ARISTIDE

Warlord of the Resistance

DAVID D NICOLSON

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The Story of Roger Landes

by

DAVID NICOLSON

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJUF - Anti-Japanese United Forces
AIR - Royal Air Force Archives
BCRA - Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action
CAB - Cabinet Papers Archives
FFI - Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur
FTP - Francs Tireurs et Partisans
FO - Foreign Office Archives
INA - Indian National Army
OCM - Organization Civiles et Militaire
ORA - Organization de Résistance de l'Armée de l'Armistice
PRO - Public Record Office
PWE - Political Warfare Executive
RAF - Royal Air Force
SD - Special Duties Squadrons
SHAEF - Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SOE - Special Operations Executive
WO - War Office Archives

CODENAMES

Angelot, Robert - Julot
Bonnier, Captain - Hypotenuse
Borde, Alban - George
Bouillard, André - Dédé le Basque
Campet, Christian - Lancelot
Charlin, Jean - Arthur
Chevalier, Pierre - Luc
Cominetti - Charlie
Corbin, Charles - Allyre
Culioli, Pierre - Pierre Leclair
de Baissac, Claude - David
Defence, Marcel - Dédé
d'Milleret - Colonel Carnot
Ducas, Pierre - Honore
Dufour - Moragglia, Lemaitre
Dussarat, Leonce - Leonce de Landes
Duval, André - Arthur
Expert, Marcel - Marcel
Fabas - Lulu
Faget, François - François
Faget, Margaret - Jacqueline
Flower, Raymond - Gaspard
Grandclement, André - Bernard
Hayes, Charles - Victor
Herbert, Mary - Claudine
Landes, Roger - Robert, Stanislas, Aristide
Langlade - Drean
Manolitsakis, John - Cyriel
Meunier, Pierre Charles - Edouard

Mouchet - Jeannot
Norman, Gilbert - Archambault
Paillere, Danny - Danny
Peulévé, Harry - Paul
Poirier, Jean - Prunier
Rabinovitch, Alec - Arnaud
Ree, Harry - César
Rudellat, Yvonne - Jacqueline
Sirois, Allyre Louis - Gustav
Starr, George - Hilaire
Suttill, Francis - Prosper
Yeo-Thomas - Shelley

Allyre - Charles Corbin
Archambault - Gilbert Norman
Aristide - Roger Landes
Arnaud - Alec Rabinovitch
Arthur - Jean Charlin
Arthur - André Duval
Bernard - André Grandclement
César - Harry Ree
Charlie - Cominetti
Claudine - Mary Herbert
Colonel Carnot - d'Milleret
Cyriel - John Manolitsakis
Danny - Danny Paillere
David - Claude de Baissac
Dédé - Marcel Defence
Dédé le Basque - André Bouillard
Drean - Langlade
Edouard - Pierre Charles Meunier
Francois - Francois Faget
Gaspard - Raymond Flower

George - Alban Borde
Gustav - Allyre Louis Sirois
Hilaire - George Starr
Honore - Pierre Ducas
Hypotenuse - Captain Bonnier
Jacqueline - Margaret Faget
Jacqueline - Yvonne Rudellat
Jeannot - Mouchet
Julot - Robert Angelot
Lancelot - Christian Campet
Lemaitre - Dufour
Leonce de Landes - Leonce Dussarat
Luc - Pierre Chevalier
Lulu - Fabas
Marcel - Marcel Expert
Moragglia - Dufour
Paul - Harry Peulévé
Pierre Leclair - Pierre Culioli
Prosper - Francis Suttill
Prunier - Jean Poirier
Robert - Roger Landes
Shelley - Yeo-Thomas
Stanislas - Roger Landes
Victor - Charles Hayes

FOREWORD

This is not the story of SOE, it is the story of one man, myself, Roger Landes. These are the events I witnessed during the Second World War in France and Malaya. I started as Wireless Operator for the 'Scientist' circuit in Bordeaux and became the Organizer later, after we had been betrayed. After escaping over the Pyrenees into Spain and returning to Bordeaux in March, 1944, I organized the 'Actor' circuit until the Liberation in September, 1944.

With one brief break, part of it spent in a Spanish prison, from the time when I first parachuted into France in November, 1942 to when I was personally ordered out of that country by General de Gaulle on 17 September, 1944, I was in almost daily contact with other members of those circuits, while the Germans were trying to arrest us all. When I first parachuted into France, I believed there was an agreement between SOE and the BCRA, and that the plans had de Gaulle's full approval. I was to receive a rude awakening when I was confronted by de Gaulle in September, 1944.

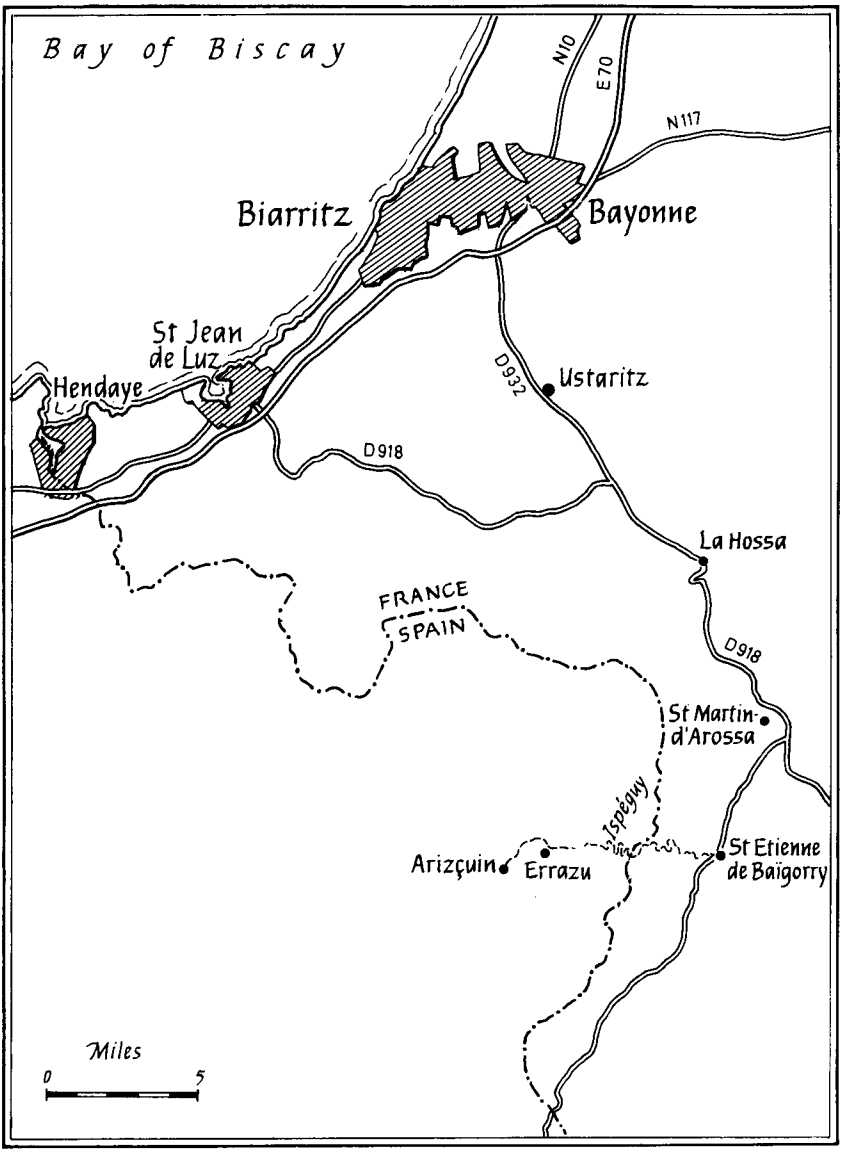
When the Délégué Militaire Regional 'Triangle' arrived in Bordeaux at the beginning of August 1944, I placed myself at his disposal and, as the DMR had no radio contact with London, I also used my own equipment to send his messages. Apart from a few members of the 'Prosper' circuit, I knew no one in any other circuit, and what I knew of this important circuit in Paris was the result of disobedience of the elementary rules of security. I cannot therefore make any comment on the work or worth of any of the other circuits as I only know what I personally saw happen and, as is explained, any other information was given to me after the war by the persons concerned.

I regret the death of my very great friend M. Gaston Cusin, Ex Commissaire de La Republique with whom during the clandestine war in France and the Liberation of the South-West and since, for nearly fifty years, I always had the most cordial relations. I would also like to thank Christian Campet (Lancelot) who was my right-hand assistant on my return to France in March, 1944. His courage and devotion to duty allowed me to remain in personal obscurity, making contact with all my groups in safety.

The honour which I received from the French Government on 30 October, 1992, Officier de Légion d' Honneur, is due to the men, women and children of the Resistance; those who died and those surviving, who helped to build up the 'Actor' circuit under the command of 'Aristide'. I know how much they suffered during the four years of the German occupation and, in spite of their moral and physical suffering, they proved their courage by energetic example. I have had the honour to be associated with their actions which contributed to the liberation of South-West France, and I would like to express my admiration, respect and very deep gratitude to them.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the author, David Nicolson, who has written down the facts of my life and military career; I feel that it has been represented accurately. Anything in the book which has nothing to do with me is due to the research he carried out at the Public Record Office at Kew, London.

Roger Landes (Aristide)
Major. MC and Bar.,
Officier de Legion d' Honneur
Croix de Guerre with Palm.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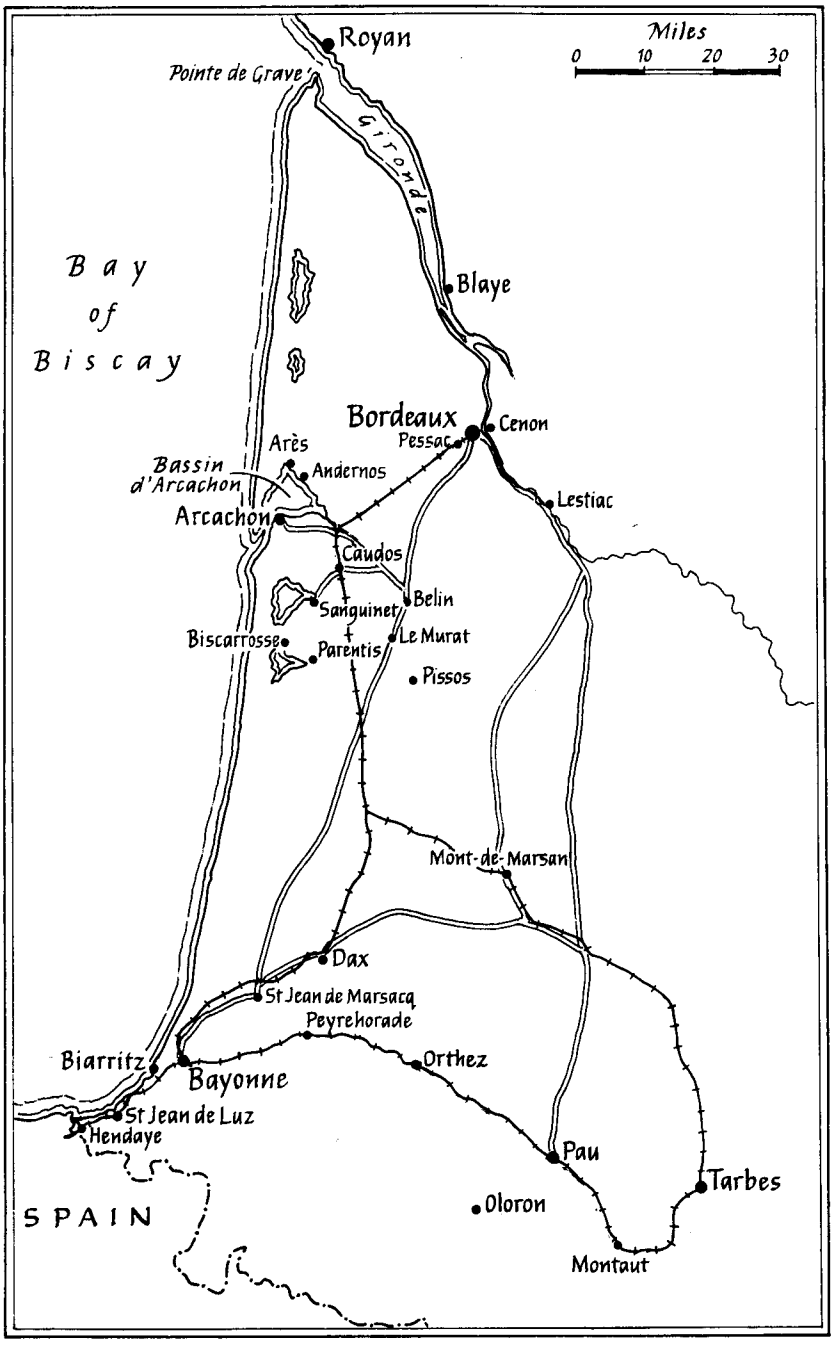
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Pau
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Oloron
Montaut

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A CIVILIAN BACKGROUND

The family history of Roger Landes is lost in the mists which descend upon a family which moves frequently, with consequent erosions of memorabilia and documents. Even the origin of his surname is more a family tradition than an accepted or recorded fact.

His paternal great-grandfather, who may have been Jewish, was born in 1827 in that part of Poland which had been incorporated into the Russian Empire. In about 1847 or 1848 he emigrated to England to avoid conscription into the Russian army. He knew little English and spoke that badly. Family tradition has it that, when asked his name, he thought the immigration officials were asking from where he had come, and he replied, 'Polands, Polands,' with the result that he was registered as 'Landes'. The fact that Roger, less than a century later, was to serve his adopted country in the Landes, a Département in south-west France, is one of life's coincidences.

Little more is known about Roger Landes' paternal grandfather, apart from the fact that he was 65 when he married Roger's grandmother. She was his second wife, born in 1858 in Russia and emigrating to England in 1870. At the time of their wedding his grandfather had two daughters from his first marriage who were five years older than his second wife. But they were not destined to remain long in London, for in 1890 the family moved to Paris. Roger's grandmother died in 1916, the year he was born.

Roger's mother, Anna, was born in Russia on 13 May, 1892, the eldest of five children. She married his father, Barnet, in February, 1913, in Paris and their first child, Marcel, was born on 9 April, 1914.

As Roger's father couldn't speak much English, though a

British subject and willing to 'do his bit', he joined the French Foreign Legion to serve in the First World War, but was invalided out six months afterwards. He was a jeweller, which had been the family trade in Russia; the war effort had little enough use for a jeweller, so he was no longer required for military service.

Roger was born on 16 December, 1916, in Paris, a British citizen like his brother Marcel. On 21 May, 1924, a third son, Claude, was born to Anna, completing the family. The regulations at the time were that Roger and his brothers had to make a choice of the nationality they would adopt when they were 21 years old, partly based on their residence between the ages of 16 and 21.

Roger attended primary and secondary schools in Paris, but shortly after his thirteenth birthday his life took a new direction. He must have shown a good deal of intelligence for a boy just turned 13, for a neighbouring builder asked his parents if he could take Roger on to train as a quantity surveyor. They agreed and thus Roger began his career. He worked during the day, preparing accounts and answering clients' queries, while attending technical classes in the evening.

His classes were in preparation for studies at l'École des Beaux Arts in Paris, which accepted only 16 students twice a year. Roger came fifteenth in the first period for which he was eligible. In November, 1934, he joined l'École des Beaux Arts, an offshoot of the University of Paris, from which he graduated in 1935. That year he obtained the Prix d'Honneur, a silver medal and two book prizes, demonstrating his talent as well as his industry.

However, the depression had not been kind to some other members of his family. In 1933 his father was declared bankrupt and returned to London, hoping to obtain employment as a jeweller. Funds were so tight that at first he could not afford for his wife and youngest child to accompany him, but by 1934 his situation allowed him to send for Anna and Claude to join him in London.

From 1934 until 1936 Roger lived in furnished rooms in Paris with his older brother Marcel. This came to an end when Marcel chose to become French, a choice which did not appeal to

Roger. Marcel's first duty as a French citizen was to do one year's military service, which finished in 1938; on his return the brothers lived together once again.

In September, 1938, after the Munich crisis, Roger realized that war was inevitable. If he remained in France the French army was likely to claim him, but he had no wish to join it. From what he had seen and heard, he believed that most French army officers were fascists. He also considered that France would lose a war with Germany. His choice was either to remain in France, become French, and serve in an army he thought would lose under officers he mistrusted, or move to England to be with his parents and his younger brother Claude.

England had become almost a second home to Roger. He travelled there two or three times a year to see his parents and, in the process, had come to like the country better than France. He therefore chose to leave France to live with his family in Stamford Hill, London.

Arriving in October, 1938, he set about getting a position. He went to County Hall to apply for a job in the Architect's Department of London County Council, where his qualifications would be of some use, and was accepted as a technical assistant at a salary of £3.10s per week. Each day began with a two mile walk from his parents' home to Dalston to catch a tram for a sixpenny return journey to work. His spare time was taken up with studying classical architecture at a local Polytechnic. As he kept only a guinea from his wages, giving the remainder to his mother for his keep, little was left for entertainment, especially as he had to find the fees for his Polytechnic course.

In December, 1939, after the outbreak of the Second World War, the 1916 age group was called up for service in the British armed forces. When he went to be registered, Roger was asked for his qualifications and said that he could speak fluent French - a fact of which the interviewer could hardly have been unaware, as he retained a strong French accent. But his work was deemed to be vital, so the Architect's Department at County Hall obtained deferment from military service on his behalf.

As part of preparations to meet the mass air attacks which were confidently expected, Roger was transferred to the Rescue Service in Islington as a surveyor. His job was to survey damaged

buildings to determine if they could be repaired or should be demolished. He worked on this classification throughout the worst air attacks, helping to ensure that as little as possible was wasted, spending much of his time in the Control Room in Islington Town Hall checking Damage Reports and waiting for the All Clear so he could visit the bomb-damaged sites.

Roger worked in Islington until early 1941, due mainly to the excellence of his Parisian training. His position was considered vital, and his employers maintained successfully that it would take a long time to train a replacement. But by March, 1941, the army would not defer his call-up any longer, so Roger reported for Basic Training preparatory to joining the Royal Corps of Signals to train as a wireless operator.

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SOE OFFICER

Roger started his Basic Training at a camp near Trowbridge in Wiltshire, but his lack of height and 'Frenchness' set him apart from the others. Moreover, he developed a hernia which required surgery at a cottage hospital in Berkeley, Gloucestershire, half of which had been taken over by the army for military patients. The treatment called for three weeks' complete bed rest, followed by a further three weeks' waiting for a place in a convalescent home.

In July, 1941, he was sent to a convalescent depot in Westbury, not far from Trowbridge, where he remained until September before being declared A1. Following a week's leave, he was posted to a holding battalion in Colwyn Bay, Wales, to await another move. After three weeks he was sent to a holiday camp at Prestatyn to be trained as a wireless operator.

He finished his training at the beginning of February, 1942, a fully qualified B3 wireless operator, unaware that the War Office had been keeping a constant eye on him. If his test results were poor, a senior officer would ask why his marks had dropped. At the time he thought nothing of it, but later realized that this was part of Special Operations Executive (SOE) surveillance. A first-rate W/T operator who spoke more French than English, young and fit, he was just the kind of man that SOE was seeking, and he had been noted since he first joined up.

Wheels began to turn. One day there was an order for him to report to the War Office for an interview, leaving the same day. On his arrival he was met by Lewis Gielgud, brother of the famous actor, wearing the uniform of an army captain. Gielgud spoke to him in perfect French, reading from notes in a file. From the size of the file it was clear that someone had been studying

him closely, even down to his politics and ideals. Gielgud knew about his Parisian training, details of the course at l'École des Beaux Arts, and his work for the LCC. This was no casual meeting, but the culmination of long and concentrated study.

'We are sending British personnel into France who can speak fluent French and use wireless sets,' Gielgud said. 'Radio operators who will be able to pass for French people. From the report I have on your skill in wireless communications, and as you have lived in France for so long, you are the perfect man to send, should you be willing to go. There are three ways to send you to France: by parachute, by motor boat, or by fishing boat from Gibraltar. The danger is you may be caught, in which case you will probably be tortured and sent to certain death. Will you accept? Yes or no? You have five minutes to think about it.'

Over the years a rumour has grown up among other members of SOE, fostered by certain writers, that Roger took a penny from his pocket and spun it in the air. He denies this, though it catches the manner of the man. He knew that he would be more use to the war effort in France and, after a few moments' thought, said 'Yes'.

It was a momentous decision, which was to lead him into a dirty war against the Gestapo, the Wehrmacht and the Milice; into treachery, betrayal and loneliness. His only comfort would be that he was being useful, measuring his usefulness by the rigour of German efforts to find and hold him. It was a war in which he was to excel.

After the first moment of surprise had passed, he asked, 'How did you know I was British and a member of the Royal Corps of Signals?' Gielgud answered, 'From your registration papers in December, 1939. That's the reason we know so much about you; why you were called up, with no further deferment, and sent to the Royal Corps of Signals. You will return to your company and, within a fortnight, we will arrange your transfer. If anyone in your unit asks questions about this interview, you need only tell them that we wanted information about Paris.'

SOE had evolved in a variety of diguises from the merging of two Military Intelligence Departments, 'D' and 'GS R', later renamed 'MI R' and a Foreign Office Propaganda Department 'EH', somewhere between the Armed Forces and SIS, the Secret

Intelligence Service, with an operational manifesto heavily biased in favour of Foreign Office sympathies. SOE could operate abroad provided there was no clash with Foreign Office operations or preceptions and, though there was an appeal procedure, the odds were weighted against it.[1]

The newly-formed SOE was allowed to recruit among refugees from foreign forces who arrived in Britain with nothing but a desire to return to homelands swept clear of Nazis, provided of course there were no objections from their own governments. But SOE wasn't able to recruit anyone in whom the Foreign Office (or by implication SIS) were interested. Specifically, they were to keep out of the USA and Latin America.

There was a further curb on the recruitment of SOE personnel. Though it was allowed by the Foreign Office to recruit from foreign forces, General de Gaulle insisted that no Frenchmen were recruited, which restricted SOE to French-speaking Britons and French Canadians. As Roger had been born in France there was some initial concern about evading this restriction, but the matter was successfully resolved. Later in the war the British were to ignore this stricture, and de Gaulle and his followers were always suspicious of anyone who had worked for Britain.

Despite these handicaps, the establishment of SOE worldwide was set at 12,000 personnel, though it never exceeded about 10,600 in practice. Many worked in the transport pool, or providing radio and training facilities; some were civilians.[2] Roger was an obvious candidate for SOE field work, however, with his language skills and wireless training.

Within a fortnight of his initial meeting with Gielgud, Roger was instructed to report to a flat in Orchard Court, Portman Square, and was told to use the name Robert. Much to his surprise, the door was opened by a butler who spoke perfect French: Parks, who had worked for Barclays Bank in Paris before the war. His memory was astounding, so good that he only had to see someone once to remember him 20 years later.

Roger was taken to a room where Captain André Simon, a peacetime wine merchant, was waiting. Simon was to be his

[1] PRO FO 898/28
[2] PRO WO 212/204

conducting officer, and asked Roger if he had any money. Being only a signalman, whose pay in those days stretched no distance, he replied in the negative. He was given £10 and sent out to buy two khaki shirts - beginning the process of turning the raw signalman into an SOE officer. Roger was able to see his parents that night, though he was to tell them nothing about what he was doing, and reported back to Orchard Court the following morning.

On his arrival there he found nine other people waiting: three officers (a lieutenant and two captains); three civilians; and the rest, like himself, privates in the British army. A small bus took them to a clothing store where they were issued with new battledress, which temporarily made them all second lieutenants, except for the substantive officers who retained their ranks. From there they went to one of the first of SOE's Special Training Schools at Wanborough Manor on the Hog's Back, near Guildford in Surrey, to start preliminary training. In that bus were some of the great names of SOE, remembered for both their deeds and sacrifices, including Francis Suttill (Prosper), Claude de Baissac (David), and Harry Peulévé (Paul).

Three weeks of training followed, during which they learned how to use various explosives, including the new 'plastique', unarmed combat, and a lot of physical training. If he didn't like it, or if he was not up to the required standard, Roger (or any of them) could return to the unit whence he came. Wanborough Manor was commanded by Major Roger de Wesselow of the Coldstream Guards, who, though a disciplinarian, ensured that all meals in the mess were taken with the ten trainees and the members of his directing team.

The training was fairly rigorous, but as all the participants had had at least some Basic Training they were prepared for it. Rising at 7am each morning, a cup of cocoa and a biscuit were followed by an hour of physical training before breakfast. After breakfast, the process continued. Part of the intention was to test reliability under the influence of alcohol, which had little effect on Roger as he only drank a small amount of wine with meals. Recordings were also made when the trainees were asleep to discover whether they talked in their sleep and, most important, in what language. There were no women at Wanborough Manor then; at other

establishments, FANYs (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) provided some of the services.

Roger was allowed to write to his parents, though all letters were censored. This was usual, as all mail from soldiers, of whatever rank, was subject to the censorship of senior officers. His parents could reply via a PO box in London; their letters were also censored. Later, from France, he was able to send messages to them on birthdays and anniversaries, but these were always sent as though coming from the Middle East. Roger's father believed he had a desk job somewhere in the Middle East until informed of his son's first gallantry award.

At the end of the three weeks, the ten were sent to Scotland by train with a new conducting officer. Their destination was part of the Arisaig complex established for SOE training near Loch Morar, a long sea loch opposite the Isle of Skye. It was a large house out in the mountains, miles from anywhere, and there they started their Commando Training.

Britain was dotted with these isolated establishments during the Second World War, hired by the Government for the 'duration'. The locals probably knew a good deal more of what went on than the Government would have liked, but country people the world over are wary of strangers; anyone seeking information would meet uncomprehending looks, shrugs, and a quiet call to the local police.

They stayed there three and a half weeks for extensive practical training with explosives and unarmed combat, plus perfecting their shooting ability with a wide variety of weapons. Part of the weapons training included firing at sounds in total darkness: out in the 'field', as occupied territory was known, this might be the only shooting they would ever do, aiming by instinct at a shadow on a darkened wall. They learned how to cross mountains, carrying out long marches with full packs and gaining experience in surviving in an inhospitable climate - this part of Scotland holds the record for being the wettest and bleakest in the country. There were no mixed courses, and the only people Roger knew were the conducting officers and the other men on the course. Each was given a codename (Roger retained 'Robert'), as they were forbidden to give their true names to anyone.

This basic security would not surprise members of any similar

organization today, but it was an innovation then. From the first, SOE tried to keep all their agents separate, so that in the field they were less likely to give anyone away. Later Lord Selborne, the Minister for Economic Warfare, boasted that SOE managed to stay intact while the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (FFI) and Giraudist circuits collapsed due to bad security.

Trainees were also encouraged to try and escape without being caught. Not only did this check on security, but also gave an outlet to high spirits which might otherwise cause tensions under the severe restrictions. In case of trouble they were given telephone numbers to call, as no one carried identity papers. Even for fit and active young men the schedule was distinctly odd, and different from any physical training they had known.

One exercise involved jumping from a lorry travelling at 30mph and rolling on their shoulders when making contact with the ground, which seemed to have no practical relevance. But it was a useful introduction to the next stage of their training: parachuting. For this they were sent to Ringway airport, near Manchester, which remained the main parachute school in Britain until after the war. There were several different courses going on at the same time, but the SOE agents were kept apart.

Contrary to popular opinion, the parachutes were not all made of silk (a very precious commodity at the time as a result of Japanese attacks on South-East Asia), but a particularly fine grade of cotton, woven on special looms to produce a strong yet fine weave[3]. Some were also made of nylon, almost as precious as silk. The demand for these materials was vast: rubberized, they were used for barrage balloons, dinghies and 'Mae West' lifejackets.

When Roger and his companions arrived at Ringway, they were shown how a parachute was made and packed. One was laid out on a long packing table and instructions were given as to how each piece fitted into the whole. As these men had to jump from 500 feet, below the lowest jump-off point for the newly-formed paratroops, it was important to get it right first time. There was no second chance: unlike the paratroops, they would not carry a reserve 'chute.

The instructor, an RAF NCO, asked if anyone had flown

[3] PRO AIR 9/425