this group of agents is well illustrated by the service of another Yugoslav-Canadian, **Nikola Kombol**, who returned three times to Yugoslavia in the service of S.O.E. He was 43 years old and working as a lumberjack in Vancouver when he volunteered for service with S.O.E. He parachuted into Yugoslavia on July 3, 1943 and worked as an interpreter for several British liaison missions. The extremely harsh conditions of living with the Partisans undermined Kombol's health so badly that he had to be evacuated to a military hospital in Cairo. Despite this, he returned twice with S.O.E. and finally, chose to remain in his homeland after the war ended.

Another Canadian who spent almost a year with the Partisans was not himself a Yugoslav-Canadian. **Major William Jones** was a seasoned First World War Veteran and a native of Nova Scotia. Jones was dropped into Yugoslavia in May 1943. While the exact nature of Jones' duties in Yugoslavia are not clear, he is known to have worked closely with the Partisans all over Yugoslavia in fighting the Germans. He gained a reputation as one of the most enthusiastic and ardent supporters of the Partisan's cause.

A small group of Hungarian-Canadians and several Romanian- and Bulgar-Canadians also served in S.O.E. missions in their countries of origin. Missions to both Romania and Bulgaria, however, were not as fruitful as those to other countries.

S.O.E. Italian Missions

S.O.E. was quite active in Italy after the overthrow of Mussolini in 1943, working with Italian Resistance groups in anti-German sabotage and harassment. Not much is know, however, about the activities of Italio-Canadians who volunteered to return to their homeland to fight with the predominantly left-wing Resistance units against the retreating Germans.

John (Giovani) di Lucia was one of these agents. He was born in Ortona, Italy, in 1913 and moved to Canada with his family as a young boy. He was invited to volunteer for special duty while attending an RCAF officer training course at the University of Western Ontario. After S.O.E. training, di Lucia parachuted into Italy just north or Verona in early 1944. Here he assisted Resistance units with the tricky task of preventing the retreating Germans from destroying bridges, hydro-electric facilities and other important works. His efforts came to an untimely end when he was captured and executed by the Germans in May 1944.

George Robert Paterson was another Canadian S.O.E. agent with one of the longest secret service careers in Italy, although he was not of Italian descent. He was to draw on a seemingly unlimited reserve of courage and perseverance in the face of hardship and captivity. Paterson, a native of Kelowna, British Columbia, signed up with the British Army after completing undergraduate studies at Edinburgh University. After serving for a time as an intelligence officer, he joined a British commando unit and parachuted into southern Italy in February 1941. The mission was unsuccessful and the entire unit was captured by the Germans. Paterson then spent two and a half years in various prisoner-of-war camps before being imprisoned in an ancient walled fortress north of Genoa. En route to Germany, he finally managed to escape through the boards of a crowded boxcar. He joined up with a local Resistance unit and promptly got involved in an escape network helping British prisoners of war cross into Switzerland. Unfortunately, he wound up back in the hands of the Germans and this time was held for six months in a Milan prison. Once again he escaped and managed to cross over into Switzerland.

True to his reputation, Paterson accepted another S.O.E. assignment and ventured back into Italy in September 1944. This time he posed as a British prisoner of war and worked with another Resistance unit for two months. Paterson was captured by the Germans yet again and held prisoner in Milan for another six months. Even after this release, he remained in Milan for another year assisting the Allied forces before finally returning to his forestry studies in Scotland.

Force 136 – S.O.E. in Asia

In Asia, where S.O.E. was known as Force 136, the life of a secret agent was quite different. Here there was no solid, well-organized group of local people fighting the invaders, such as the French Resistance movement in France, with whom S.O.E. agents could align themselves. Most of the native peoples in the Japanese-occupied countries (Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, the Netherlands East Indies, Siam, French Indochina and the Philippines) were either indifferent or antagonistic toward the Europeans who they felt were attempting to re-impose colonial rule. There was also much hostility among different factions within the countries. Most of the time, S.O.E. had to enlist the support of local communist guerrillas in the fight against the Japanese.

Furthermore, European agents could not move about in these Asian countries disguised as local people because of their skin colour and inability to speak the local languages. Therefore, European agents were forced to operate away from the main population centres, primarily in the jungle. This exposed them to a whole new set of dangers, including many tropical diseases. Rather than disguising themselves as local people, S.O.E. agents in Asia often wore a green jungle uniform, high canvas boots and an Australian type bush hat.

The surrender of the Japanese after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, changed the role of undercover agents in the Asian countries. Their role shifted to one of accepting the surrender of Japanese units and keeping public order until civil government could be restored. Force 136 also played a key role in assisting prisoners of war in these countries.

The Role of Chinese-Canadians

Because they often could speak the local languages and blend in with local populations, Chinese-Canadians played a primary role in S.O.Es in 1943 and 1944. It was a dramatic switch for the Chinese-Canadians who up until then had been prevented from playing any role in the defence of their new country.

The Canadian government had brought many Chinese people to Canada at the end of the nineteenth century to build the Canadian Pacific Railway and others had followed. By 1940, there was a substantial Chinese population in Canada, primarily living in British Columbia. They were denied the right to vote or serve in the Armed Forces. Therefore, they were eager to serve their new country, seeing in such service the opportunity to improve their status.

In discussing the participation of Chinese-Canadians in Britain's secret service operation, Roy MacLaren wrote:

They embarked for their destinations halfway around the world without a care for the morrow. In volunteering for clandestine warfare, the spirit of adventure was as evident in them as it had been in those Canadians who went into occupied Europe. But for the young Chinese-Canadians, their service meant something more. For them, it was also an affirmation of equality. Their parents, or even grandparts, as well as themselves, had been second-class Canadians, deprived of the full privileges of citizenship. They were ready, even eager, to fill all the obligations of citizenship so that in return they might receive all those rights under which other Canadians took for granted.[8]

Hundreds of Chinese-Canadians volunteered for S.O.E. service – far more than any other group of Canadians – and many were selected and underwent gruelling training in Canada as well as at special S.O.E. training camps in Australia and India. Many of them did not actually see combat service before the Japanese surrender. Their willingness to serve, however, combined with the excellent record of those who did, is worthy of acknowledgement.

It is interesting to note here that, in 1945, the government of British Columbia gave the right to vote to all those, including Chinese and Japanese, who had served in the Canadian Armed Forces in either world war. Furthermore, over the next few years, both the provincial and federal governments dismantled their anti-Asian legislation.[9]

With the Head-Hunters in Sarawak

Sarawak, in northern Borneo, had been occupied by the Japanese since early 1942. When the first S.O.E. team landed in this wild, jungle-covered land, they took great risks to enlist local mountain tribes in their fight against the Japanese. Fortunately, these local people detested the Japanese and became loyal and indispensable allies to the S.O.E. agents. The Ibans, one of the most aggressive of these head-hunting tribes, were a considerable help to S.O.E. in clearing this area of Japanese.

The small, black-haired, brown-skinned Ibans had adapated perfectly to their lush and unchanging environment; they could move effortlessly through either the dense jungle or along the sinuous river with equal skill. The Japanese gradually withdrew down the river, the head-hunters spreading terror among the debilitated enemy.[10]

It was into this situation that 29-year-old **Roger Cheng** and four other Chinese-Canadians, **Jimmy Shiu, Norman Lowe, Roy Chan** and **Lewis King**, were flown on August 6, 1945. Cheng was the first Chinese-Canadian to become an officer in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, a rare accomplishment in those days. He was an electrical engineering graduate from McGill University and spoke fluent Cantonese, making him a natural to head this team. Upon arrival, the group joined a small British team which was gathering information on the movements of the Japanese as well as about conditions in

prison camps in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, where about 25,000 British prisoners of war were being held.

The day after the team leanded, the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Although Japan surrendered, many isolated Japanese units refused to accept defeat and the war dragged on for months. The team's major accomplishment was assisting in transferring many emaciated prisoners to Australia before returning home themselves.

In Malaya and Burma

The British surrendered Singapore to Japan on February 15, 1942. It was not until February 1945, however, that S.O.E learned that an arrangement had been negotiated whereby the Communist Party placed its Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (M.P.A.J.A.) under the general operational orders of Lord Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command in return for British instructors with arms, explosives, money, medecine and other supplies. Therefore, S.O.E. decided to support local communists against the Japanese invaders and thus agents in Malaya fought side by side with communist guerrillas.

In June 1945, more than 100 Force 136 officers were sent into Malaya. Among these men were three French Canadians who had already completed missions with S.O.E. in France and ten Chinese-Canadian sergeants. Their task was initially was to train the M.P.A.J.A. to disrupt enemy communication and supply lines, ambush troops and gather information. With the surrender of the Japanese, their task shifted to moderating fighting between the guerrillas and the Japanese until the British and Indian armies arrived, and maintaining peace between Malayan and Chinese guerrillas.

Force 136 agents were also involved in assisting prisoners of war in Malaya. For example, in the first two weeks of September 1945, more than 1,000 tonnes of supplies and 120 doctors and other relief workers were flown to all known POW camps in Malaya thanks to the work of Force 136 teams in the area.

Nineteen-year-old **Henry Fung** of Vancouver was the first, and the youngest, of several Chinese-Canadians who served in the area around Kuala Lumpur, today the captial city of Malaysia. He parachuted in on June 22, 1945, and worked with an S.O.E. team in sabotaging Japanese communications and harassing Japanese road convoys. With the formal Japanese surrender in September, the team took over control from the Japanese garrison in the city of Kajang and attempted to maintain order until British troops arrived. Fung returned to Britain suffering from jaundice and malaria and eventually made it back to Canada.

Operation Tideway Green, which worked with the M.P.A.J.A., was led by one of S.O.E.'s "old boys", **Joseph Henri Adélard Benoit**. Benoit had already completed sabotage missions in France and undergone jungle training in Ceylon and Burma.

This, the only all-Canadian team of Force 136, parachuted into Malaya on August 5, 1945. Other team members were **John Elmore Hanna, Ernie Louie** and **Roger Caza**. Hanna had spent much of his childhood in northern China and could speak Mandarin fluently. He immigrated to Canada in 1931 and joined the army 10 years later. In September 1944, at 29-year-of-age, Hanna volunteered to use his knowledge of Chinese on special duty in Asia. Seven months of training in New Delhi followed.

Ernie Louie was a Chinese-Canadian who spoke fluent Cantonese and acted as interpreter for the team. The fourth team member was Roger Caza, a former journalist from Ottawa, who like Benoit, was also an S.O.E. veteran, having served as a wireless operator in France. He also trained at S.O.E.'s Eastern Warfare School and at the jungle training school in Sri Lanka and had been in Malaya since March of that year.

The team spent six days, three in torrential rain, trekking through 120 kilometres of jungle to northern Johore. Here they were to gather information about Japanese movements and to instruct and supply local guerrillas. Since the Japanese had surrendered by the time they reached their destination, the team's mission shifted to assisting Allied prisoners of war, many of whom were suffering from disease and malnutrition after three and a half years in captivity. With the assistance of an Australian corporal and captain, Benoit's team located 900 near starving and sick POWs and organized food and medical drops for them as well as initiating arrangements to get them home.

The members of Tideway Green stayed on in Malaya, involved in police work and civil administration, until mid-November when they returned to Canada.

We have already met **Jacques Taschereau** and **Paul-Émile Thibeault** working with the French Resistance in German-occupied France in 1944. In March 1945, they were back at it again following months of training at S.O.E.'s Eastern Warfare School where they learned about jungle survival and local languages and customs. They parachuted into Burma in March and April 1945 as did six other Canadians who had also served in France **(Jean-Paul Archambault, Joseph Benoit, Pierre Chassé, Joseph Fournier, Pierre Muenier and Bentley Cameron Hunter)**.

Taschereau, part of Force 136's Operation Character, linked up with local guerrilla tribesmen called Karens to ambush Japanese troops attempting to escape across the mountains into Thailand. Paul-Émile Thibeault parachuted into Burma with **Joseph "Rocky" Fournier**, a wiry, tough miner from New Brunswick who had already completed one mission as a radio operator with S.O.E. in France. Fournier lived with the Karen tribesmen and took part in ambushing the retreating Japanese. While Thibeault instructed the Karens in the use of explosives, Fournier provided the essential radio link with S.O.E.'s Burma section headquarters in Calcutta. Fournier also took part in several

ambushes. Thibeault and Fournier were both victims of recurrent dysentry and malaria, conditions which most S.O.E. agents in the Asian countries had to learn to endure.

Conclusion

Canadians joined with men and women from many countries to fight for democracy. These people were rugged individualists, idealistic and wiling to put their lives on the line to defend their ideals. Theirs was a lonely, dangerous and demanding job.

While they often worked alone, the success of their missions depended on the establishment of a team of reliable people who could work smoothly together. Unlike those who fought in the organized military forces, secret agents had to personally enlist the cooperation of like-minded individuals to create this team. Officially, they did not have a high military rank and yet they were definitely leaders.

Unlike the efforts of the Allied military machine, the *results* of their work are not as clear-cut. Their battles were not fought openly or their victories measured in terms of the number of enemy killed or amount of territory gained. As Roy MacLaren wrote:

Intangible and ultimately immeasurable though such assistance to resistance may have been, it was an essential element in the conflict which eventually vanquished the tyranny of Hitler from Europe and that of the Japanese militarists from Asia.[11]

There is no question that these Canadians made a different to the people in occupied countries and to the final outcome of the Second World War. Through their uncommonly courageous acts, they saved many lives. We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the following brave men and women who faced countless risks in enemy-occupied territory to help others win freedom. It is also dedicated to those others whose names are not recorded – they are acknowledged although unnamed.

Alcock, Ian
Archambault, Jean-Paul
Avery, Harry
Beauregard, Alcide
LaPointe, Ferdinand Joseph
Larose, James
Lee, Bill
Lee, Bing

Benoit, Joseph Henri Adélard
Biéler, Gustave Daniel Alfred
Biéler, René-Maurice
Bodo, Gustave
Bozanich, Rudolph
Butt, Sonia
Byerley, Robert Bennett
Byrnes, Henry "Barney"
Caza, Roger Marc
Chan, Roy
Chartrand, Joseph Gabrielle
Chassé, Pierre Edouard
Cheng, Roger
Chin, George
Chung, Charlie
Dafoe, Colin Scott
d'Artois, Lionel Guy
Dehler, John Harold McDougal
Deniset, François Adolphe
Derry, Sam
Diclic, George
di Lucia, John
di Vantro, Angelo
Dolly, Cyril Carlton Mohammad
Druzic, Milan
Duchalard, Charles Joseph
Duclos, Gustave
Dumais, Lucien
Durocher, Lucien Joseph
Durovecz, André
Erdeljac, Peter
Fournier, Joseph Ernest
Fung, Henry
Fusco, Frank
Gelleny, Joseph
Georgescu,George Eugene Stephane
Lew, Bob
L'Italien, "Tintin"
Lizza, Peter
Lock, Tom
Louie, Ernie
Louie, Victor
Lowe, Norman
Macalister, John Kenneth
Magyar, Adam
Manzo, Peter
Markos, Steve
Mate, Steve
Meunier, Pierre Charles
Misercordia, Frank
Moldovan, Victor
Munro, Colin
Naidenoff, Toncho
Nardi, Vincent
Paterson, George Robert
Pavicich, Marko
Pavicich, Mica
Pavlic, Paul
Pickersgill, Frank Herbert Dedrick
Rodrigues, Georges
Sabourin, Romeo
Serdar, Stevan
Sharic, Joe
Shiu, Jimmy
Simic, Alexandre
Sirois, Allyre Louis Joseph
Smrke, Janez
Starcevic, Ivan
Stefano, Joseph
Stewart, Arthur
Stichman, Paul
Strange, Burton

Gordon, Laurence Laing
Hanna, John Elmore
Herter, Adam
Ho, Harry
Hunter, Bentley Cameron
Joly, Guy
Jones, William
Kendall, Francis Woodley
King, Lewis
Kombol, Nikola
Labelle, Paul-Émile
LaBrosse, Raymond
LaFleur, Conrad
Landes, Roger
Stuart, William Yull
Taschereau, Leonard Jacques
Thibeault, Paul-Émile
Turk, Michael
Vanier, Robert
Vass, Alexander
Veilleux, Marcel
Vetere, Ralph
Wickey, John Hippolyte
Williams, Val
Wong, Ted
Wooler, John Raymond
Wright, Bruce
Yaritch, A.D.