

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: RESISTANCE AND SOE

**How to set up a resistance organisation in occupied France**

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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**

**Male agent:** Now the real work started, the real work of building up an organisation. The French were marvellous. I used to borrow everything from them. It was impossible to buy a bike and before I managed to get one on the black market I had to live on borrowed bikes. I say live on, it almost became that. My plan was to organise eight or ten resistance groups within a radius of 25 miles of the town. I had to do everything by personal contact. It was amazing how one good contact, a farmer, a wine merchant, priest led invariably to another. Broadly speaking there were three kinds of contacts and I tries to keep them separate. In the first group were the active ones; those I could rely on to a job work- sabotage or taking part in a reception committee. Then there were safe houses, usually older people who could be relied upon for hospitality and where I could go at any time of day or night and get a bed or meal no questions asked. Then, thirdly there were the letterboxes that is, people like caf' proprietors or garage owners where I could leave messages or meet people by appointment without attracting attention. Of course, we couldn't use telephones, they'd be tapped, even internal letters were censored. I had to keep a good look out for controls on the roads and avoid them where possible.

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**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.

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

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.