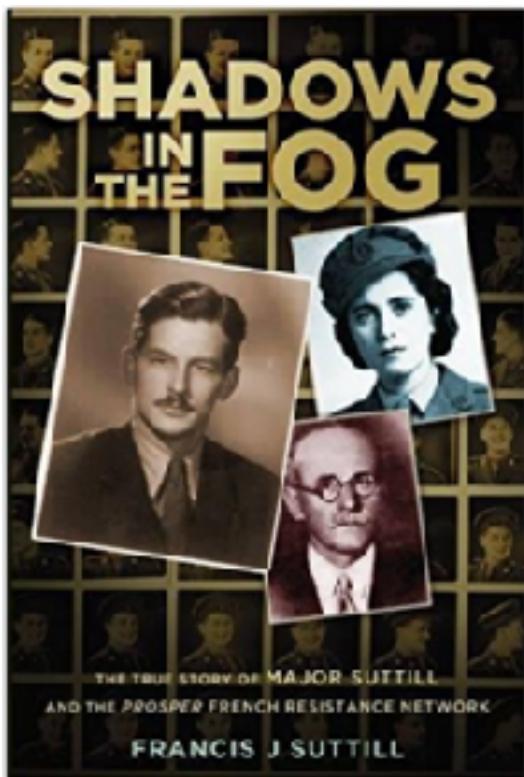


Shadows in the Fog

by Francis J Suttill



World War II ended with many strategies of deception and special operations remaining secret for years afterward. It was not until the mid-1950s that curious journalists began to reveal the existence and the activities of the *Special Operations Executive* (SOE), the organization Winston Churchill had brought into being with the mandate to "set Europe ablaze."

The job of SOE was to infiltrate agents into Nazi-occupied countries to carry out subversion and sabotage and to identify, arm, and train resistance groups to be ready to support Allied troops at the time of a cross-channel invasion.

It was a new kind of warfare, sending men and women into enemy-held territory via parachute or landing them by means of plane or boat with instructions from officers in London who were making up their methods as they went along.

Inevitably there were mistakes made, confusion on the ground, some successes and some failures. Among the latter was the destruction of the largest network in France, covering a huge swathe of the north under the leadership of its organizer Francis Suttill, known as Prosper.

The Prosper network had succeeded in organizing parachute drops of weapons which were hidden in barns, wells, caves, and outbuildings on farms whose owners had agreed to help the resistance, knowing full well that if caught they would be shot or deported. Then suddenly in June 1943 the leaders, Suttill, his radio operator Gilbert Norman, and his courier Andrée Borrell, were arrested. What followed was the wholesale confiscation of the hidden arms and the arrest of those who had been hiding them.

In the years that followed, partial information became available about what had happened but official records had either disappeared in a fire, or been held secret in the Public Record Office (now the National Archives). Agents' memoirs began to appear along with books by journalists suggesting imaginative explanations for the Prosper debacle. There were accusations of betrayal from above, hypothesizing that the network had been misled about the time and place of the coming cross-channel invasion in order to deceive the Germans when they were caught. Others opined that the group's leaders themselves had been partly responsible by, in the opinion of the French Section's official historian M. R. D. Foot, ignoring the most basic rules of security: "they kept their heads up when they should have kept them down."

There was enough evidence of cases of infiltration, betrayal, and just plain muddle to keep the presses going. There was the intriguing question of the role played by the agent responsible for organizing the schedule of flights in and out of France, Henri Déricourt. Was he a double or a triple agent?

The question that remained most troubling was who it was who had revealed the information about the caches of weapons to the Germans in the naive belief that they would honor an agreement to spare the lives of those who had hidden them. Was it Suttill or Norman?

It was to answer that question that Prosper's son Francis Suttill, Jr. undertook in 2000, with the encouragement of Foot, to solve the mystery that seemed to besmirch the memory of his father. He set about in the next few years during his summer vacations, to establish the facts about the Prosper network's activities, its communications with London, and its receptions of arms. This highly detailed record makes up the bulk of the book resulting from his researches. It establishes

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the extent and value of the activities of Prosper and his group before they were captured. And it puts to rest the idea that Suttill was the one who gave the Germans the information that led them to the secreted arms and the patriots who had agreed to store them. It was Gilbert Norman, influenced by how much the Germans already seemed to know, who made what Foot called the "inane" pact. He may have hoped to save his own life that way. Suttill, on the contrary, was reported by witnesses interrogated after the war to have withstood torture for days without revealing anything.

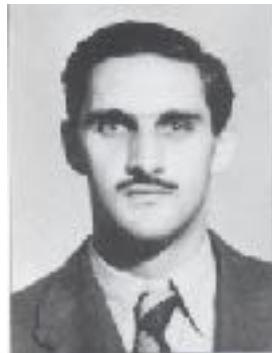
Suttill's final exoneration was the judgment of SOE's official historian who wrote, after interviewing several people not available to him earlier, while preparing a new edition of his SOE in France: "I now have no shred of doubt left that [Suttill's] personal integrity, his loyalty to his friends, and his patriotism all remained absolutely intact, to the end."

This is not a book that can be recommended to the general reader, its focus being too specifically on the details of the activities of a single network of SOE agents. It will provide material for those with a special interest in the minutiae of British-led resistance activities in France. Those who have followed the controversy about the fate of SOE's French Section over the years will find some long-awaited answers here.

Rita Kramer, New York



Andrée Borrel
Courrier



Gilbert Norman
Radio Operator



Jack Agazarian
Radio Operator