



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Richard Brooks (Ser 202 / IWM 009970R06-8)

Object description

British officer served aboard HMS Jewel and HMS Sevra in GB coastal waters 1939-1941; served with Naval Section, Special Operations Executive operating Helford River Flotilla in GB, 1941-1942; commanded No. 1 Special Force in Algeria and Tunisia 1942-1943; served as Head of Special Operations Executive Massingham Section operating in Corsica and southern France, 1943-1944

Content description

REEL 1 Background to joining Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in GB, 1939: education including Magdalene College, Cambridge University; interest in yacht design; narrow escape from internment in Germany, 9/1939. Aspects of operations as officer aboard HMS Jewel and HMS Sevra in GB coastal waters, 1939-1941: work sweeping magnetic mines and conversion of craft for mine sweeping, west coast of Scotland, 1940; civilian hospitality to servicemen; sweeping Belfast Lough, 3/1940-7/1940; techniques to de-magnetise anti-mine drifters; loss of craft 'The Dual'; joining Anglo-Norwegian whaling ship sweeping Plymouth Sound, summer 1940; knowledge of Falmouth, Cornwall and friendship with yachtsman and boat builder Bill Luard in Mevagissey, late 1930s; plans to equip craft with acoustic mine sweeping equipment, November 1940. REEL 2 Continues: setting off acoustic mine, breaking leg, sinking of HMS Sevra off Cornish coast, 11/1940. Recollections of period as officer with Naval Section, Special Operations Executive operating Helford River Flotilla in GB, 1941-1942: story of Gerry Holdsworth witnessing incident from Falmouth; hospitalisation; opinion of inaccuracies of Cecil Hampshire's books; origins of idea of using Breton fishermen refugees for operations from Cornwall to France, 11/1940; early days of penetration of Free French agents by sea; initial dependence of Special Operations Executive on SIS for sea transport; circumstances of arrest of Holdsworth in Sweden and his journey back to GB, early 1940; pioneering work with crossings into Brittany, late 1940. REEL 3 Continues: fitting out fishing vessel 'Mutin'; origins of naval section under Holdsworth; members of Holdsworth's crew including John Louis Newton, Tom Long and Jock Grubb; theft of Brixham trawler's chain cable, lack of resources available for Helford Flotilla; vessels acquired; joining Holdsworth's group, 7/1941; fitting out French tunneyman with advice of 'Monsieur Pierre' (Pierre Guillet);

problems of navigation off Breton coast; first mission to Breton coast to collect package from Polish intelligence organisation; work of Jacques Gueguen. REEL 4 Continues: story of Gueguen's later escape to GB; aspects of role in SOE naval section's Operation Savannah; mission's objective; return of French agent Joel Le Tac to France, 10/1941; return to France to collect agent, 12/1941; addition of 'C' class motor gunboat; aspects of Operation Third Overcloud, 1/1942; designing 14" dory for further operations; arrest of Le Tac brothers and fate of their vessels; strafing by Focke Wulf off Scilly Isles. REEL 5 Continues: tensions between Special Operations Executive and SIS; story of Gus March-Phillips being ordered to shelve operations plan by SIS; recruitment of Anders Lassen to Special Operations Executive; memories of Anders Lassen; furore over Fernando Po operations; watch on German warships bottled up in Brest; work of Daniel Lomenech in Brittany; alteration of Special Operations Executive vessels to resemble Brittany craft; accompanying Lomenech on Breton mission, 8/1942. REEL 6 Continues: Lomenech's achievements with SIS; story of fate of Lomenech's family; turning down invitation to join SIS; activities of naval section's Lieutenant Commander Cardle Ryan alias 'Abdullah Bey' in Red Sea; story of Bey's sinking of German merchantman escaping from Mesewa; story of Bey's recommendation for DSO being quashed; recruitment of Bey to Special Operations Executive; story of Bey becoming security risk. Recollections of period commanding No. 1 Special Force in Algeria and Tunisia, 1942-1943: background to posting to Gibraltar in preparation to land arms into Algiers for Allied landings, autumn 1942; role of OSS; attempts to land explosives and weapons from Gibraltar, 3/11/1942-4/11/1942. REEL 7 Continues: activities of Algiers resistance group and reasons for failure of Algiers mission; joining Operation Torch convoy; picking up survivors from torpedoed collier; decision to put Algiers Gaullists in British uniforms under British command; crashing car during drive towards Tunisia; last sighting of Randolph Churchill as pillion passenger on motor cycle disappearing into enemy lines; by naval landing craft to lighthouse at Cap Serat and cutting signals line to French naval base at Bizerte; travel on horseback towards Bizerte; decision to abandon attempt to reach Bizerte. REEL 8 Continues: taking over Cap Serat lighthouse with members of Algiers resistance; problems handling local Arabs; reorganising lines of communication; riding into minefield; Italian probe towards Cap Serat; personnel at Cap Serat; effects of assassination of Darlan; problems feeding French comrades at Cap Serat and decision to slaughter sheep; arrival of unit of RAF Regiment at Cap Serat, early 1943; para-naval operations with group 'Ten Little Bears' from Malta to eastern Tunisia, spring 1943. REEL 9 Continues: Para-naval operations; discovery of imprisonment of contact 'Mallory' and realisation of having landed to German controlled reception party; aspects of SOE mission 'Massingham' in north Africa; para-naval operations to Corsica; role of Deuxieme Bureau agent Paul Coloma Distria; gun-running by French submarine, 'Casabianca'; recollections of submarine commander Lerminez; use of craft to move arms ashore; direction of operations to malarial area of northern Corsica, summer 1943; contracting malaria; plans for SOE Italy mission. REEL 10 Drop off-course of OSS parachute trainees and Douglas Dodds-Parker's

reaction; Holdsworth's role with Peter Murray Lee in establishing SOE mission in Italy. Recollections of period as Head of Special Operations Executive Massingham Section operating in Corsica and southern France, 1943-1944: establishing Massingham French section; background to being appointed head of Massingham French section; duties on Corsica operations being taken over by Andrew Croft; opinion of Croft's landings work; background to decision to invade southern France, 7/1944; work with Free French Secret Service officer Guillum Widmer including mission to London to organise communications and air supply to Algiers in preparations for landings in southern France, 1/1944. REEL 11 Continues: protracted nature of journeys between London and Algiers; establishing Anglo-American co-ordinating body; recollections of opposite number in co-ordinating body, Jerry Depulanc; relations with OSS in operations in southern France; setting up Special Projects Operations Centre in Algiers; story of security problems encountered by King George VI's en route to visiting Club des Pins, North Africa in 1943; story of agent Paul Collona's horoscope reading and escape from Italians on Corsica; problem recovering arms from Corsicans after liberation; logistics problems presented by Vercors rising of Maquis, summer 1944; role of Francis Cammaerts; confusion over signal for Vercors rising . REEL 12 Continues: crushing of Vercors rising; effect on morale; securing of Christine Granville to act as courier to Francis Cammaerts in Vercors; recollections of French doctor at Cap Serat Henri Rosemancher, his Polish Jewish origins and story of being shipped into occupied France by Croft; learning Germans on defensive in southern France and effects on plans for landings in Provence; attempt to influence commanding officer for Provence landing at meeting in Tunis; effects on Wehrmacht of blowing of Drome bridge during retreat. REEL 13 Continues: story of Granville's bluffing of German officer to save Cammaert's life; opinion of effect of resistance on German strength in southern France; recollections and role of Tony Brook's work for Pimento section, Special Operations Executive; effect of movement of Das Reich division to D-Day beach heads.

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