

Opération Loyton. SAS Brigade. GHQ Liaison Regiment/Phantom

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THE SAS BRIGADE IN FRANCE, 1944

FIRE FROM THE FOREST



ROGER FORD

BEHIND ENEMY LINES WITH THE MAQUIS

The SAS has become the most famous regiment in the British Army if not the world. Its origins during the Second World War and its early missions in the North African desert have been recounted many times. However, its role in the Normandy campaign and the liberation of France has not received anything like the same coverage. Roger Ford investigates the assembly and deployment of what was then the SAS Brigade. From the outset, the 'special forces' had to surmount opposition within the Allied high command. Their actions were described in some quarters as 'a too easy ... form of gallantry to a few anti-social irresponsible individualists who sought a more personal satisfaction from the war than of standing their chance, like proper soldiers, of being bayoneted in a slit trench or burnt alive in a tank'. Nevertheless, by summer 1944 the Brigade was ready to launch a succession of missions far behind enemy lines. Their primary objective was to delay the arrival of German forces at the Normandy battlefield. By attacking communications, ambushing patrols and calling in air-strikes, the idea was to inflict damage and delay out of all proportion to the number of SAS men involved.

Between D-Day and October 1944 the SAS Brigade mounted some thirty-six operations behind German lines in France. This is the first comprehensive history and assessment of these missions. Some achieved exactly the sort of success intended, tying down disproportionate numbers of German forces and fanning into fierce flames the sparks of resistance kept alive by the French *maquisards*. Others, most notoriously 'Operation Bulbasket', were disastrous failures leading to the deaths of many SAS personnel and resistance fighters.

CONTINUED ON BACK FLAP

CONTINUED FROM FRONT FLAP

One controversial issue explored by Roger Ford is the degree to which British officers knew about Hitler's order to execute captured 'commandos'. Many of the SAS men captured during operations in France were murdered in cold blood, war crimes for which four German NCOs were tried and executed and a dozen more officers and men served short prison sentences after the war. Should they have known the Germans would not treat them as normal prisoners of war?

As Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke wrote to the SAS Brigade the following year: 'the SAS...made a fine contribution to the defeat of Germany, and has not only gained a well-deserved reputation, but has also provided a tradition of courage and initiative which will be an inspiration to any troops called upon to undertake such tasks in the future'. From the early hours of 6 June 1944 to the destruction of the German army in France, this is the story of how small teams of SAS men fought their secret war behind enemy lines.

Roger Ford, with a background in computing and information technology dating from the mid-1960s, is a relative latecomer to military history. He is the author of dozens of works in the field of military technology and weapons systems, including *The Grim Reaper*, a highly acclaimed account of the development and employment of the machine gun. He lives in rural southern France and can be contacted on matters relating to this book on forest_fires@hotmail.com

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LOYTON

Operation Loyton, mounted by 1 Squadron, 2 SAS, had as its broad objective the establishment of a chain of small bases from which to attack the routes through the Vosges mountains toward the important Rhine crossing at Strasbourg. It was to be one of the least effective and most costly of all the Brigade's missions, thanks to its timing and to local conditions. Thirty-three SAS personnel who took part in it, plus two members of the attached Phantom patrol and two Jedburghs were to lose their lives, all but three or four of them killed in captivity.

It has been held by some to be significant that the impetus to mount Loyton came from SHAEF HQ and not from within SAS Brigade. This distorts the chain of command out of all recognition and suggests that somehow staff at Airborne Forces or SAS Brigade HQ might have been expected to take responsibility for broad strategic decisions upon themselves, a notion which is not worth contemplating. The impetus came from within Supreme Headquarters, and it was then Airborne Forces HQ's responsibility to hand the order down to SAS Brigade, which in turn selected a regiment (the choice was not exactly wide at this point) with the capacity to turn the requirement into a feasible action plan and then carry it out. There *were* cases where SHAEF (or 21st Army Group, where the operation fell within the greater Normandy battlefield area) passed down a totally unsuitable requirement – Operation Defoe was one of them – but the objectives for Loyton were entirely reasonable, and certainly met the criteria David Stirling and his successors had set for SAS participation.

The problem with Loyton was not one of concept; it was all to do with timing and the inability to react flexibly to changing conditions within the operational area. If Brigade HQ was at fault, it was in not cancelling the operation, desirable as its objectives certainly were, when it became clear that this was simply not the right way to go about achieving them. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see that

Foreword by
FREDERICK FORSYTH

SAS HEROES

REMARKABLE SOLDIERS, EXTRAORDINARY MEN



PETE SCHOLEY



'Don't look for medals; you're SAS – much more is expected of you.'

Colonel John Woodhouse during an SAS 'wings' presentation ceremony, 1963

'In this book Pete Scholey gives a pen portrait of 20 SAS soldiers who became legends, but only inside their own tiny brotherhood. This book is a glance behind a curtain that very few can draw aside.'

Frederick Forsyth

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From WWII to Iraq the SAS has been at the forefront of armed conflict, though most people wouldn't realise it was even there. Universally acknowledged as the best special forces in the world, every member of the Regiment is a hero in his own right. However, even amongst these remarkable soldiers there are those who stand out.

SAS Heroes contains former SAS soldier Pete Scholey's memories of 20 such warriors who are true heroes, although many were never recognised as such during their lives or even in death. It is a collection of stories about soldiers who fought for their country with no desire to be famous, feted or rewarded, some of whom died in action. A few received medals, and all earned the respect and admiration of their fellow soldiers, their names and faces etched into the true history of the SAS.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pete Scholey was lucky enough to discover what he wanted to do with his life at a young age, and he stuck with it. He was, as he put it, 'a lifer' in the most respected, admired and toughest British Army regiment, the SAS. For 20 years Pete served in some of the world's most hostile terrain, patrolling, cooking, fighting and even laughing as enemy soldiers sought to expel him and his small band of fellow soldiers from whatever foxhole, jungle or sand dune that they were holed up in.

However, Pete did not want to be a soldier when he signed up. He wanted to join the RAF but, having twice failed the entrance exams, he ended up doing his National Service in the Royal Army Service Corps. When he was discharged, he immediately re-enlisted, ending up in the Parachute Regiment and eventually, in 1963, in the SAS. Pete served in Borneo, Aden, Oman and Northern Ireland as well as with the Regiment's anti-terrorist team. On leaving the SAS in 1983, Pete worked as a security consultant before settling down in semi-retirement with his wife, Carolyn, in Hereford.

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Chapter 2

SERGEANT LEN OWENS

As I was only a youngster during World War II, I never had the opportunity to serve with Paddy Mayne, but I know a man who did – and you would struggle to find two men more fundamentally different.

Len Owens is a slightly built, short, modest and quiet sort of man, a far cry from the hell-raising Irish giant who was Paddy Mayne. The one thing that they certainly had in common was their courage. Len may be small in stature but he has got a big heart, something that he has proved time and time again not only during his wartime service, but for the more than sixty years since World War II ended. Len is a special kind of man and when he was in uniform, he had a very special role to play.

There was not much to talk about for the soldiers sitting in the belly of an aircraft shoulder to shoulder with around 20 other men, buttoned, zipped, fastened and strapped into so much kit that they could barely stand, even if there had been any room to walk about. For Len and the men of 2 SAS, conversation was pretty much redundant anyway. The noise inside the converted Stirling bomber meant that anything that was said had to be shouted at the top of the voice to be heard. Not that anyone was in the mood for a chat. The atmosphere was tense, to say the least. They were heading south over the English Channel, crossing the Allied lines to be dropped into eastern France deep inside enemy-held territory as part of Operation *Loyton*. It was early August 1944, two months after the momentous D-Day landings

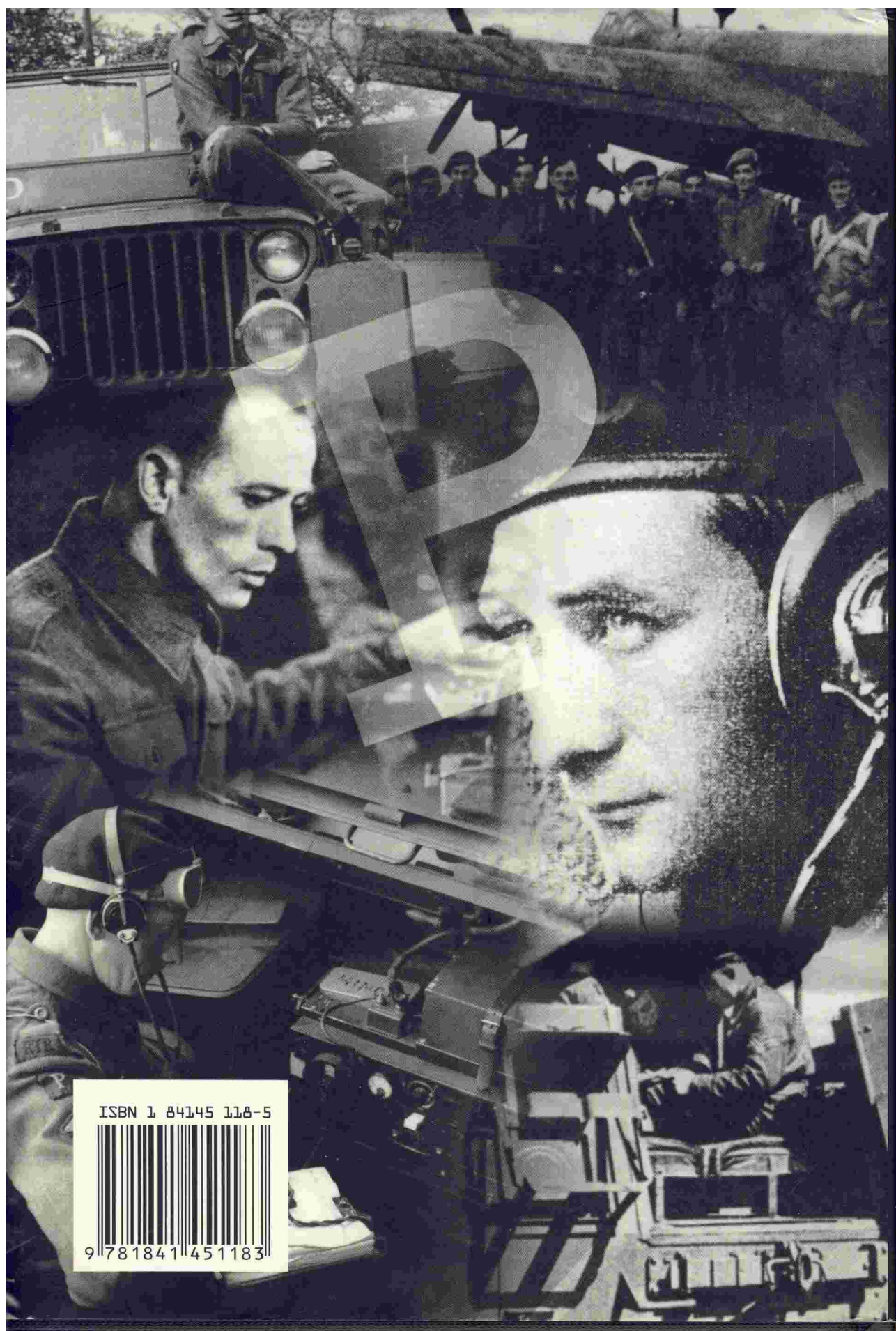
PHANTOM AT WAR

*The British Army's Secret
Intelligence & Communication
Regiment of WWII*

FOREWORD BY

SIR ROBERT MARK, GBE, Kt, QPM

ANDY & SUE PARLOUR



ISBN 1 84145 118-5



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This is the story of perhaps one of the British Army's least known regiments of World War Two - The General Headquarters Liaison Regiment, code-named PHANTOM.

Every commander in the field or at rear headquarters needs to have up to the minute information on the progress of the battle to enable him to plan his strategy. Communication, or lack of it, can sometimes decide the outcome.

One man had the foresight and inspirational thinking to realise this. Lieutenant-Colonel George Frederick Hopkinson served in France and Belgium in 1939/40 with the British Expeditionary Force until he was evacuated from Dunkirk. His experiences convinced him of the need for a special communication service. Immediately on his return to England, Hopkinson wasted no time in presenting his ideas to the War Office and the Ministry of Defence, and, with their approval, the General Headquarters Liaison Regiment, PHANTOM, was born.

PHANTOM was to serve in many theatres of World War Two, in Greece, North Africa, Italy and the Mediterranean, and its role was to be of paramount importance in the liberation of Europe. When General Urquhart was trapped at Arnhem in September 1944, it was the PHANTOM radio patrol serving with him that provided the only radio link to the outside world. This elite regiment worked with all the Allied forces and a special PHANTOM squadron served with the SAS behind enemy lines.

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UK NET

This book is about the men of PHANTOM and the memories of some of those who served in this elite regiment, both officers and other ranks. Some of the reminiscences are funny, some are sad, but hopefully the readers will enjoy reading the stories as much as the writers did writing them.

Many of those who served with PHANTOM went on to achieve distinction in public life after the war.

*'To see and not be seen;
to hear and not be heard.'*

ANDY AND SUE PARLOUR have taken over five years to research and write PHANTOM AT WAR. They were allowed access to many secret war office files previously denied to other military writers, and have personally contacted officers and men who served with Phantom, which was founded before the SAS. They write with a real knowledge and understanding about one of the British Army's least known secret regiments of World War Two, and a genuine warmth and compassion about men at war.

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*'There is a heroism beyond all,
for which no Victoria Cross is ever given,
because there is no official enemy nor any sort of firing,
except one volley in the early morning at some spot where
the noise does not echo into the newspapers.'*

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

We dedicate this book to our parents

Peter Cyril Hargreaves
(*Royal Air Force Hurricane Pilot 274 Squadron*)

Eira Keziah Hargreaves
(*Women's Land Army World War Two*)

William Frederick Parlour
(*Territorials, Royal Sussex and Royal Fusiliers*)

Margery Pamela Parlour
(*Factory Worker for the war effort*)

*To all the officers and men of the General
Headquarters Liaison Regiment 'PHANTOM'*

and

*to all the other men and women who
'did their bit' 1939-1945*

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