

An SOE mission

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Courtesy of the [Imperial War Museum](#), London.

Extract from a film called "Now It Can Be Told" produced by the RAF Film Production Unit for the British Government in 1946 about the work of British agents during the war.

Transcript

Interviewer: I want you both to go to occupied France.

Female agent: France?

Male agent: How?

Interviewer: By sea or air, only you won't be going in uniform.

Male agent: What do we do when we get there?

Interviewer: Organise resistance. Act as liaison officers with London.

Male agent: Will we be working together?

Interviewer: I hope so. Miss Williams will be your wireless operator. I don't need to say that the job is dangerous and difficult. That must be obvious to you both. Are there any questions before you decide?

Female agent: What made you pick on us?

Interviewer: It wasn't just haphazard. We make extensive inquiries before we recruit our people.

Male agent: Do you think that we are right people for the job?

Interviewer: We're sure of it.

Male agent: All right, I'm on!

Female agent: Of course!

What is this source?

This film is a reconstruction showing the work of men and women who belonged to the Special Operations Executive in WW2. The SOE was set up to carry out missions in enemy territory. British agents working with the French Resistance are shown disrupting enemy communications in preparation for the Normandy landings.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: RESISTANCE AND SOE

The film was produced in 1946 by the RAF Film Production Unit and was paid for by the Central Office of Information.

What's the background to this source?

When the Germans overran most of Europe in 1939–40 there were still many people in the occupied lands who were prepared to resist them. The job of the SOE was to locate people who could resist the Germans and also send agents in to help the resistance movements.

Resistance took many forms. Many resistance workers focused on collecting information about German activities, troop movements and weapon sites. Some took part in sabotage operations, destroying important factories and rail links. It was a very dangerous activity. Resisters risked being tortured and executed. There were often reprisals for acts of resistance as well.

It's worth knowing that...

Many of the 'British' agents were not British! Large numbers of people fled from the German advance in the early stages of the war and ended up in Britain. Some of these were recruited as agents to be sent back to their own countries because they spoke the language, they were familiar with those countries and they wanted to help their country.

The SOE was one of many organisations that carried out operations behind enemy lines. The SOE and other agencies also had to work closely with the RAF and Royal Navy, because agents were usually dropped in from planes or submarines.

What do we learn about SOE agents from this source

1. What training and equipment were they given?
2. What tasks did they carry as agents working in occupied France?
3. What type of people carried out this work?

Use this outline to plan your poster.