

Eisenhower's Guerrillas: The Jedburghs, the Maquis, & The Liberation of France

Benjamin F. Jones (Oxford University Press, 2016), 384 pp., notes, index.

Reviewed by David A. Foy

As General Dwight Eisenhower, commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), contemplated Operation OVERLORD, he realized his need to effectively utilize an additional ally—the French Resistance, writ large, including General Charles de Gaulle's French Forces of the Interior (FFI). *Eisenhower's Guerrillas* is the story of how he sought to do that, although the author explains that the purpose of his volume is to better acquaint readers with the complexity of the war, to describe diplomacy's impact on the individual soldier, and to stress how much leadership matters.

True to its title, the book—whose author is a college faculty member and administrator—focuses on the confusing multiplicity of French Resistance groups and on their inconsistent relationship with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)-subordinated Jedburghs, the three-man, multinational teams comprised of an American or British officer/leader, a French officer, and a radioman (British, French, or American) and Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE). As Jones explains, the Jedburgh teams were tasked with arming, equipping, and training local Resistance groups in guerrilla warfare. Making its first conceptual appearance in March/April 1943, the Jedburghs would play a role of somewhat hard-to-determine significance through September 1944.

While the concept seemed simple enough in theory, its actual operation proved more problematic, due to differing goals of the French Resistance on the one hand and the British and American military and political authorities on the other. The British and Americans viewed the retaking of France as a military goal, while the French viewed the campaign as primarily a political contest, with no postwar occupation of the nation by either Britain or the United States. In this sense, Jones claims that his book is the first to view the actions of the Jedburgh teams in light of the politics of French liberation.

After a discussion of the origins of the Jedburgh construct, the author notes that in the then-embryonic US doctrine on guerrilla warfare, American authorities

expected the Jedburgh teams to replace the SOE and OSS agents who were rolled up, tortured, or killed. Meanwhile, in light of the French surrender, partial German occupation, and the creation of the Vichy regime, the exiled De Gaulle proclaimed sovereign authority over France. Although the November 1942 Operation TORCH landings proved a surprise, De Gaulle realized that the Resistance would have to cooperate with the Allies when the long-awaited cross-Channel invasion occurred; this realization also meant that his FFI members, in exile in London, would have to work with the interior groups. To that end, the National Resistance Council was created in May 1943, a body pledged to support De Gaulle. A sizable fly-in-the-ointment, however, was that neither Roosevelt nor Churchill liked or trusted the insufferable Gallic champion, a strained relationship that would continue and bedevil the cooperation Eisenhower needed to plan and conduct effective guerrilla operations.

Meanwhile, the United States prepared to jump in—literally—to participate in the Jedburgh mission, seeking to recruit men who could operate behind enemy lines, speak French, parachute, and operate independently. In December 1943, COSSAC (Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander) published a "Basic Directive" on the Jedburgh teams—the teams were to act as a "focus for local resistance," to train Resistance members, and to ensure that their operations were aligned with OVERLORD missions. Additionally, they had the delicate but important task of representing Eisenhower to the Resistance, being careful to exert "leadership" only when absolutely necessary.

In early March 1944, SHAEF ordered that 70 Jedburgh teams be trained and ready for D-Day. Eisenhower directed the Resistance to focus on rail and road targets and the blocking of any German columns moving north after the initial landings. For OPSEC reasons, however, he chose to share only the month of the planned cross-Channel invasion with French military leader General Pierre Koenig, who plays a key role in this account. Not only did Koenig outrank the heads of SOE and OSS, he was on 23 June

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proclaimed by Eisenhower as the equivalent of any other subordinate officer in his command. Otherwise, the kick-off of OVERLORD remained a secret to the French until the late evening of 4 June, when the BBC transmitted 185 action messages to the Resistance.

From 5 June—the date the first Jedburgh unit, Team Hugh, dropped into France—Eisenhower's orders to the Resistance were, first, to focus on the bridgehead area and to be ready for expanded operations in Brittany; second, to strike against the French rail system bringing German reinforcements to the front; and third, to neutralize the communications system to further thwart and delay the German response. Yet, as the author points out, thanks to the arrest and interrogation of numerous Resistance members, German officials had a very good idea of what the Resistance targets and missions were, although Jones hastens to add that knowing the allied goals and being able to thwart them were two different things. But German forces clearly had their moments—such as the brutal retaliation 10 June 1944 against the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, in which they killed all the men of the village, barricaded all the women and children in the church, and set it ablaze, killing 642 French civilians in a four-hour period. As the author writes, “The untrained and uncontrolled Maquis were already [a few days after D-Day] drawing too much of the wrong kind of attention with their passionate desire to kill Germans.” (178–179)

The rest of Jones's account stresses the frustrations and flexibilities of the Jedburgh teams in the movement toward Germany as they dealt with the factors that frequently limited their effectiveness—the vagaries of European weather, which often prevented parachute drops of arms and supplies; the consistent underestimating by US authorities of the numbers of Maquis who would rise up; unreliable communications; and, increasingly, the inability of the Allies to generate sufficient air sorties to place trained teams into the theater at all. This latter problem meant lengthy delays at the primary British training facility, Milton Hall, and led to much grouching. In the words of a disgruntled Jedburgh team member who had been Eisenhower's driver in North Africa, “there were a lot of angry guys at Milton Hall.” (256)

In summing up the accomplishments of the 93 Jedburgh teams and the Resistance, Jones notes that Eisenhower deserves credit for the cooperative and effective way he worked with Koenig. However, he posits that the

success of the FFI in the wake of Operation DRAGOON (the August 1944 invasion of southern France) had more to do with German actions than those of the Resistance, as the Germans were able to form a solid defensive line and save many of their troops from annihilation. On the other hand, some operations went well, especially in Brittany, where aerial resupply was easier and Wehrmacht units were weaker and more dispersed. In the final analysis, Jones concludes that “when the Jedburghs succeeded, they did so because the Resistance and De Gaulle's provisional government put in place the element necessary for success—national political will. General Eisenhower then placed that national political will, in the form of General Koenig and the Free French, within his coalition.” (285)

The author deserves credit for writing a fact-packed narrative, replete with detailed information about the Jedburgh teams and their Resistance colleagues, and his viewing the history of the Resistance movement through the lens of French political developments is certainly novel. His dedication in the frontispiece to the 17 Jedburghs who were killed-in-action is fitting, and he exhibits an impressive knowledge of the German military chain-of-command. The book has a useful and extensive glossary, good maps and index, a solid bibliography demonstrating the use of a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, and a small but suitable selection of photographs. The two appendices—one listing French Resistance leaders, the other the Jedburgh team members—are a nice touch.

Detracting from the volume's attributes are an embarrassing number of typographical errors—more than expected in a modern, professional publication. For example, readers learn about the US Marines as “the force the United States sent to in to Haiti” (42) and, just a few pages later is a reference to the space-less phrase “theyturnedtoAdolfHitler'sNationalsozialistischeDeutscheArbeiterpartei.” (54) Finally, speaking of the John F. Kennedy-sponsored insurgency against North Vietnam, the reader's attention is disrupted by the phrase, “Kennedy believed the CIA did not have the resources to do pursue this . . .” (283). Such unfortunate sloppiness is as unwelcome as it is unexpected.

Eisenhower's Guerrillas is one of three recent books on the French Resistance—in November 2015, Robert Gildea's *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* appeared (but has only one reference to “Jedburgh missions” in the index) and as this review

is being written, the English translation (*The French Resistance*) of Olivier Wieviorka's 2013 volume, originally in French, is due (but which, despite its billing as a "comprehensive history of the French Resistance," has no references to the Jedburghs and few even to Eisenhower).

Thus, Jones's book fills a void, expanding our knowledge of and appreciation for the complexity and political significance of the Resistance movement overall and for the limited but unique accomplishments of the Jedburgh teams in particular.



