

Confidential Filing

History of Special Operations (SOE) in S. E Asia  
from 1942-46.

3001

HISTORIES

May 1980

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>25.80</del>							
<del>15.5.80.</del>							
<del>6.6.80</del>							
<del>10.9.82</del>							
<del>13.9.82</del>							
<del>16.1.84</del>							
<del>9.1.87</del>							
<del>28.1.87</del>							
<del>23.4.7</del>							
<del>28.7.81</del>							
<del>24.11.81</del>							

PREM 19/2214



PM  
70

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBIN BUTLER

**HISTORIES OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE**

The Prime Minister agrees the proposal in your minute of 23 November that Mr. Christopher Wood should be appointed as an Official Historian to begin the preparatory work on "SOE in Italy". The Prime Minister also agrees that you should, in future, approve such appointments unless they seem to you to have controversial elements on which you judge that her authority is needed.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence).

N. L. WICKS

24 November 1988

PM

Ref. A088/3382

PRIME MINISTER



1  
Pme Minutes  
Agree to X and Y  
overleaf?

Yes no

N.C.U  
23.11

Histories of the Special Operations Executive

At present three histories of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) are being prepared:

History of SOE in Greece by Dr Richard Clogg, to be published by Oxford University Press,


History of SOE in the Low Countries by Professor M R D Foot, to be published by Macmillan, and

History of SOE in Yugoslavia by Dr Mark Wheeler, also to be published by Macmillan.

2. These histories are produced and published under commercial arrangements. Public expenditure on them is limited to the provision of research assistance.

3. The pressure to keep up the momentum on preparation of the SOE Histories whilst it is still possible to draw on the memories of those who were directly involved with SOE continues, particularly from Sir Brooks Richards and Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker of the Special Forces Club, and Sir William Deakin, all of whom I am meeting soon to discuss how best to cover the activities of SOE in the Eastern European countries.

4. In the meantime, however, Mr Christopher Woods, a former member of SOE, has recently retired from the Foreign Office, where, following a diplomatic career he has, for the past six years, been the SOE Adviser. This entails giving



advice on the use of the SOE Archive and assisting the historians appointed to write the histories of SOE with their research. Mr Woods now has the time to undertake the task of writing 'SOE in Italy' and has expressed his willingness to do so. All those who have been involved since the programme of SOE histories began regard him as well suited to this task.

---

5. The facilities for research into the SOE Archive, which is held by the Foreign Office, can normally only support two historians at any time. Dr Clogg's research for 'SOE in Greece' is coming to an end which will leave the field clear for Professor Foot and Dr Wheeler. I have however agreed to seek your consent to Mr Woods' accreditation as an Official Historian on the understanding that he would not seek access to the SOE Archive until it is convenient to the Foreign Office for him to do so: there is much preparatory work which he can be doing in the meantime. There is other documentation to research and Mr Woods is anxious to start work on establishing contacts with the diminishing number of survivors and others with relevant views and information. The arrangements for official vetting of the text which emerges would remain the same as those approved for the histories listed above.

X 6. I should be glad to have your approval for Mr Woods to be appointed as an Official Historian to begin the preparatory work on 'SOE in Italy'.

---

Y 7. Unless you wish to approve each of those appointments, would you be willing that I should do so when they have been agreed by the Departments and interests concerned? I would of course refer to you any which seem to me to have controversial elements on which I think that your authority is needed.



8. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to the Secretary of State for Defence.

R.R.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

23 November 1988



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

**SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG**

**HISTORY OF SOE IN YUGOSLAVIA**

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 27 July about the proposed official history of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Yugoslavia.

The Prime Minister has read and noted your minute with care. She agrees that Professor Wheeler should be invited to write this official history.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

N.L. WICKS

28 July 1987

85

010

Prime Minister

Agree that  
Professor Wheeler should  
be invited to write the  
Official History of the SOE in  
Yugoslavia?

Ref. A087/2259

MR WICKS

*[Handwritten signature/initials]*

History of SOE in Yugoslavia

N.L.U  
27.3

The Prime Minister will remember that we have in hand a series of Official Histories of Special Operations Executive in the Second World War. The first (by M R D Foot, about SOE in France) was published many years ago by the Stationery Office. More recent histories have been published by commercial publishers: two (SOE in the Far East and in Scandinavia) written by Dr Charles Cruickshank have been published by the Oxford University Press; a third (SOE in Greece) written by Richard Clogg is in hand for publication by the OUP next year; and M R D Foot has been commissioned to write the history of SOE in the Low Countries for publication (on present plans) by Macmillan. In each case the author and the publisher have been asked to give the Government undertakings accepting conditions of access to official records and a right for the Government to "vet" the history before publication.

2. The next history that it is proposed to commission is that of SOE in Yugoslavia; and the purpose of this minute is to seek the Prime Minister's approval to commission Professor Mark Wheeler to write this history. The publisher could well again be Macmillan; failing them, we should probably go back to the OUP, or Methuen who have published other books by Professor Wheeler.

3. Professor Wheeler is a professor at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in the University of London. He has made wartime Yugoslavia his field of special study, and has already written a book on "Britain and the War for Yugoslavia 1940-43". He has the necessary linguistic qualifications. He



is well regarded as a reputable historian who would bring to his task the necessary degree of detachment: he has been recommended by Sir Harry Hinsley, the General Editor of the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War; by Richard Clogg, who is writing the history of SOE in Greece; by Sir Peter Wilkinson (formerly Director, GCHQ and Intelligence Co-ordinator); by Sir Brooks Richards (formerly Ambassador in Greece, and himself in SOE); and by Sir Fitzroy Maclean and Sir William Deakin.

4. Wind of the possible choice of Professor Wheeler has reached Miss Nora Beloff, who has written to protest in the strongest terms against it. She regards him as a light-weight, unsuitable for the job, and she says that her view is shared by M R D Foot. It is evident from her letters that she believes that Professor Wheeler is an "inheritor of the Maclean-Deakin mythology", who will write the history with a Titoist bias. She has come to take a "revisionist" view of Yugoslav history which has provoked considerable controversy (I am attaching as Annex A copies of an article she published in The Times on 18 May, a letter Mr Renton wrote to The Times on 19 May, and a letter which Miss Beloff subsequently sent to Mr Renton on 20 May). She cites the view of Dr S K Pavlowitch of Southampton University that "as a huge mass of new material is now available, it would be better to postpone any official history until the many rival historians have had time to go through the new evidence and see how their respective theses hold up".

5. Dr Pavlowitch is also a respected academic historian specialising in Balkan studies; he would be an alternative to Professor Wheeler for the SOE history. But his father was associated with the Royalist Yugoslav Government-in-exile during the Second World War, and he would be liable to write the history with a Mihailovicist bias.





6. I have considered with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office whether we should postpone the writing of the official history. But we believe that the "new material" which Miss Beloff says has become available is not so much primary source material as new interpretations of the existing evidence made by Yugoslav historians for internal Yugoslav reasons. This material will be available for Professor Wheeler to take into account in writing his book. His knowledge of Serbo-Croat will enable him to exploit all available Yugoslav sources. If the project is postponed, the evidence of the survivors of those who took part in SOE operations in Yugoslavia will be irretrievably lost.

7. In view of the likelihood of controversy, I thought it right to discuss the matter directly with Professor Wheeler. He is keen to take the project on; he fully understands the likelihood of controversy and recognises the need for him (if he takes it on) to "lean over backwards" to do justice to the pro-Mihailovic point of view. For what it was worth, he struck me as an objective and balanced person.

8. I believe therefore that the right course is to go ahead and commission Professor Wheeler to prepare the Official History of SOE in Yugoslavia, provided that he and his publisher are prepared to accept the conditions governing access to the official records and the Government's right to "vet" his book before publication. Whatever he writes will not necessarily be the last word on the subject: his book will be subject to critical analysis and review by those who take a different viewpoint, and it would not be out of the question, if the Government thought that the criticism had merit, to allow (say) Dr Pavlowitch access to the official records to write a second book, if he could find some one to publish it.

9. Sir Patrick Wright concurs in this recommendation.

---



10. If the Prime Minister accepts this recommendation, I shall write as in the draft at Annex B to Miss Beloff.

11. I am sending a copy of this minute and its annexes to the Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

27 July 1987

CONQUEROR

# Britain's misguided largesse

# Kinnock's world of fantasy

MES  
RY  
ng

This month marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Britain and the principality of Serbia, the cradle of modern Yugoslavia. By a historical coincidence we find ourselves today, just as in 1837, backing a lawless regime against advocates of legal restraints on executive power.

The similarities between, on the one hand, the semi-feudal "constitutionalists", as they called themselves, who opposed the despotism of Prince Milos, and, on the other, the present-day Yugoslavs demanding a plural society, should not be exaggerated; but the principle is the same.

A prominent group of Serb intellectuals, at considerable personal risk, are now publicly demanding specific changes in Yugoslavia's legal and constitutional provisions in an attempt to break the communist monopoly of power and to impose the rule of law. The Yugoslav press has not been allowed to publish the text and the federal prime minister, Branko Mikulic, has denounced the signatories as "agents of the bourgeois enemy". In an interview with a West German magazine he said that, if necessary, he would use troops to capture them and took the occasion to castigate the veteran Yugoslav defender of human rights, Milovan Djilas, as "traitor *par excellence*."

None of this nastiness was allowed to sully the cordiality of the 150th anniversary celebrations which took place last week at Lancaster House. One of Mikulic's ministers, who was visiting London to reaffirm Yugoslavia's desperate need for hard cash, warmly thanked his host, Timothy Renton, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, for his assurance that British benevolence would continue.

In his welcoming speech, Renton chose to ignore the political factor, which, as all intelligent Yugoslavs agree, is at the bottom



Tito: his regional policies helped start the rot

their stabilization programme. "Stabilization" seems an odd word to use about a country where inflation is running at more than 100 per cent and likely to increase now that Mikulic, whose bark is worse than his bite, has conceded 40 per cent wage demands to buy off nationwide strikes.

Western support for a manifestly incompetent and unaccountable government is primarily directed, as it was in Palmerston's day, at doing down the Russians. In effect, however, Yugoslavia's continued receipt of Western goods and know-how, paid for by Western subsidies, is just what the Russians want: Yugoslavia's principal usefulness being as a conduit for technical innovation, from which all Warsaw Pact countries — but not Yugoslavia — are debarred.

For a long time now, Yugoslavia has been exploiting Western goodwill by borrowing far above its means, and four years ago I asked the IMF — whose endorsement of a country's creditworthiness stimulates all other lenders — why it was so profligate. An IMF official told me it pinned its faith



Mikulic: fighting off demands for greater freedom

mists were refusing to serve on the commission, arguing that experts already knew what needed to be done but the politicians would not do it. And last month Sergei Kraigher, the commission's chairman, publicly admitted that most of those in charge have no idea of the programme's content.

Now, yet again, the Paris Club, representing creditor countries, has agreed to reschedule the Yugoslav debt. Of this, \$160 million was lent by Britain. When I asked at the Treasury whether we had no better use for our taxpayers' money, I was told that we had no choice — the Yugoslavs had spent it and could not pay us back. Yet it is on the greed of their capitalist creditors that the Yugoslav public is being encouraged to blame their miseries.

Further, the communists can fall back on another favourite scapegoat: the various ethnic groups, Serb, Croat, Slovene, Albanian etc, are always ready to blame one another for their wretchedness. Tito, who ruled Yugoslavia for 35 years, gravely exacerbated the rivalries inherent in the diversity of the Yugoslav

to Stalinist central planning, he delegated power and patronage to political trustees within the eight federal entities.

Each of these, and their copied successors, have drawn on international credits to build up their own power bases and compete industrially and financially against one another. In so doing, they have paralysed central government in Belgrade.

The gravity of the crisis was fully recognized at the recent meeting of the party's central committee in Belgrade. The *rappporteur*, in language reminiscent of our own "loony left", pledged the party to continue the fight against encroaching capitalism, to contribute to the spread of socialism "throughout the entire world" and to refuse to tolerate — or even recognize the humanity of — those favouring alternative political systems.

But though the party leaders clung to power, they showed themselves incapable of agreeing on a single practical measure to head off calamity. Most speakers conceded growing anti-communism, even within party ranks, and one warned against the ominous threat of "a historic compromise" between some of the people already in power and champions "of freedom and democracy in the liberalist sense."

If, as seems increasingly possible, the Yugoslav democrats do manage to break one-party rule — though Renton's benediction of their enemies, who still control the secret police, will hardly help — the country's social and economic rehabilitation will be long and hard. Perhaps we should consider sharing some of the costs of decades of misdirected resources and massive embezzlement — if only as reparation for the damage we have done to the Yugoslav people by sponsoring and financing a regime no less arbitrary than that of Lord Palmerston's protégé

If there is any intellectual interest to be extracted from this election campaign (and, if there is not, some of us will go mad), it surely consists in thinking what one would do if one was in the shoes of Mr Kinnock or in those of Dr Owen and Mr Steel. This week I shall concern myself with Mr Kinnock; Dr Owen and Mr Steel will have to wait, tremulously, until next Monday.

Obviously, Labour should now be looking for weaknesses in the Tory position. Why is it that the clearest of those weaknesses escapes it? It is the widespread public belief that Mrs Thatcher is not enough of an authoritarian. Last time she had everything going for her in this respect. She had organized the reconquest of the Falklands, against much judicious advice; she stood for strong national defence; she was well known to approve of the restoration of the death penalty; she had given her colleagues in the EEC a fairly rough time. In gratitude for all these exhibitions of patriotic strength, the people were prepared to accept her obnoxious sessions with the free economy, privatization and all that.

It is possible to argue, however, that she has not done nearly so much as she could to promote the national cause in the last four years. She has not been particularly successful in putting down crime, and in this respect she has reconciled herself to a roughly liberal consensus. She has shrunk from the idea of encouraging such immigrants as feel unhappy and unwanted to return whence they came. She has subscribed to a dangerous instrument called the Single European Act which powerfully reduces national independence by permitting a great many matters of domestic interest to the United Kingdom to be settled by foreigners. She has accepted mod-

ernization of social policy. His party would bitterly divide wholeheartedly on the various causes. What specifically against her would collapse her idiosyncratic leadership, the entire in so far as the fallen short on causes (strong common sense, a vigorous EEC, realism about South Africa — her fault but the inferior colleague

Mr Kinnock, therefore, remains in a peculiar way of nevertheless, satisfactory. No authority is the commends her people, he authoritarianism conjure up an of "true English fantasy composed the Diggers, Martys, the Lin and all those radicals like S who stood, no socialism, but man, for com humanity, for

It will not do. The first is the conscious of his state and that of Mrs Thatcher's deficiencies (her secrets secret curb the luna unrepresentative seem to most sensible. The that, for all unbureaucratic British radical dancing, we a coalition

ive had their David Steel. e and David visits to each gdom, Steel n appearance Bradford. As to land, he wished good n by the air o turned out uncillor. On BC's Today im another unintention-wrong tape. ective party for the day, ounced that l be continu- ountry. With orter began: treet as the he Liberals, g up to a wn. Having that their p with lead- romeone has at buses run

t groomer in is offering arty colours ign. She set £40 weekly

toral law is . . . for eay ves given. to lure another, the other ision will, it enforced at

Letter to the Times

published May 19th 1987

### **Policy on Yugoslavia**

*From the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

Sir, The article by Nora Beloff, which you published on May 18, about the Government's policy towards Yugoslavia concentrates on polemics, without making much attempt to describe what our policy actually is. But I would like to correct one of Ms Beloff's inaccuracies — her assertion that British policy, as set out in a speech I made last week to mark the 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Serbia/Yugoslavia, is a "benediction" of the enemies of Yugoslav democrats.

The fact is that the Yugoslav leadership has committed itself to policies of political democratisation and economic liberalisation. The approach of Britain and Yugoslavia's other Western creditors, not least in the context of current discussion about the next phase in refinancing Yugoslavia's hard currency debt, is to encourage Yugoslavia to stick to those policies. This hardly amounts to a benediction of enemies of democracy and economic modernisation.

Yours faithfully,  
TIM RENTON,  
Foreign and Commonwealth  
Office,  
Whitehall, SW1.  
May 18.

NORA BELOFF

11 BELSIZE ROAD, LONDON NW6 4RX · TEL. 586 0378

May 20th 1987

Dear Tim,

My article in the Times will have come as no surprise to you. On May 2nd I wrote to say that I proposed drawing an analogy between the British backing of ~~xxxxxxxx~~ arbitrary rule 150 years ago and now, and begging you not to take the occasion of the celebration to beat the old drum about our wartime collaboration with the communist-led Partisans.

Instead, you signalled out Deakin and Maclean for special tribute. That they were both brave men in the face of danger is beyond dispute but, now that the record of what was really going on in Yugoslavia at the time is widely available, we have to recognise the sheer absurdity of some of their wartime dispatches - most of them available at the PRO. e.g. Deakin lauding the religious tolerance and liberty-loving nature of Tito's men, at a ~~xxx~~ time when they were slaughtering pro-allied resisters, specially priests, who refused to follow the communist lead. e.g. Maclean's repeated urging that, by forcing the King to dump Mihailovic, we would be helping to save the monarchy!

And why no tribute to another brave ~~xxxx~~ British officer, Michael Lees, author of Special Operations executed (1986) who served in Mihailovic's Serbia, and whose current comments on Deakin and Maclean are unprintable.

All this would be funny if it were not tinged with grief. Did you know that you were speaking in the presence of Ljubo Sirc, a guest at the party, who had been an anti-communist resister who spent over seven years of his life in Tito's jails as a British spy? His offence had been to take seriously the 1944 deal between Tito and Subasic (sponsored by the British on the basis of reports from your 'legendary figures') and providing for a postwar coalition government: as a young innocent, Sirc thought he was within his rights in helping to try and organise a democratic opposition in the postwar Yugoslav elections.

Hoping to force out of him a confession of ~~xxx~~ spying for Britain, the Titoists grabbed his father as hostage and the old man died in jail. As I know (I ~~am~~ <sup>am</sup> currently helping edit <sup>to be published by Andre Deutsch next year,</sup> Sirc's recollections) his consciousness of parricide has dented his sense of humour.

You object to my use of the phrase 'benediction' as a fair synthesis of your speech. Yet you ~~said~~ <sup>declared</sup> that we and the Titoists "acknowledge our common European heritage"; you ~~praised~~ <sup>praised</sup> "the unique and fruitful relations between the European community and Yugoslavia" which mostly amount to doling out money to help sustain the regime; you claim that Yugoslavia is (you use the present tense) tackling stabilisation at a time when inflation is running over 100 per cent. You say "we applaud and support the efforts of the Yugoslav authorities..." yet you know that Premier Branko Mikulic is more ~~px~~ repressive than his predecessors and that many Yugoslavs are in jail, or deprived of their livelihood or right to ~~travel~~ <sup>travel</sup>, for

page two

You point out that the Yugoslav government keeps talking of "political democratisation and economic liberalisation", ~~yes~~ indeed, they always have. Yet they have never lived up to these promises and I hope that the Editor of the Times, to whom I am sending a copy of this letter, will agree with me that what you said about the system does indeed constitute a 'benediction'.

In taking exception to this remark (which is a matter of opinion not of fact), you cite it as only "one of the inaccuracies" in my Times article. As Minister of State, you ~~obviously~~ obviously have no time to tell us what are the other inaccuracies, but I wonder whether you would be good enough to ask your staff to list them? As you know, I come from a family of academics, Max, John et al, and though we disagree about a lot of things, we are all sticklers for facts.

As this argument has historical implications, I am sending a copy of my letter to Sir Robert Armstrong who, as Secretary of the Cabinet, is ~~is~~ responsible for the Official history of the war. As I have told you, I have already written to him about the reported intention of preparing an official history of the SOE in Yugoslavia. If this is necessary, I have pleaded with him to select an author who recognises that, both in this country and in Yugoslavia, the old fashioned pro-Partisan legends are currently subject to severe revision.

On current issues, what emerges from your letter to the Times is that you persist in supposing that a one-party collectivist system, in which the government is unaccountable and irremovable and the judiciary subservient, is capable of reforms enabling its subjects to compete in the Western economic world. This is the ~~essence~~ <sup>sub</sup> of the wider argument I am having with the FCO, about the appropriate attitudes towards the Gorbachov era. In this connexion, may I ask you to read a little booklet which appears this week (I understand a copy has already been sent to you) by Jan Winiescki of Poland: Economic Prosepects East and West?

Commenting on the widening gap (underestimated, as he shows, in the official figures) between the economic performance of the communist countries and those with a market economy, Winiescki warns us against ~~confusing~~ <sup>CONFUSING</sup> symptoms with causes. The symptoms, lack of innovation, misallocated investment, financial indiscipline etc., are economic. The causes, lack of a civil society operating within the framework of the law, are political. Political pluralism, as he shows ~~is~~ is a prerequisite for economic prosperity.

Hoping that, after the election frenzy, we can meet and talk all this over,

as ever,

N/MLC

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO  
MISS NORA BELOFF, 11 BELSIZE ROAD, LONDON NW6 4RX

Thank you very much for your letters of 14 April and 22 May about the proposal for a history of SOE in Yugoslavia.

I have naturally taken your letters extremely seriously. From the outset we have recognised that this was likely to be one of the most controversial areas for a SOE history, and it is clearly important to make sure that it is entrusted to a historian who is not only expert in Yugoslavian history of the period but who also has the linguistic qualifications that give him access to Yugoslav-language sources and can be expected to weigh all the available evidence in a thorough, objective and balanced way.

You suggested in a letter to Mr Renton that we should find an author whose approach would in your view be less likely to be coloured by one particular viewpoint; or that we should postpone the project until the new material which has become available has been digested and assessed.

We should be reluctant to postpone the project, since that could well deprive us of the first-hand evidence of those of the participants in these events who are still living. These people are now getting on in years. A historian starting now will be able to collect and collate material from their recollections, the SOE archives and the new material you say has become available. We are impressed by the view that this project should be tackled now rather than later, by which time one source of evidence would be irreversibly lost. If the resulting book is felt by some to be unsatisfactory, they will of course be able to ventilate in public their criticisms and their reasons for taking a different view.

On this basis, the decision has been taken to proceed with the history of SOE in Yugoslavia now, and to entrust the project to Professor Wheeler. The inquiries I have made certainly lead me to the view that he can be relied upon to weigh all the evidence in an objective and balanced way, and I have satisfied myself that he is well aware of the need to give due weight to the views of those who take a "revisionist" view as well as of those who might be expected to take a "Titoist" view.





Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 March 1987

*me*  
Dear Trevor,

Histories of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)

The Foreign Secretary <sup>at 11.15</sup> has seen Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 5 January and is content that an official history of special operations in the Low Countries during the Second World War should be prepared on the basis set out in Sir Robert's minute.

Sir Geoffrey Howe has noted that HMG retains the right to vet the manuscript and would accordingly wish FCO officials to be involved in the vetting process as was the case with previous volumes in the series.

I am copying this letter to Nigel Wicks (No 10) and to David Ball (MOD).

Yours ever,

(A C Galsworthy)  
Private Secretary

Trevor Woolley Esq  
Cabinet Office

HISTORIGS: History of SOE May 1980





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-930 7022

MO 23/2V

28th January 1987

*MBM*

*Dear Trevor*

HISTORIES OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE

The Defence Secretary has seen Sir Robert ~~Armstrong~~'s minute of 5th January and Nigel Wicks' reply of 9th January. He is content with the proposal that Professor Foot should write an Official History; but has asked that the Ministry of Defence should have a chance to look over the manuscript before it is published.

I am sending copies of this letter to Nigel Wicks (No 10) and Tony Galsworthy (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

*Yours sincerely  
D C J Ball*

(D C J BALL)  
Private Secretary

Trevor Woolley Esq  
Cabinet Office

HISTORIES: History of  
Special Operations



1944



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

HISTORIES OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE (SOE)

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 5 January in which you seek her approval for the preparation of an Official History of Special Operations in the Low Countries during the Second World War.

The Prime Minister agrees that this Official History should be prepared, provided that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence are both content.

I am copying this minute to Tony Galsworthy (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and John Howe (Ministry of Defence).

N. L. Wicks

GA

9 January 1987

Ref. A087/29

PRIME MINISTER

Histories of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)

This minute seeks your approval to the preparation of an Official History of Special Operations in the Low Countries during the Second World War.

2. The history would be written by Professor M R D Foot, who wrote "SOE in France", and would be published by Macmillan under arrangements similar to those you have approved for previous histories viz:

History of SOE in the Far East, by Dr Charles Cruickshank, published by the Oxford University Press on 13 October 1983.

History of SOE in Scandinavia, by Dr Charles Cruickshank, published by the Oxford University Press last year, and

History of SOE in Greece, which is still under preparation by Mr Richard Clogg, and will be published by Oxford University Press, we hope later this year.

2. Interest and pressure for further histories of special operations continues. Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker, Chairman of the Special Forces Club, is concerned to keep up the momentum whilst it is still possible for the authors to draw on the memories of those who were directly involved in the events, in addition to the documentary evidence.

3. The method of producing these "private venture" histories, which you approved for those listed above, offers the best prospect of continuing the work whilst there are worthwhile stories to be told, and without incurring publishing costs

Prime Minister  
Agree the  
preparation of this  
Official History if other  
Ministers agree?

N.L.W.

G.1



from public funds. Access to closed records would be necessary and facilities such as accommodation in secure premises made available. Agreements with the author and the publisher provide for us to vet the manuscript and to require any deletions that may be called for. By these means we can be assured of a scholarly and accurate work, and at the same time secure full sanitisation by the agencies as a condition of publication.

4. Professor Foot is eminently well suited to carry out this work, both by virtue of his contacts in the world of SOE and because his wife is Dutch. He has expressed himself very willing to undertake the task, and has reached agreement with Macmillans with regard to publication.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to the Secretary of State for Defence.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

5 January 1987



SECRET AND PERSONAL

NBPM

PM/84/13

PRIME MINISTER

Histories of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)

1. I have seen Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 19 December and Michael Heseltine's minute of 9 January. I am also content that official histories of Special Operations in Greece and Scandinavia during the Second World War should be prepared on the basis set out in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute.
  
2. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Defence and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

16 January 1984

SECRET AND PERSONAL



CONFIDENTIAL



History

JP

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

---

HISTORY OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE IN  
SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 10 September (A09425) and is content that you should tell Dr. Charles Cruickshank that the way is clear for him to deliver the text of his Official History of special operations in South-East Asia from 1942 to 1946 for publication by the Oxford University Press.

E. E. R. BUTLER

13 September 1982

JP



Ref. A09425

*Approved*

PRIME MINISTER

History of the Special Operations Executive in South-East Asia

In May 1980 you approved proposals which I put before you in my minute of 1 May 1980 (A02064) that we should commission Dr Charles Cruickshank to prepare an Official History of special operations in South-East Asia from 1942 to 1946 to be published by the Oxford University Press.

2. Dr Cruickshank has completed his work; his text has been scrutinised by the Departments and agencies concerned; he has accepted all the amendments and alterations which were sought; and the text has now been cleared. All concerned are content that the book should go forward for publication.

3. If you are content, I will tell Dr Cruickshank that the way is now clear for him to deliver the text to the publishers.

*RA*

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

10 September 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

*histories*



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 June 1980

ZFF 291

(18)

*NBA.*

*MW*

*9w*

*Dear Aline,*

History of SOE in South East Asia

I am sorry for the delay in commenting on your minute of 2 May to Robert Armstrong about the proposed official history of special operations in South East Asia from 1942-46. I can now confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary agrees that the project should go ahead on the lines proposed.

I am copying this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office) and Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence).

*Yours ever  
G G H*

(G G H Walden)  
Private Secretary

C A Whitmore Esq  
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL

SECRET

*Horrocks*

3



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-930 7022 ~~XXXX~~ 218 2111/3

MO 11/10/6

15th May 1980

*NBPM*  
*ML*  
*lv.*

*Dear Clin,*

HISTORY OF SOE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

I am writing further to your minute to Robert Armstrong of 2nd May, commenting on his submission to the Prime Minister of 1st May, to confirm that my Secretary of State is, for his part, content that the project should go ahead on the lines proposed.

There are relevant MOD records which are not available in the Public Records Office and Dr Cruickshank's access to these could be arranged.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (FCO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours truly,*  
*Bur*

(B M NORBURY)

C A Whitmore Esq

SECRET

SECRET

Histories

2



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

HISTORY OF SOE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The Prime Minister has seen your minute AO2064 of 1 May 1980 and agrees, subject to the views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary, that we should commission Dr. Cruickshank to prepare an Official History of special operations in South-East Asia from 1942-46 to be published by the Oxford University Press.

I am sending copies of this minute to Mr. Walden (FCO) and Mr. Norbury (MOD).

JWH.

SP

2 May 1980

SECRET



SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister.

This proposal does not seem to raise the same difficulties as the Official History of Counter-Intelligence.

Agree, subject to the views of Lord Carrington and Mr Lyne, that there should be an official history prepared by Dr Cruickshank?

Yes  
no

History of SOE in South-East Asia

AW  
1.1.80.

I am seeking your approval to the preparation of an official History of Special Operations in South-East Asia, 1942-46, to be published by the Oxford University Press. It has no connection with the wartime History of Counter-Intelligence which you are to discuss with the Home Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on 8th May, but you may nevertheless wish to know in advance that there is this proposal for a further wartime history.

2. Last autumn, Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker, who is Chairman of the Special Forces Club, informed us that the Club had agreed to invite a professional historian, Dr. Charles Cruickshank, to write a history now of SOE in South-East Asia while at least some of those involved were alive to tell the story. It could be either a private history, or an official history, but in either case they sought reasonable access for Dr. Cruickshank to use the closed records held by Departments.

3. This approach was not the first. Lord Mountbatten had urged Sir John Hunt to sponsor an official history in 1976; we were not able to pursue his request because Cabinet Office funds for histories were committed until at least 1982 - which is still the situation.

4. We understand from talks with Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker and Dr. Cruickshank that they are very much concerned not to place too much reliance on the recollections of now elderly participants, and they are anxious to secure adequate access to contemporary documents. There is a fair amount of material in the Public Record Office; and the Special Forces Club have asked members to contribute their personal recollections. A fully authentic history cannot be written, however, without access to closed records held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (in fact the SOE archives are held by SIS) and the Ministry of Defence.



SECRET

5. Dr. Cruickshank, who was formerly a senior Civil Servant, is the author of: "The German Occupation of the Channel Islands", "Greece 1940-41", "The Fourth Arm: Psychological Warfare 1938-45", and "Deception in World War II". All I hear of him is good, and we have no qualms about the quality of Dr. Cruickshank's work or about his readiness to comply with such constraints as we might specify.

6. We have two choices. The first is to give limited help to the writing of a private history. The custodian of the SOE archives has for many years been in the practice of answering questions from outside enquirers and writers. He would answer questions which Dr. Cruickshank cared to put to him so far as practicable. The second course is to appoint Dr. Cruickshank as official Historian, as M. R. D. Foot was appointed to write "SOE in France". On this basis, Dr. Cruickshank could be granted almost complete access to the closed SOE records. As an official Historian, Dr. Cruickshank would have to agree formally to submit his manuscript, to accept any necessary changes in the text, and to obtain approval for publication. In either case, access could be granted to Ministry of Defence records under controlled conditions.

7. Sir Michael Palliser and I would prefer to have an official history. We believe there is a worthwhile story to be told, and that it is desirable for Dr. Cruickshank to have reasonable access to closed records. The author's agreement to the official vetting of his manuscript would enable the Government to ensure that there were no sensitive references, whether drawn from official papers or from the contributions of former members of the Special Forces, all of whom are supposed to be bound by the Official Secrets Act. There has been continuing demand for a further official history of SOE following the publication of SOE in France, and we should have come forward earlier if we had had the money. The work we have in mind is not an Intelligence History, and the story of Special Operations in South-East Asia would be essentially paramilitary, as is clear from the relevant sections of an unpublished history in the SOE archives. 'C' would be content with the arrangements and ready to give the fullest access to papers after preliminary vetting by one of his own staff.



SECRET

8. We have secured the agreement of HMSO to publication of the history by the Oxford University Press, subject to the payment of royalties on Crown copyright material. We should need an agreement with OUP, as with the author, that publication would not take place without Government approval of the script. We foresee no major problem in this.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to the Secretary of State for Defence.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

1st May 1980