The OSS and Operation TORCH: The Beginning of the Beginning

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Until July 1941, America had never run a clandestine service. The U.S. government had operated under the rule, famously articulated by former Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson: “Gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.” But in early 1941, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt confronted the possibility of U.S. entry into World War II, he saw the need to create an agency that would bring U.S. foreign intelligence – then conducted on an ad hoc basis by various federal departments – under one roof. On July 11, 1941, FDR appointed Colonel William J. ‘Wild Bill’ Donovan – a decorated World War I hero and well-known Republican lawyer – as the leader of this new civilian agency, dubbed the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI) and answerable only to the President. A little less than a year later, a presidential military order transformed COI into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – an arm of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, charged with collecting and analyzing strategic information and performing covert operations.

Despite the agency’s reincarnation as a military enterprise, the OSS struggled to find traction amidst bureaucratic turf wars in Washington and to wean itself from its dependence on counterparts at the British intelligence services, including Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, or Military Intelligence 6), the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the British Security Cooperation (BSC). According to many American and British sources, bureaucrats saw the OSS as a weak ring of amateur spies that provided little useful information, ridiculed by the satirical title “Oh So Silly.” But in November 1942, when the OSS participated in Operation TORCH

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1 Stimson is reported to have coined this phrase when he shut down the MI-8, also known as the “Black Chamber” – the first peacetime cryptanalytical agency run by the State Department – in 1929, as Secretary of State under President Hoover. Stimson later changed this opinion and was a force behind the creation of COI in his role as War Secretary.

2 The SOE was a wartime agency created by Winston Churchill and Hugh Dalton to perform espionage and sabotage behind the lines in Nazi-occupied countries. It was disbanded in 1946. The BSC was a cover organization set up by the MI6 in New York City in 1940, aimed at influencing U.S. policy in favor of Britain.

3 See in particular, Nelson D. Lankford, ed., The OSS Against the Reich: The World War II Diaries of Colonel K.E. Bruce, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press).
alongside American and British forces in French North Africa, now Morocco and Algeria, the organization’s bureaucratic reputation took a turn. General Mark W. Clark requested an OSS contingent alongside his Fifth Army at Oujda in Morocco, and the British SOE rushed to set up its own independent foothold in Algiers. What made Operation TORCH a turning point for the OSS and its role in the war? And what were the implications of this change for Anglo-American intelligence cooperation?

Ironically, OSS contributions in military intelligence, psychological warfare, and covert operations at best offered uneven support to Operation TORCH. Most scholars agree that the OSS failed to accomplish many of its objectives for the November 8th invasion; one author argues that OSS efforts, in fact, “had dire consequences for the future of the Allied war effort.” But while the OSS had mixed operational results, TORCH proved a major political win for the new organization. The OSS gained recognition from top U.S. military brass following TORCH and transitioned into a new relationship with British intelligence, moving out from under its tutelage to become a more equal partner – and a rival as well.

Creating America’s First Spy Agency

The official narrative of America’s first spy agency – related in the War Report of the OSS, published by the War Department in 1946 – presents its genesis as the one-man mission of Bill Donovan. “This concept [for COI] evolved from two missions performed for President Roosevelt in 1940 and 1941 by the man who guided COI/OSS throughout its existence – William Joseph Donovan,” the War Report reads. Specifically, in July 1940, Donovan was sent on a “fact-finding mission” to survey the much mythologized Nazi fifth-column activities in Europe and to gauge Britain’s ability to fight in the wake of the defeat of France and the British

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retreat from Dunkirk. Then, in 1941, Roosevelt sent Donovan abroad again, this time to the Mediterranean and the Middle East to “make a strategic appreciation from an economic, political, and military standpoint.” These trips convinced Donovan that the U.S. needed a centralized intelligence entity to “assimilate the growing mass of material” coming into Washington and engage in “irregular and unorthodox warfare,” according to the War Report.

At FDR’s request, Donovan summarized his ideas on the need for a new organization. Entitled “Memorandum of Establishment of Service of Strategic Information,” the June 10 proposal called for an agency that would supply “accurate and complete enemy intelligence reports upon which military operational decisions could be based.” While Donovan’s formulation saw the COI primarily as a device for military intelligence, the agency’s principal focus would soon evolve into the shadow war tactics of black propaganda and covert action. Just over a month later, consultation with various departments prompted FDR to issue an order titled “Designating a Coordinator of Information” that outlined COI’s duties to collect and analyze information, including a vague catch-all phrase apparently aimed at authorizing covert operations – “to carry out, when requested by the President, such supplementary activities as may facilitate

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6 Ibid, 6.
7 Ibid, 7.
8 While Donovan is hailed as the ‘father’ of the Central Intelligence Agency for his role in envisioning its forerunner COI, some writers contend that the British secret services were the true force behind the agency’s creation. The strongest among these voices is H. Montgomery Hyde, a former BSC agent, in his biography of Sir William Stephenson, the Canadian businessman who was head of BSC during the war. Hyde claims that Stephenson arranged for his long-time friend Donovan to undertake the two trips in 1940 and 1941, (QC, 151) and then exerted influence to push for Donovan’s appointment as COI chief. H. Montgomery Hyde, The Quiet Canadian: The Secret Service Story of Sir William Stephenson (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), 151. Other British ex-spies have also claimed a hand in creating COI, including Ian Fleming who claims to have written a memorandum for Donovan on “how to create an American secret service” that later became “the original charter of the OSS.” Andrew Lycett, Ian Fleming, London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1995):131. Many of these claims are in turn refuted, most notably in Thomas F. Troy, Wild Bill and Intrepid: Donovan, Stephenson, and the Origin of the CIA (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
9 “Memorandum of Establishment of Service of Strategic Information” in Appendix B to Thomas F. Troy, Donovan and the CIA (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1981): 419-420.
the securing of information important for national security not now available to the Government.”\textsuperscript{10} But while COI was born as an American spy agency, its close ties to the British intelligence services in the early days cast suspicion on COI among other government agencies and created an imbalanced partnership between the more senior British service and the nascent COI.

**A British Protégé, An ‘Unwelcome Newcomer’**

In the early days, close collaboration with the British secret services proved OSS’s lifeblood as the organization struggled to demonstrate its usefulness to U.S. intelligence “consumers”, particularly the President, and weather infighting with bureaucratic powerhouses like the State Department and FBI. The OSS Chief Historian writes:

Early formulation of relationships in London was the key to the future. SO and X-2...accepted offers from Britain’s SOE and MI6 (V) of complete sharing of operations and techniques they had developed over the years. In return, SOE and MI6 (V) demanded knowledge of SO and X-2 operations and a degree of coordination which often amounted to complete control. American acceptance was basically the result of Donovan’s feeling that SO was a purely wartime activity which could afford, at least in the early stages, to surrender independence for rapid learning.\textsuperscript{11}

COI/OSS gained a great deal of effectiveness from its early liaison with British; in particular, the British could teach the complicated tradecraft techniques COI had to acquire in a relatively short

\textsuperscript{10} “Designating a Coordinator of Information” in Appendix C to Troy, Donovan and the CIA, 423. This original conception of COI as a civilian agency under the direction of the President most likely stemmed from a fear of offending the isolationist sentiment still strong in pre-Pearl Harbor 1941, and as the War Report states, because of “opposition from the Army and Navy on the ground that the new agency might usurp some of their functions” (War Report, Vol. 1, 7).

\textsuperscript{11} Office of the Assistant Secretary for War, The Overseas Targets: War Report of the OSS, Vol 2. (New York: Walker & Co., 1976): vii. Designated as a purely wartime exercise, SO was OSS’s “Special Operations” division, equivalent to the British SOE. X-2 was the counter-espionage unit, matched by the Section V of the MI6. The British intelligence services’ willingness to reveal intensely secret “operations and techniques” to a foreign agency bespeaks the country’s desperate situation in late 1940 and early 1941. Hitler’s U-boat offensive in the Atlantic was hemorrhaging British shipping, and production was hard-pressed by the Luftwaffe bombing of London and outlying areas in these years. Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps were continuing their march across North Africa, and Barbarossa would soon begin. In light of these events, British secret agents had every reason to assist COI in its early days, both as a future investment and a short-term *quid pro quo* for American war materials.
period that “were in many cases foreign[…] to American thought.” Early COI recruits were indoctrinated into special operations at British paramilitary and commando training facilities, most famously at Camp X in Ontario, Canada, and the organization’s leaders received daily guidance from their counterparts through the COI base established in London in November 1941.

Moreover, it is probable that COI would not have survived to become the OSS without the British intelligence Donovan funneled to FDR. As COI had yet to develop its own apparatus for collecting foreign intelligence, almost all of the material it provided to the White House came from British sources: the BSC, the British embassy, liaison through the COI representative in London, among others. But as the War Report explains, this reliance on British intelligence came at a price. While COI greatly benefited from its association with SOE and SIS, it also ran the risk of being labeled a British agent by U.S. government agencies. Indeed, when Donovan pushed for a peacetime extension of the OSS in 1945, the press put out a number of stories damning the organization as a British lackey, citing OSS agents’ training in England, the Brits’ extensive access to OSS information, and the close relationship between OSS and BSC.

As the young organization depended on the goodwill of the President and assistance from a foreign intelligence entity, it is unsurprising that COI struggled to survive the turf wars that sprung up around it. COI soon found that Roosevelt’s vague mandate in the July 11th order often created conflicts with other divisions, especially the FBI, the State Department, and the various military intelligence agencies. David Bruce, the OSS chief of station in London, stated that

\[12\] War Report, 1.
\[13\] Overseas Targets, 3.
\[16\] Smith, Shadow Warriors, 15.
these well-established departments “forgot their internecine animosities and joined in an attempt to strangle the unwanted newcomer at birth.”\textsuperscript{17} Donovan soon developed enemies in Washington as he strove to expand his organization’s purview and his nickname “Wild Bill” became a pejorative among his opponents for what they saw as his “threatening and unfocused” agenda.\textsuperscript{18} After the U.S. military bureaucracy underwent a massive reorganization to prepare for war post-Pearl Harbor, COI barely escaped extinction, surviving through the “hesitant but ultimately supportive”\textsuperscript{19} role of the new Joint Chiefs of Staff JCS.

Aided by an Anglo-American grand strategy calling for “subversive activity,” COI managed to hang on during the reshuffling, coming under the jurisdiction of the JCS. Nevertheless, in March 1942, a JCS report proposed the complete dismemberment of COI with its various apparatuses incorporated into the military establishment. But by April, military officials began to reconsider. The JCS apparently decided that the military should retain control over guerilla operations, but these operations should be carried out by civilians, not soldiers.\textsuperscript{20} The JCS’s awareness of the strategic role of guerilla operations most likely stemmed from the Allied grand strategy signed in December 1941, in which Churchill and Roosevelt emphasized “subversive activity” as a key element in undermining German resistance.\textsuperscript{21} In this regard, Donovan’s organization could be very useful, and so the JCS agreed to bring COI under its authority. On June 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1942, the President signed an order rechristening Donovan’s group as

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\item[17] Lankford, ed., OSS Against the Reich, 205.
\item[18] Jay Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs: Anglo-American Collaboration and Rivalry in Human Intelligence Collection and Special Operations, 1940-1945 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999): 30. For instance, in March 1942, COI came under attack from FBI and the State Department for allegedly running undercover agents in Mexico in violation of the President’s injunction that Latin America was FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover’s exclusive realm. The charge turned out to have arisen from a misunderstanding regarding the status of one of Donovan’s agents, but the dispute lasted for two months (War Report, 22).
\item[19] Smith, Shadow Warriors, 107.
\item[20] Ibid., 120.
\item[21] Smith, Shadow Warriors, 114.
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the OSS and placing it under the jurisdiction of the JCS.\textsuperscript{22} Ten days later, a JCS order delineated
OSS’s mission: to prepare “intelligence studies” and research; to plan and “execute subversive activities”; and to “operate and train an organization for the collection of information through espionage.”\textsuperscript{23} The OSS would now need to prove its worth to its new military overseers, a still skeptical group who had been some of COI’s most powerful critics\textsuperscript{24} , in the form of strong performance in the field and support from U.S. theater commanders and their staffs.

With OSS’s legitimacy now secured in the Washington hierarchy as a JCS instrument, instead of a fly-by-night civilian answerable to the President, the OSS set out to differentiate its areas of operations in relation to the British SOE. Through discussions between the OSS and SOE chiefs in June 1942, agreements designated certain geographic spheres of responsibility for each organization to avoid duplication of effort and confusion.\textsuperscript{25} SOE won primary control of much of Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, East and West Africa, and India, while OSS would have operational predominance in North Africa and the majority of the Far East, including China.\textsuperscript{26} Within the “invasion sphere” in Europe – designated as areas where Allied forces planned to reenter the continent – all OSS personnel who wished to participate would have to work through SOE essentially in a supporting role.\textsuperscript{27} The protocols gave the OSS responsibility for two major combat zones – North Africa and the Far East\textsuperscript{28} – but it was clear the organization

\textsuperscript{22} A second order removed COI’s original propaganda function and handed it over to the newly created Office of War Information.
\textsuperscript{23} JCS 67 in Appendix F to Troy, Donovan and the CIA, 429.
\textsuperscript{24} Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 48.
\textsuperscript{25} Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 50.
\textsuperscript{26} Overseas Targets, 4.
\textsuperscript{27} Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 51-52. In the “non-invasion sphere,” agreements differed for each country; for example, the Americans could run independent operations in Germany and Italy, if directed from OSS London in close coordination with the SOE.
\textsuperscript{28} A note from OSS agent Lt. Col. Ellery C. Huntington to Donovan in November 1942 carps that these areas were allowed to OSS only because at the time of the agreement, North Africa was only “a vague idea,” and the British had few capabilities in the Far East following events at Hong Kong, Singapore, and Burma and left it to the Americans “probably because most of the struggle there will be at American expense, and necessarily [until] the shattered prestige of the Empire has been repaired.” Memorandum from Lt. Col. Ellery C. Huntington Jr. to Col.
would need to prove itself in order to participate on equal footing with the British services in the European theater, where the bulk of the Anglo-American military effort would be targeted.

**The Proving Ground of Torch**

By July 1942, Churchill and Roosevelt had committed to a joint invasion of Vichy-controlled North Africa by the end of the year.\(^29\) Code-named TORCH, the operation would be American-led, as the British had been declared collectively *persona non grata* in French North Africa following their actions at Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar in 1940, whereas the U.S. maintained diplomatic relations with the Vichy regime.\(^30\) The invasion was to be accomplished with minimal violence against the traditionally friendly French,\(^31\) but there was concern that the small invasion force would face disaster if the French resisted strongly,\(^32\) or if the element of surprise failed and Axis forces amassed in the area. As a result, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower\(^33\) and the Allied combined military chiefs decided that political maneuvers, psychological warfare, and sabotage would have to quell French resistance against the invading Allied forces. As the OSS assumed primary responsibility for covert operations in North Africa under the OSS-SOE agreements signed in June, this emphasis on subversive warfare paved the way for Donovan’s cadre to play a major part in the lead-up to and during the invasion.\(^34\) TORCH would mark the first American-

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\(^{29}\) In an OSS memorandum written in September 1942, some of the goals of TORCH are illuminated: The importance of the Mediterranean basin is demonstrated clearly in severe naval losses which have occurred largely as a result of Allied inability to control the North African shore, resulting in the acutely dangerous situation at Malta, Egypt, and the Middle East. “Elements for Consideration in the French North African Situation,” Memorandum of 4 September 1942, NARA, microfilm.

\(^{30}\) War Report, 71.

\(^{31}\) Troy, *Donovan and the CIA*, 172

\(^{32}\) Smith, *Shadow Warriors*, 148.

\(^{33}\) Eisenhower was appointed commander of U.S. forces in the European and later the North African Theaters of Operation in 1942.

\(^{34}\) Smith, *Shadow Warriors*, 148-9. If TORCH went as planned, military officials hoped to advance quickly after occupying French North Africa to confront Axis forces in Libya with assaults from two sides and then move on to
led offensive in the European and African theaters – and U.S. troops’ first major entry into the European war – and planners understood that the operation’s relative success or failure would have a major impact on Allied strategic planning and morale.\textsuperscript{35} In this way, TORCH set the stage had been set for a trial for the OSS; the OSS needed to prove it could act effectively and independently in support of a military operation and would have the opportunity to do so at a pivotal moment for U.S. forces and their newly appointed General: Eisenhower.

**OSS Performance at Zero Hour**

As mentioned above, the OSS record at TORCH offered mixed results. Colonel. Eddy and his agents certainly undertook ambitious plans to enlist disaffected Frenchmen and Muslim groups in sabotage work. But historians criticize OSS for its overly optimistic assessment of the French will to resist an Allied invasion/ The OSS’s optimism fueled the precarious situation of November 8\textsuperscript{th} in which the militarily expedient decision ultimately translated to serious political costs. Ultimately, however, it was OSS’s consistent and strong performance in military intelligence and coordination with the landing forces that the military brass remembered, while the agency’s political miscalculations were largely lost to history.

In the months leading up to the operation, OSS agents stationed in North Africa worked closely with Gen. Eisenhower and his staff to provide precise information to aid the landing forces. While TORCH would prove to be a complicated mission, it would occur in an area of strength for the OSS ;French North Africa was the one region where the organization had a preexisting spy network in place. Under the Weygand-Murphy accords of February 1941,\textsuperscript{36} the

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\textsuperscript{35} Jakub, *Spies and Saboteurs*, 65.

\textsuperscript{36} The Weygand-Murphy accords provided for the U.S. to export supplies to North Africa – despite the British blockade and trade restrictions in place – on the condition they were used in that area and not reshipped to Europe where they might be useful to the Axis. To enforce this special provision, the vice consuls – or FDR’s Twelve Apostles as they were known in Washington – were dispatched to Tunis, Oran, and Algiers.
U.S. had twelve ‘vice-consuls’ in place in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunis, ostensibly to monitor trade in the region. The OSS War Report nonetheless reveals that these officials were, in fact, briefed for the collection of intelligence and reported all significant military and political developments to a COI officer in Tangier named Col. William A. Eddy. Through these undercover officers and their subagents, Eddy supplied Eisenhower at Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) and OSS Washington with a large volume of intelligence reports, maps, and diagrams, including estimates of the strength and disposition of French forces; reports on political developments; and precise information on beach conditions, ports, and military installations. OSS sent a French hydrographer, an expert on the beaches and ports along the coast of Morocco, to London [who was] to brief the invasion commanders, and two OSS agents also accompanied the invasion forces to advise them on terrain and locations of enemy headquarters. Many sources praise this intelligence as useful work, and it stands as OSS’s signature achievement during TORCH. One author argues that military intelligence personnel could have achieved similar results, but the G-2 staff would not have devoted as much time “in country” as the OSS did prior to TORCH and might not have collected the same range of political and military information as these civilian spies did.

While the OSS made a strong attempt to bring guerilla forces into play, these efforts largely failed on November 8th due to the intense degree of secrecy surrounding the mission and difficulty in integrating on-the-ground actors into a high-level military operation. Memorandums between Eddy, Donovan, and the JCS reveal that the organization laid plans to utilize both

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37 War Report, 71.
38 Overseas Targets, 14; Smith, Shadow Warriors, 151.
39 Memorandum from William J. Donovan to Brigadier Gen. Walter B. Smith, 27 August 1942, NARA, microfilm.
40 See Smith, Shadow Warriors, 152 and 156; Walker, “OSS and Operation Torch,” 669; Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 70.
42 Eddy arrived in early January 1942 to begin organizing the vice-consuls.
propaganda and fifth column resistance to aid the landing forces.\textsuperscript{43} On August 27\textsuperscript{th}, Donovan wrote the JCS, asking to acquire 40,000,000 francs “to finance the expenses of guerilla or other extraordinary action” and to coordinate the earmarking of “stores” – presumably, weapon caches – and small boats for guerilla groups to use.\textsuperscript{44} The War Report indicates that most of the would-be guerillas the OSS recruited were disaffected Frenchmen, civilian and military, as well as “native” Moroccans, including religious and tribal leaders.\textsuperscript{45} In mid-October, Eddy received instructions from AFHQ outlining sabotage tasks for his recruited guerillas, such as seizing airfields and radio and telephone stations, cutting telephone connections to French coastal artillery batteries, and lighting flares to signal the troops.\textsuperscript{46} The OSS dropped many of these sabotage missions on the day of the invasion for several reasons. As the element of surprise was vital for the success of the operation, the guerilla units were not told the timing of the invasion until shortly beforehand,\textsuperscript{47} causing confusion and poor preparation. Moreover, the War Report notes that there were several defections as the invasion got under way, and some sabotage plans were abandoned because of “lack of American authorization to carry them out”\textsuperscript{48} – most likely caused by difficulty in coordinating these on-the-ground actions with a three-pronged amphibious assault. It is doubtful that the failure of these fifth column activities detracted in a major way from the relative success of the TORCH operation. Indeed, while the sabotage missions’ success could have improved through better coordination between the landing forces and the guerilla groups, it was likely more advantageous to forfeit these activities in favor of

\textsuperscript{43} Eddy also proposed an “assassination program” in one memo to Donovan, in which French agents would kill all members of the German and Italian Armistice Commission in Morocco with the appearance of a “reprisal” unconnected to the OSS. It does not appear from the records that Donovan relayed this proposal to the JCS, however. (Memorandum to Colonel Donovan from W. A. Eddy, 26 August 1942, NARA, microfilm).

\textsuperscript{44} Memorandum from William J. Donovan to Brigadier Gen. Walter B. Smith, 27 August 1942, NARA, microfilm.

\textsuperscript{45} Overseas Targets, 13.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{47} Jakub, \textit{Spies and Saboteurs}, 70.

\textsuperscript{48} Overseas Targets, 18.
tight security surrounding the timing of the invasion as its success relied heavily on keeping Axis forces in the dark.

Historians now criticize the OSS for underestimating the strength of French resistance to an American-led invasion and gambling on a French resistance group, leading to a high rate of casualties and forcing Eisenhower to broker a ceasefire with a notorious Vichy collaborator. Because of concerns over the small size of the invading force – 10,000 troops – Allied commanders tasked OSS with determining the mood among Vichy French troops and the likelihood they would strongly resist an American-led invasion. Both the vice-consuls and OSS’s Research and Analysis branch reported that resistance would be minimal\(^49\) based on their assessment of the overall pro-Allied sentiment of the Vichy armed forces.\(^50\) In addition, the OSS, in collaboration with State’s Robert Murphy, courted a French resistance faction under General Henri H. Giraud – recently escaped from a German prison – to be a partner in the invasion in the hope that Giraud’s standing among Vichy authorities “might facilitate the invasion and reduce casualties on both sides.”\(^51\) After Giraud’s representatives requested face-to-face assurances, General Mark Clark, Eisenhower’s deputy, secretly traveled to Morocco in late October to discuss plans for the invasion. Clark returned to Eisenhower with confidence that the landings would be successful and the invasion force would receive substantial French assistance in Algeria and Morocco.\(^52\) The day before the operation, Eisenhower wrote to General George C.

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50 Ibid, 674.

51 Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 72. In choosing Giraud’s shadowy group, the OSS purposely excluded de Gaulle’s Fighting French organization because of alleged security laxity, giving rise to sour relations with Gaullists lasting into Le Général’s presidency. The ‘deal with Darlan’ (to be discussed later) further infuriated de Gaulle’s camp. In contrast, the British supported the Gaullists as preeminent in the battle for a liberated France. See Richard H. Smith, OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 1972): 51.

52 Smith, The Secret History, 55. These plans included a plot for a coup in Algiers on the day of the invasion, led by two leaders of the French resistance network. The coup began on the 8\(^{th}\), as invasion troops approached the shore,
Marshall\textsuperscript{53} advising him: “If [General George] Patton encounters any real resistance, he is going to have a tough time of it because landing problems alone are enough to occupy his full attention.”\textsuperscript{54} Armed with OSS’s prediction of minimal French resistance and a pact with a segment of the French resistance, the U.S. military felt prepared to move forward with the risky invasion.

As Allied forces approached three points along the coast, events moved contrary to expectation in determined opposition from Vichy forces at many landings and Giraud’s unhelpfulness in abating the violent resistance. In a letter to his wife on the morning of the 8\textsuperscript{th}, General George S. Patton\textsuperscript{55} reported that the forces “took Safi at dawn” but “had some pretty bad losses at Fedala and some losses largely from drowning at Lautey [sic].”\textsuperscript{56} General Giraud, who had been smuggled out of Vichy France on the British submarine, the HMS Seraph, likewise proved uncooperative. Giraud insisted on receiving full command of the invading forces in Eisenhower’s stead, and when refused, he agreed to accompany the Allied force only as a “kind of French associate.”\textsuperscript{57} By the point of Giraud’s refusal, the landing forces had suffered significant casualties, and French forces had pinned some task forces to the beach. Without Giraud to put a stop to the fighting, Eisenhower was forced to turn to Admiral François Darlan – the Vichy vice-premier and a notorious collaborator – who happened to be visiting Algiers. As the Allies negotiated with Darlan, Hitler invaded the unoccupied zone of France in violation of

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\textsuperscript{53} Marshall was then Chief of Staff of the Army.


\textsuperscript{55} Patton commanded the Western Task Force, which landed at three points near Casablanca: Safi, Fedala, and Port Lyautery.

\textsuperscript{56} Blumenson, ed., \textit{The Patton Papers}, 103. Because AFHQ believed the French would not resist, there was no preliminary bombardment of the area, and French gunnery and shore installations took their toll on the landing forces.

\textsuperscript{57} Smith, \textit{Shadow Warriors}, 155.
the 1940 armistice,\textsuperscript{58} causing Darlan to quickly agree to a cease-fire in exchange for Allied promises that he would retain authority in French North Africa.\textsuperscript{59} This accommodation – known as the ‘deal with Darlan’ – was bitterly criticized in the U.S. and Britain as “a sellout to Fascism.”\textsuperscript{60} Author David A. Walker contends that the OSS’s failure to accurately predict the strength of initial Vichy French resistance to TORCH “helped to prolong the war”\textsuperscript{61} by delaying the Allied advance into Tunisia and consequently allowing time for Axis forces to build up in that area. The resulting Tunisia campaign lasted almost six months and “reduced the strategic options open to the Allies, especially the cross-Channel option,”\textsuperscript{62} according to Walker. While Walker is correct in pointing to OSS’s inaccurate assessment of the Vichy forces’ motivation as detrimental to the operational success of TORCH, he fails to recognize that TORCH still stands as a strategic success, without which the U.S. would have delayed any offensive landing in the European and African theaters for perhaps another year.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, if nothing more, TORCH served to put American boots on the ground in theater and take pressure off the war-weary British forces in the Western desert. In this regard, the OSS’s overly optimistic reports can be seen as aiding the Allied cause. As historian Bradley F. Smith writes, “the Allies needed to be encouraged to act like lions,”\textsuperscript{64} and OSS assurances of French cooperation inadvertently allowed them to overcome their sense of weakness in executing TORCH.

\textsuperscript{58} It is speculated that Hitler believed the French were close to an accommodation with the Allies in which they might hand over the powerful French fleet at Toulon. See Walker, “OSS and Operation Torch,” 672. 
\textsuperscript{59} Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 72. In subsequent months, particularly up until Darlan’s assassination on December 24, the Vichy regime continued to enforce Hitlerian decrees, including anti-Semitic discrimination and concentration camps for political prisoners, to the growing embarrassment of the Allies (Smith, The Secret History, 56).
\textsuperscript{60} Smith, Shadow Warriors, 155.
\textsuperscript{61} Walker, “The OSS and Operation Torch,” 674.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Churchill had ruled out a landing in continental Europe as too risky at the time.
\textsuperscript{64} Smith, Shadow Warriors, 150.
Therefore, despite miscalculations and failed guerrilla operations, the OSS won recognition from U.S. field command on the day of TORCH for its strong intelligence work. The War Report asserts that top commanders recognized the OSS intelligence contribution to TORCH, citing a December 1942 letter from General Marshall to Donovan, in which OSS support to TORCH “received special notice,” and General Clark’s request in early 1943 for an OSS contingent with the Fifth Army at Oujda to build on the intelligence work for TORCH in Morocco. In evaluating the course of the operation military leaders looked to the OSS’s solid military intelligence, rather than political errors of judgment over the Vichy resistance and its result: the Darlan deal. It is likely the military staff was not particularly sensitive to the political ramifications of the Darlan deal among liberal home populations and thus would have regarded the cease-fire as an expedient decision forced by a situation unprecedented in U.S. military history – “an unprovoked attack upon a neutral country,” as. Eisenhower describes it in his subsequent history of the war. Furthermore, in assessing the OSS’s failure to provoke fifth column activities, one should remembered that subversive activity was a new form of warfare in World War II and unlikely to be hammered out in the commanders’ field manuals. The OSS’s amateurish shortcomings, therefore, did not hold it back from rendering valuable assistance to the Allied commanders and proving it could in time become an important component of America’s war-fighting machine.

Comrades-In-Arms or Team of Rivals?

While American top brass took note of OSS’s capabilities and potential at TORCH, the British secret services also noticed the organization’s performance, rushing to secure their own

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65 Overseas Targets, 18-19.
66 In announcing the negotiated cease fire, Gen. Clark is reported to have told Allied reporters in Algiers on November 12 that the “yellow-bellied sons of bitches” had come to terms. (Smith, The Secret History, 56).
foothold in North Africa, as well as expressing concern over the American spies’ growing independence. Prior to the landings on November 8th and without OSS’s knowledge, the SOE convinced Eisenhower to agree to the establishment of an SOE operational headquarters in Algiers, code-named MASSINGHAM, after the invasion.68 The British service was apparently determined to create a base in North Africa from which to launch operations in the Mediterranean region and Southern France. Donovan, on the other hand, saw Britain’s ambition as a calculated attempt to undermine the OSS presence already established in the region in preparation for TORCH.69 OSS agent Ellery C. Huntington suggested a response to the MASSINGHAM incident in a note to Donovan on November 14, 1942:

Since SOE is now in full flight to Africa, it would seem advisable to accept the situation philosophically and proceed as follows: I. Advise our ‘friends’ at the proper time that their methods were unusual and unexpected, II. Profit by precedent established to obtain what we want in the way of SO freedom in other areas – particularly the Balkans and Greece…70

Considering this precipitate action by the British and the mistrustful response from the OSS, it is clear the two organizations were no longer operating under the earlier one-sided tutelage relationship. In light of OSS’s energetic efforts during TORCH and the support earned from U.S. military services, it is clear the organization had moved onto a track toward equal footing with the British in espionage activities. In the future, more spats over operational ”turf” would flare up as a result of this equality. OSS and the SOE clashed in India, China, Indochina, and the Middle East over American anti-colonialism and British imperialism, creating more of a rivalry in these areas than a partnership.71 Ultimately, these anxieties and differences did not hold the OSS and British secret services back from close collaboration, particularly as demonstrated in

68 Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 74.
69 Ibid.
70 Memorandum from Huntington to Donovan, NARA, microfilm.
71 Jakub, Spies and Saboteurs, 90.
Operation OVERLORD in 1944, and the two organizations forged collective experiences that would bring them into the Cold War as partners.

‘Once More Unto The Breach, Dear Friends’

Churchill famously said two days after the TORCH landings: “Now, this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” For the OSS, however, TORCH proved to be the beginning of the beginning. By the end of the war, the organization had morphed into a professional spy agency in its own right. A former SOE agent concedes OSS’s growing strength in his memoir of the war:

But Americans are above all quick learners. By the end of the war their bitterest detractors would be forced to admit that they had become quite as good as the British at getting secret intelligence and at carrying out special operations, and I personally thought they were doing it better.72

In its contributions to the war effort, OSS demonstrated the vital and growing role of intelligence in the American military system. Though President Truman disbanded the OSS in September 1945, the organization’s larger mission found new life four months later in the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), which became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947. For the CIA during the Cold War and into the present day, the seeds of Anglo-American cooperation in intelligence planted between COI/OSS and the British services during World War II held broad implications. Cameron La Clair, a CIA officer for 30 years,73 recalled in an interview with the author multiple instances of close US-British intelligence collaboration during the Cold War – from American assistance during U.K. involvement in the Falkland Islands War to British sharing of information from operatives at their consulate in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. La

73 La Clair worked in a military intelligence unit attached to the American Third Army in Europe. He joined CIG in 1946 and was stationed as a case officer in Geneva, Frankfurt, Paris, Hanoi, and Milan. He served as chief of station in London from 1970 to 1976 before retiring to Washington. Cameron La Clair, interview by author, 28 December 2008,Washington, DC.
Clair cited in particular Anglo-American cooperation in “running” Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, a Soviet military intelligence official working as a British spy. Penkovsky initially approached the CIA with information, but suspecting him to be a plant, the organization delayed contacting him. The Russian subsequently began working with British intelligence, which was able to verify his intelligence and agreed to share future information with the CIA. Efforts like this one would not have been possible without the deep ties and collective experiences forged in wartime between the OSS and Her Majesty’s Secret Service.
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