

Agent's name: Capt. Peter Ivan LAKE

Nom de Guerre: BASIL

Circuit: DIGGER

11th October 1944

Report - Mission France April-October 1944

With the mission of instructing the Maquis, I was parachuted into France on the night of 9/10th April 1944 together with Capt. Beauclerk. The weather was good, and the operation which took place in bright moonlight was entirely successful. We both landed fairly and squarely on the 'ground', where an experienced Reception Committee had lit three magnificent bonfires, easily seen from a distance by the crew of the aircraft. NESTOR (Maj. Peters) was waiting to receive us, and with him we clambered into a camionette with baggage and a part of the RC. The camionette took us in the small hours of the morning to Siorac-en-Périgord, a small village in the Sarladais, some 15km from the 'ground'. Until daylight, we remained in the house of M. Robert Brouillet (CHARLES) – the local organiser of résistance. At daybreak the camionette took Capt. Beauclerk and myself to our respective safe-houses. My hosts were a Doctor and his wife, refugees from Luxembourg, who has chosen as a refuge a dilapidated farm-house in the heart of the Forêt de la Becede, about 7km from Le Buisson. Dr. REMBOUX later organised a number of hospitals in the region for the Maquis.

Instruction

It was arranged that I should begin instructing among the local maquis. In this area, the neighbourhood of Siorac, Belvès, etc. the leading light was René (SOLEIL) - loud-mouthed thug from Marseille, successor to RAYMOND, killed just previously. He appeared, however, to exercise an uncanny influence over the youthful elements, and inspired a salutary terror among 'collaborators', whom he pursued relentlessly. With him I made my first sortie – to Villefranche by train. This was a somewhat disturbing experience for the uninitiated and still security-minded, since SOLEIL and his companions were armed like pirates, behaved like pirates and expected me to do likewise. Wherever they went they appeared to be known openly as 'Maquis'. Before long I realised that young SOLEIL was under a misapprehension regarding my purpose; he had thought (or taken it for granted) that I was especially sent from England as instructor for his small maquis – about 200 men, and practically under his orders. It suited him well to have an Englishman as a showpiece, for it helped him in his recruiting drive. He was quickly informed of his error.

The first two maquis in which I instructed were composed mostly of Spaniards led by a Spanish ex-artillery captain. Many of them were tough, experienced veterans of the Civil War in Spain, well disciplined and often well versed in modern explosives. Some of the best work in that area was done by Carlos following the 6th June landings . . . blowing of bridges and successful guerrilla tactics against German columns., particularly at Castelnaud and Groslejac.

I devoted a longer course to a larger maquis in the region of Villefranche. There were good elements, and had they had a proper military framework and leadership, they might have accomplished useful work. As it was, they devoted rather too much time to 'requisitioning' of all kinds of merchandise, from cars to toothbrushes. Later on they became the FTP and their tendency to banditry obliged NESTOR to cut all contacts.

From here I was conducted to a maquis near COURSAC, some 8km south of PERIGUEUX. This was my first contact with a serious maquis, Le Maquis ANCELLE, and it was here that I met most of the leaders

who were later responsible for clearing the Germans from Dordogne and in particular, PERIGUEUX. At that time there were about 60 men under ANCELLE, another 40 under MARCEL, and about 20 under ROLAND, leader of a GF which operated inside and outside PERIGUEUX.

All these men were in French Army uniform, and had some sort of arm. Regular Army NCO's gave them the necessary groundwork of military training and discipline. For the rest their rugged existence had inured them to hardship and fatigue, especially those who had seen a winter in the maquis. I had little to teach and a lot to learn from them on guerrilla warfare. At this time, towards the end of April, their morale was excellent, with the prospect of D-Day becoming more and more real. I was constantly asked when that would be, but their chief pre-occupation was whether they would receive any more arms from England. Recruits and volunteers were not lacking, as was seen on and after 6th June, when their numbers swelled to over 1000 in the Camp ANCELLE alone. But in the absolute impossibility of providing arms, ANCELLE could not accept recruits whom he could not arm. I was able to get a good idea of the political strength when each day I had as 'students' numbers of civilians from towns such as PERIGUEUX, BRANTOME, NEUVIC, St ASTIER – section leaders of organised Resistance groups, who were ready to quit their homes with their men the moment they could be supplied with arms.

This period was one of preparation and it is necessary to stress that with the effectives and armaments then available, anything but relatively insignificant 'coup de main' of no military importance, were out of the question. It is not easy for a maquis to conceal its existence and unless the location of the camp was changed every few days, it was sure to be attacked. This occurred frequently and there was rarely any alternative but withdrawal. Often the attackers were the chicken-hearted GMR and Milice, sometimes with and sometimes without Germans. The GMR showed little anxiety to fight and cases are on record where GMR and Maquis agreed beforehand to stage a mock battle, where no one gets hurt and which at the same time satisfied the Germans that the GMR were doing their duty. This enabled the maquis to retire in good order despite the apparent haphazard manner in which this withdrawal was carried out. Other factors which favoured the maquis were good knowledge of the country, sympathy of the majority of the local population, individual acts of heroism and that imponderable element – luck.

Security was in fact one of the principal problems of the Maquis. The enemy used many methods for tracking the Maquis, even aircraft. In consequence considerable attention had to be paid to camouflage. From my point of view it was easy enough to teach the theory of explosives, but difficult to give practical demonstrations. Small charges could be fired if there was water – a pond or a stream – to deaden the sound. With weapons the main problem was ammunition, but I did manage occasionally to fix up targets in cellars for pistol practice on the Arisaig pattern. The first place used for this purpose was the Château de la Feuillade at COURSAC, where the shooting practice had an unfortunate sequel. The GMR acting on a denunciation, searched the château, found spent cartridge cases, took the owner's wife and daughter and delivered them to the Gestapo. They only regained their liberty when the Germans left Limoges. The owner himself escaped arrest and lived with the Maquis for several months.

Another Maquis where I found a useful group of men with military formation was near THENOT in the Forêt de la Double – the Groupe ROGER. I spent about a week giving them a miniature commando course – with special emphasis on guerrilla tactics. In between whiles I was giving evening classes in sabotage and the use of weapons, to the "Legaux" (members of the Resistance who were "covered" by their normal occupation) in the small villages, in particular SIORAC whose position in the annals of Resistance is unique. For a short time the Château de Giversac near SARLAT was a kind of STS. Here the Legaux from SARLAT was sent to me for instruction, also the NCOs from the Maquis Alberte, who later distinguished themselves at MORTAGNY in the Gironde.

After D-Day

D-Day transformed the whole situation over night. French Resistance came out into the open – the Maquis occupied, often unwisely, the small towns and villages. A new Prefet, ROUX, for Dordogne was elected, with his HQ near CEEDRIEUX. Enthusiasm was unbounded; at the same time roads were blocked by felling trees, control of circulation established, small railway bridges blown up or great lengths of track removed. Orders from London were, in fact, fully executed.

On D-Day I was instructing in the Maquis Roger at THENON. The first event was the arrival of the local gendarmerie in the Maquis complete with arms and baggage, The occupation of THENON however was carried not so much as a defence against the Germans as against the FTP, who had occupied the neighbouring villages. A few days later when the passage of the Germans along the N89 seemed imminent I managed to persuade the local leaders to discontinue the occupation by Maquis and establish road blocks well out side THENON, while the village itself should not be compromised. Effectively a day or two later, the Germans came through, found nothing suspicious in THENON, left without causing anything but fear, while at THRRASSON, where the FTP offered resistance, they destroyed part of the village.

German reaction to the general uprising was not long in becoming apparent. After 6th June, there ensued a very precarious period. Resistance was unveiled. The villagers were at the mercy of reprisals, and the Maquis in Dordogne were paperless with their modest armaments to stop AMVs, light tanks etc. During this period the Maquis round PERIGUEUX and BERGERAC were constantly attacked and continually obliged to withdraw. The roads became more perilous than ever before, and liaisons greatly hampered. Cars sporting FFI pennants and devices almost disappeared for a while and at one time our car was about the only one to be seen on the road. The “Black period” as one might call it, lasted until well into August and saw the sacking of villages such as Oradour, Mouleydier and Pressignac. Our HQ had to be changed twice and the first cost us two casualties, one killed and one wounded. In materials only one car and one lorry were lost.

Towards the middle of June, the use of the railways had been completely denied to the Germans, with one notable exception – the main line PERIGUEUX to COUTRAS. Though the track was cut regularly every night by the Groupe Roland, the damage was repaired within a few hours. With plastic only there was little to be done, especially as there were no steel bridges. But on one occasion, when it was important to hold up the traffic at PERIGUEUX it was agreed with NESTOR that I should see what could be done. With seven picked men I went to NEUVIC, and in the small hours of the morning, blew up 500 yards of track in twelve places and left delayed action charges under the line. At the same time notices in French were put up warning the cheminots not to approach. The operation went according to plan, no opposition being met with, and traffic was delayed for the best part of a day. Later the track was successfully mined with dynamite which caused a subsidence. The line is still blocked.

Finally we settled in the Château de la Pujade, property of the half English Marquise de Comarque. The position was favourable for defence and accordingly I had the approaches mined, constructed a sort of block-house (camouflaged) to house our one and only Piat, dug trenches and generally prepared for an attack. Our defences depended principally on the mines and gammon grenades but at a pinch we could have put up quite considerable fire-power with brens and rifles, all our staff of about 50 being armed.

Here it was that I began to train thoroughly our own corps-franc who special purpose was to provide a dependable body of trained saboteurs entirely at our disposal and available at any moment for any special job that might occur. We had sometimes it unsatisfactory having to borrow teams from other Maquis – and they proved a most valuable addition to our HQ. Simultaneously I trained the Groupe Castel Real with whom our local defence was closely linked.

With the arrival of GILBERT (Emile Gerschel) on 1st July, my functions as instructor virtually ceased and I became adjoint to NESTOR. With GILBERT came also at long last arms for ANCELLE (Maquis AS sector centre). The operation was entirely successful and although only 8km south of PERIGUEUX there was no inference – until 2 hours after we had left the ground. This parachutage was followed by others long overdue. The black period was over and the Maquis were able to pass over to the offensive again. The greatest fillip of all was provided by the gigantic operation of the 14th July with 1400 containers in CORREZE, thus providing arms for the majority of serious organised Maquis. There were still however a conspicuous lack of anti-tank weapons. Distribution, despite transport difficulties, was eventually effected without loss. With various other parachutages on our grounds we were able to fulfil all our commitments and arm our own corps-franc to the teeth. We also were able to form a special anti-tank section in the Groupe Roland.

The arrival of the American commandos coincided with the liberation of Correze and Dordogne – and by the time there were ready for action there were literally no more Boches in our area. Attempts to deal blows at their rear guard were not successful – because the Germans fled faster than we could chase them. Only at MARENNES, a static front, could they have done anything but they chose that moment to be recalled. The positive result of their mission was a coup de main at AGEN which supplied us with car fuel sufficient to last until we left, and MARMANDE where they ensured that the petrol train would not fall into enemy hands by having it moved to a safer area.

It was when the American commandos had left MARENNES that NESTOR planned what was known as “Operation Bickford”, code name for a series of operations against the enemy in the ILE d’ OLERON, mainly infiltration of agents, saboteurs and materials. I was entrusted with the execution of Bickford and already results were promising when the De Gaulle incident at SAINTES (see separate report) precluded any further hand in the MARENNES sector. Bickford was to have been an SOE operation par excellence and although we put the succession into capable hands, it was most disappointing not to see the matter through to our own academic satisfaction.

After this it only remained for us to disband the HQ, arrange for the continuance of the SR at BORDEAUX and make our adieux.

Signed:

PI LAKE
Captain.

Agent's name: Capt. Peter Ivan LAKE

Nom de Guerre: BASIL

Circuit: DIGGER

27th September 1944

Report

Subject: Meeting with Général de Gaulle at Saintes on 18th September 1944

Following Général de Gaulle's visit to BORDEAUX, he was expected at SAINTES on Monday 18th September. At this period Captain Mark and I were at MARENNES (Charente Maritime) engaged in active operations against the German-occupied ILE d'OLERON. In view of the decision of a number of French officers in the MARENNES sector to pay their respects to the general we decided to accompany them to SAINTES with the same object in view.

The programme began at about 1100 hours with the usual parade and inspection by the general accompanied by Colonel ADELIN (or ADLINE) officer commanding the FFI encircling ROYAN, ILE d'OLERON, etc. Captain Mark and myself were among a group of French officers during the inspection, and if De Gaulle noticed the two British officers, he showed no sign of recognition. The cortège of motor-cyclists and staff cars then escorted him to Colonel ADLINE's HQ where a number of French officers were awaiting their turn to be presented. Here also we encountered Captain CAMILLE (ALYRE?) and two members of the Inter-Allied Mission (Dordogne Nord) an American and a French captain with similar intentions to ours.

It would have been normal for the Allied officers to be presented at the outset; instead, however, the general disappeared behind locked doors with Colonel ADLINE and his staff. We later learned that the discussion which took place was directly concerned with the military situation in the sector – a situation to which we were not entirely alien. About an hour later, the discussion over, the general appeared in the doorway, and at the same time we received the word to approach. As we were the last to be summoned I cannot say of the other Allied Officers present were presented in the proper sense of the word. Colonel ADLINE ignored Captain Mark, and presented "Le Capitaine JEAN-PIERRE."

In the dialogue which followed, I had little to say, and even less chance to speak. It went roughly like this:-

de G "*Jean-Pierre, that's a French name*"

self "*My nom-de-guerre mon Général*"

de G "*What are you doing here?*"

self "*I belong to the Inter-Allied Mission for Dordogne, and I am at the moment with Dordogne troops at MARENNES, mon Général.*"

de G "*But what are you doing here?*"

self "*I am training certain troops for special operations.*"

de G "*Our troops don't need training. You have no business here.*"

self *"I obey the orders of my superiors."*

de G *"You have no business here I say. You no right to exercise a command."*

self *"Mon general I exercise no command."*

de G *"We don't need you here. It only remains for you to leave. I have already told one ARISTIDE who was indulging in politics, to get out. Another that I have dispatched is HILAIRE in TOULOUSE. You too must go home. Return, return quickly Au revoir."*

Pause

self *"Oui mon général."*

The whole dialogue passed very quickly and in a tone of voice there was no mistaking. It was so unexpected that I must confess I was far too taken aback to reply intelligently, and I think the majority of those present had similar reactions. The general then muttered something which I did not clearly hear and disappeared before anyone had time to recover their equilibrium. The only person who could have made any protest was Colonel ADLINE. The fact that he remained silent implies his complicity, or at least his sympathy, with the general's welcome. A letter to this effect was sent to Colonel ADLINE on the following day by Captain Mark. We have since heard that he flatly denies this, and even goes so far as to assert that he shared the general stupefaction.

Captain Basil
La Poujade
27/09/1944

[R5:R4 - Area: CORREZE and DORDOGNE]

AUTHOR and DIGGER CIRCUITS

Organization of Major Jean PEULEVE (Jean)

& subsequently of Captain (later Major) Jacques Rene Edouard POIRIER (Nestor)

History of Organization

1943

AUTHOR

18 September

Lysander - 2nd Mission: [1st Mission with SCIENTIST] Major Jean PEULEVE (Jean, formerly Edmond) returned to France by a Lysander operation organized by Henri DERICOURT (Gilbert) in the region of ANGERS. He had been instructed to get in touch with certain contacts in PARIS and BORDEAUX with a view to organizing Resistance in the CORREZE. He had also been instructed to work in de BAISSAC's SCIENTIST Circuit. However, on arrival he found that most of the contacts indicated to him in LONDON had been blown by the GRAND-CLEMENT affair.

PEULEVE visited the CORREZE where he had to find his own contacts. Whilst there he was approached by Col VENI who requested that he supply his group with arms. Eventually his area comprised the DORDOGNE, LOT, AVETBON, TARN, LOZERE, CANTAL and BOUCHES du RHONE. He also succeeded in finding a locally recruited W/T operator Louis E. BERTHEAU (who was subsequently arrested with PEULEVE and died of Typhus in a German Concentration Camp on 15 May 1946). BERTHEAU transmitted from his own house when urgent messages had to be sent, even after he had been warned of the danger.

PEULEVE's most important contact was André MALRAUX. Together with him he worked with the FTP.

1944

28 January

Parachute

Capt (later Major) Jacques René Edouard POIRIER (Nestor) [[also known as Major PETERS] was dropped in the CANTAL a distance of 150 km from his destination which was MARCELLAC-la-CROIZILLE. His instructions were to act as assistant to Major PEULEVE's Organization. They finally met at a safe house BLOC-GAZO in BRIVE.

NOTE: Jacques POIRIER had previously been active in -the Resistance in France and had reached England via Gibraltar by sea on 29 May 1943 where he had training and was commissioned.

March

Major PEULEVE reported having 2,500 men under his control in the CORREZE and the DORDOGNE, two-thirds of whom were in the Maquis. He helped to arm 1,500 FTP. He organized 24 parachute operations and with material so received armed the Maquis. [No details available.]

By his tact and diplomacy he established a strong fighting force which he led in a number of attacks against enemy communications. One of his groups was attacked by Germans and Miliciens but under PEULEVE's leadership his group killed 51 Germans.

1944

21 March

Major PEULEVE with his W/T operator Louis BERTHEAU, Louis Charles DELSSANTI

and Roland MALRAUX, a local recruit (brother of Andre) were arrested in the Villa which they were using as their HO situated on the road from MALEMORT to BRIVE. The W/T set and codes were also captured as was a large sum of money. During the six months of his activity PEULEVE sent 83 W/T messages and received 118.

NOTE: After his arrest PEULEVE made several attempts to escape, one from FRESNES prison where he succeeded in getting into the street but was shot, wounded in the leg and recaptured. He finally escaped after imprisonment in BUCHENWALD and himself took prisoner two SS men before joining up with the American 83 Infantry Division. He returned to England on 18 April 1945.

1944

DIGGER

Capt POIRIER (then aged only 22) took over command although the Organization had been very severely broken up by the Gestapo. He was himself badly compromised as the Gestapo had his name and photograph. As the W/T set had been captured he was without direct contact with LONDON for a time.

9 April

Parachute Capt Ralph Charles BEAUCLERK (Casimir) was dropped to POIRIER as W/T operator. He landed near SIORAC-en-PERIGORD. Subsequently he lived in isolated farms from where, starting on 21 April, he sent 139 and received 138 W/T messages in the course of five months.

9 April

Parachute Capt Peter Ivan LAKE (Basil) was dropped as assistant and arms instructor. He later became second-in-command to POIRIER.

The well-trained and efficient reception Committee was headed by Major POIRIER. The arrivals were taken by lorry to SIORAC-en-PERIGORD and then to the safe house in the Forêt de la BECEDE, 7 km from Le BUISSON.

Not far from PERIGUEUX Capt LAKE undertook the instruction of the Maquis in the Camp ANCELLE which grew from 120 men before D-Day to over 1,000 after the Allied landing. He organized day and evening classes in the VILLEPRANCHE area, then for the Maquis ANSELLE near COURSAC; subsequently for the group ROGER in the Forêt de La DOUBLE and finally for the "LEGAUX" in SIORAC and in the Chateau de GIVERSAC near SARLAT and the group CASTEL REAL. Some of his Maquis were Spaniards who blew bridges and waged guerrilla warfare against the Germans at CASTELNAU and GROSLEJAC.

May

By May POIRIER had completely reconstructed the Circuit with new groupings, but the link established by PEULEVE with Andre MALRAUX remained unbroken until the latter was arrested.

POIRIER worked with groups of all complexions throughout the DORDOGNE, CORREZE and LOT amounting to some 10,000 men. The highlight of these groups' activities was the delay, claimed to be as long as seven days, which they imposed on the armoured division DAS REICH, endeavouring to make its way to the front of NORMANDY.

Mid June Capt LAKE himself, with seven of his men, cut the PERIGUEUX-COUTRAS railway near NEUVIC in 12 places. It was thereby put permanently out of action by earth subsidences thus adding considerably to the difficulties of enemy movements. Sixty parachute operations were organized by POIRIER [no details available as to localities].

May/Aug	Date	Operations	Containers	Packages
	May 1944	11	149	40
	June 1944	4	54	30
	July 1944	43	1085*	227
	August 1944	2	48	18
	Totals	60	1336	315

**Includes a daylight operation of 413 containers on 14/07/44*

1 July Parachute Capt Emile Marc GERSCHEL (Gilbert and Marc) was dropped to help POIRIER with the training of FTP groups and to act as his assistant. On arrival he took a prominent part in many parachute arms receptions.

8 July The group GERSCHEL was working with at JOURNIAC was attacked by the Germans. He successfully extricated his men in face of overwhelming enemy forces.

23 July André MALRAUX [known as Col BERGER] FFI Chief of the DORDOGNE was arrested. (He escaped three weeks later.) He was succeeded by "MARTIAL" whose desire to become independent head of these groups caused friction. GERSCHEL, however, helped smooth things down.

5 August Major POIRIER and HERVE, Chief of the A.S. in CORREZE being aware of the disorganization in the German forces decided to surround BRIVE.

15 August This proved successful for the ultimatum sent to the Commander of the German garrison on 15 Aug resulted in the surrender of about 1,200 Germans and the capture of very considerable quantities of arms. Major POIRIER was one of the four signatories of the surrender document.

16 August Capt GERSCHEL with two FFI group chiefs organized the cutting of the RN.89 so as to facilitate POIRIER's attack on PERIGUEUX.

19 August The Germans evacuated PERIGUEUX.

20 August A German force, encircled in the quarry near St. ASTIER surrendered. But almost immediately after a German column approached. Capt GERSCHEL requested the local Cure to proceed under the protection of a white flag to ask for the surrender of these Germans under honourable conditions. The Cure, together with his interpreter Fernand LEVY, were tortured and subsequently killed by the Germans. After fighting the Germans for several hours St. ASTIER had to be evacuated by 8.00 p.m. On entering the town the Germans killed 21 civilians as a reprisal. The Maquisards took 57 prisoners, including a Captain and a Lieutenant against a loss of 15 dead in their own ranks. In all it is estimated that the Germans lost 300 men during the day's fighting.

The Maquis reformed at TOCANE which they reached via Le GUILLAC de l'AUCHE.

After the liberation of the DORDOGNE at the end of August Capt GERSCHEL and several of his groups proceeded to the BORDEAUX area.

10-17
September

Capt GERSCHEL fought with his men to capture the Fort at CHAPUS and by so doing liberated the isthmus of MARENNE.

18 September

Capt GERSCHEL and Capt LAKE took part in the reception given to General de GAULLE at SAINTES. In a short conversation with General de GAULLE, LAKE was told that he had no business to be in France and that he was to leave forthwith.

1 October

Capt GERSCHEL returned to LONDON, relinquished his Commission and was awarded the M.C.

1 October

Major POIRIER [also known as PETERS] returned to the UK, relinquished his Commission and was awarded the D.S.O.

5 October

Capt LAKE returned and was awarded the M.C. and Croix de Guerre.

5 October

Capt BEAUCLERK returned to England and was awarded the M.B.E. (Mil.) and Croix de Guerre,