



Behind the Lines: A Critical Survey of Special Operations in World War II

Michael Dilley

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The array of new technologies that came on the scene in the early 20th century resulted in widely varied new forms of military special operations once civilization embarked on its greatest war. Suddenly, fighting men could be delivered by parachute, submarine, glider, jeeps, and fast amphibious craft deep into enemy territory to perform special tasks; yet others would continue to perform missions the same as their ancestors in previous wars—on foot using stealth, endurance and patience.

This work contains discussions of the employment of various special purpose, special mission organizations during World War II. These units operated in Allied and Axis countries and in various theaters of war including Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, Asia, and the continental United States. Representing every major combatant, the operations include various kinds of raids, intelligence gathering missions, support to partisan/guerrilla groups, prisoner rescues, direct-action missions, and at least two where the object was simply to steal something. Some missions would have been officially denied if the operations had been caught in the act.

The book is divided into two sections: Behind Enemy Lines and Behind Friendly Lines, to demonstrate that special-purpose organizations can be employed wherever needed, even in areas controlled by military units of their own or allied countries. Many of the units described run the gamut of special mission types, from commando to parachute units, reconnaissance to sabotage units, and partisan training units as well as those with combined missions.

Many of the operations described in this book continue to serve as templates for modern Special Operations missions, while still others—the first attempts of their kind—continue to serve as examples of what not to try under the circumstances.

Michael F. Dilley served for 20 years in the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence branch. After retiring from the Army, the author served for about ten years as an employee of the Department of Defense, then as a contractor for various U.S. Government agencies in several fields for 15 years. . Author of several books and many articles, a number of these chapters are based on his previous writings for the legendary Behind the Lines magazine.

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