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Odd tales from secret files

By John Sherwood
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The Central Intelligence Agency has reluctantly opened for research more than 450 boxes of once-secret files of World War II's Office of Strategic Services.

The agents at the CIA, successors to the dashing spies at OSS, have hoarded the covert operations intelligence records for nearly 40 years.

Winnowing out the drama in these faded papers depends greatly on luck. A proper card index file is non-existent.

Two days of eye-strain in a grim and chilly researcher's room. Then a random opening of Box 37 of 109 of the OSS History Office Files turns up this intriguing folder:

"NATO [North African Theater Operations] Anthology. Algiers. Vol. 1." A coded opening page is marked: "Secret — Equals British Most Secret."

Hmmmm... "The Simmons Beautyrest Project: Sir Smokey Chases the Holy Grail."

"Simmons" was the code name for a top secret mission under Lt. William W. (Smokey) Downey, U.S.N.R., Secret Operations Officer, North Africa. His mission impossible: Storm a secret Nazi bomb plant ("Beautyrest") and capture the super-secret "glider bomb" that was later to become famous as the terrifying V-1 rocket that buzz-bombed England.

The mission would take almost a year, cost many lives, and dispatch agents around the world to Egypt, Great Britain, Algeria, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, France, Italy, Greece, and America.

Let's have a look, then, at Lt. Downey's report, secret for four decades:

The mission, of the highest secret priority, was created after a "radio-guided bomb" landed at 1 p.m. on Aug. 22, 1943 on the remote Norwegian island of Bornholm on an experimental flight. Incredibly,

an alert Danish scientist happened by the strange, unarmed dud that suddenly dived into the ground. He took photographs of the damaged bomb and gathered a lot of technical data.

"He had but a few hours to do this," Lt. Downey wrote, "and was successful in eluding the Germans who were on the ground in the neighborhood awaiting to report on the experiment. However, the Gestapo later captured this Danish

projectiles; most agreed that they had some kind of wings and tail. Most also agreed that they seemed to change their course in midair after launching."

A committee met in deepest secrecy on Malta to study the bomb fragments, and those involved were forbidden to discuss the new weapon with anyone.

By early November, the OSS already had a plan and Lt. Downey had a mission. The main objective,

he continued, "was to get physical possession of these bombs, if possible, and in this effort we were continuously running up against a stone wall in our efforts."

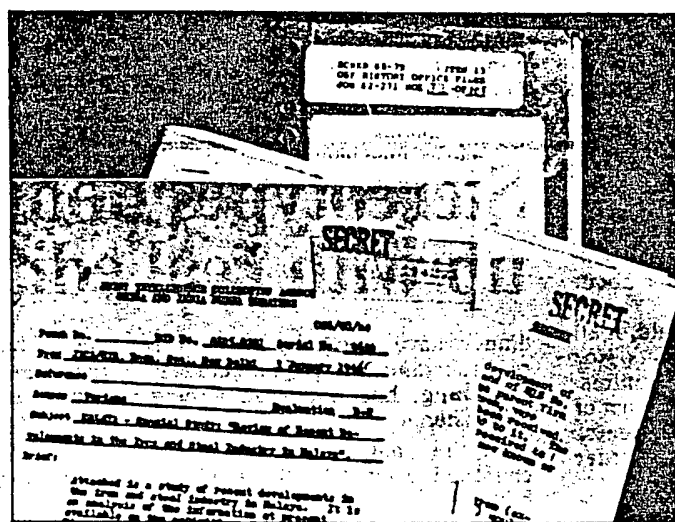
"It was not because people did not want to cooperate with us but everywhere we turned we were told the same old story — 'it can't be done,' or 'it is impossible.' It was at this point that our nickname for the bomb came into being — 'Holy Grail.'"

The first attempt to steal the bomb was in the middle of January in Norway "where the temperature is anything but tepid, and [we] trudged over sixty miles of the roughest terrain conceivable to get to

Banack, the German-held airport on the Arctic Ocean... After five weeks the teams reached the airport and returned to their base, but reported no trace of the bomb, nor of the plane which carried the radio-controlled bomb."

Early in February 1944, they decided to concentrate on getting the radio mechanism, rather than the rocket bomb itself, "because it weighed but 50 pounds and was about 3 feet overall, whereas the rocket bomb, dubbed the 'Robomb,' or the 'Buzzbomb,' and technically known as the V-1, was believed to weigh 3,000 pounds, or even more."

The first of several tragedies came when two OSS agents were dropped behind the lines in France. One of them died when he struck a tree upon landing, and the other was forced to return.



His mission impossible: Storm a secret Nazi bomb plant and capture the super-secret "glider bomb."

patriot and he was shot to death."

The secret data, however, got through. It reached London through the Norwegian Government in Exile's Secret Intelligence Corps. Inexplicably, the intelligence never got to the United States through the regular channels dominated by the British.

"Nevertheless, and in spite of some opposition from our own people in England," Lt. Downey noted, "the photos and technical information was forwarded to the U.S. First, and for reasons I'll never be able to quite understand, I was told not to send the material to Washington."

Also in September, the "radio-directed flying bombs launched from airplanes" were first used by the Germans in the Mediterranean in a devastating attack on a crewed British patrol boat. The unusual missiles were described as "small airplanes, rockets, and shell-like

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