DOSSIER

4

Mission Auguste (Aisne)

August 1944

English translation

REPORT
on the activity of the mission "AUGUSTE".

This Mission was composed of three men:-

INDIANA	- American Major	BONSALI J.)
HERAULT	- French Captain	(DELVICHE)
ARISONA	- American Radio NCO	(COTE Roger)

It was parachuted on the night of 15 to 16 August 1944 onto the terrain "FABLE", north-west of Colomfay (AISNE). Service phrase: "All quiet on the Western Front" ["A l'Ouest rien de nouveau"]. The operation promised to be dangerous, for German troops were stationed in the region and patrols were being made by Georgians.

Then, at 13.30, the service phrase went out on the B.B.C. The regional chief of air operations, GRAMME (Jean-Pierre), and his deputy MOINE [?] took the necessary precautions, for as their H.Q. was near LE NOUVION, reaching the drop zone meant a journey of 35 kilometres. They decided to go and reconnoitre the road and warn the field chief "RAYMOND". With him it was agreed that at the crossroads, bridges and dangerous spots a man would be posted to show the way and give the alarm in case of danger. These precautions taken, they returned to H.Q. and hurried the final preparations: choosing the men who were to attend the drop, checking the vehicles - 2 front-wheel-drive "Citroen" cars and a 1,500 kg "Renault" van.

At 19.30 and at 21.15 the phrase is repeated on the B.B.C.; the operation will therefore take place tonight. The regional team takes its place in the vehicles and leaves for the drop site around 22.00. The journey goes well, the road is marked out, the men are at their posts, all is going for the best, and they reach the field without trouble. RAYMOND is there with his reception team. The arrangements for the lights are made at once, for the night is black, only a few stars: poor conditions for dropping men. Then the wait.

Then, around 01.30, the welcome sound, and the aircraft appears. Perfect light signals; after a few passes the aircraft drops the containers and then the men - but across the line of lights, so that the "AUGUSTUS" come down a long way from the beacons. Assembly, lamps signalling in the night; at last here is the first, "HERAULT", then the Major "INDIANA", and finally the radio "ARISONA", who had landed 1,500 metres from the lights. Everyone is there, not without bumps, falls and tears. During the introductions the containers are gathered, except for one, which was found a few days later 15 km away, near GUISE. Then came the return, headlights blazing, the sentries at arms. The Mission is amazed, believing it is living a dream.

Then the arrival at H.Q., where, in the light, we become better acquainted: conversation, the aim of the mission, a reception, champagne, coffee laced with a Calvados of the finest vintage - and everyone goes to bed, for it is past 4 in the morning. In the morning FONTAINE, operations officer and liaison between GRAMME and GISSOIDE [Cissoide?], D.M.R., goes to the latter's H.Q. to learn what destination would be given to the mission. It was decided that it would be taken to the CAUDRY area, and from there to a safe house where the necessary measures would be taken. So FONTAINE goes to LE NOUVION to pass on this decision, and in the afternoon the Mission boards the van with arms and baggage and leaves for the "d'Iris" [?] farm, commune of CLARY (Nord), run by Monsieur H. MICHEL CORNEILLE [?], where they receive a truly warm welcome. It was agreed that they would stay a few days and that FONTAINE would provide liaison between them, the D.M.R. and GRAMME.

Fontaine looked for another safe house and passed it on to the mission in case it should be in danger. Meanwhile the mission got in touch with LONDON and lived the life of the chateau: good cooking (French style), good wines, etc...

It was then decided to call a meeting to be attended by the leaders of the region. This meeting took place at Fontaine's safe house, the farm of Petit Tournai, commune of Beaurevoir (Aisne), run by M. BRICOUT, on the morning of 19 August. A very cordial meeting at which various questions were examined, in particular the increase in parachute drops and the approval of new terrains with their service phrases, with comments on the organisation of air operations; the Mission was amazed at the work already done and the results obtained. At the close of this meeting it was decided that the mission would go to the south of the department, the SOISSONS area, where the Germans were building defence works - so that the mission could speed up the dispatch of the arms so badly needed by the resistance in that sector.

Present were: GRAMME, Regional B.O.A.; MOINE [?], deputy to the regional; BASTIEN, Regional F.F.I.; RENAULT, D.D.M. AISNE; FONTAINE; SEIGNEUR, operator, region A.5.

On Saturday evening SEIGNEUR returns to BRAINE and announces to his men that a rather delicate mission must be carried out as quickly as possible: to bring back from the north of the Department our three men making up the "AUGUSTUS".

We discuss where we are going to lodge them, and another question arises: the truck has broken down. "Whatever it takes," says SEIGNEUR, "we must leave Monday morning at eight." That same night and on the Sunday, the mechanic of the COSTEAUX works [text unclear: "aujour de la liberation de la petite ville"] set to work, and by noon the truck was running.

Meanwhile SEIGNEUR went to see some friends who might lodge the mission. The first, M. PASCARD at RUGNY, commune of ARCY-STE-RESTITUE, refuses, having too many staff. The second, M. MATHIEU, his neighbour, accepts after a few questions. We are ready for the journey.

Which route to take?

Costeaux, who knows the region well, proposes the itinerary to SEIGNEUR:

BRAINE - VAILLY-SUR-AISNE (2 bridges to cross, sometimes guarded) - the Chemin des Dames - PINON and its works - SAINT-GOBAIN, its fuel depot - LA FERE, its barracks, its bridges - VENDEUIL - CORNET D'OR - ITANCOURT - HOMBLIERES - ESSIGNY-LE-PETIT - RAMICOURT - BEAUREVOIR. After consulting the group, SEIGNEUR accepts on condition that lookouts are posted at the most dangerous spots, for from one day to the next the enemy had changed tactics.

It was therefore decided to post men on watch at the following points: VAILLY-SUR-AISNE and the CHEMIN DES DAMES, LA FERE - CORNET D'OR - HOMBLIERES.

These posts will be held respectively by Jean NOEL, who will join by bicycle, Jean LEROUX, Jean PLANTIER and Emile FORTIER.

On Monday morning the truck is loaded with rags and rabbit skins, and at eight o'clock sharp we leave, armed with our sub-machine guns with 5 magazines each, our revolvers and our grenades. J. LEROUX is missing.

First stop, leaving La Fere: Jean PLANTIER gets off with his bicycle (tyre let down for the good cause), for three G.M.R. (Petain police) are there, waiting for a lift to Saint-QUENTIN. They ask us where we are going: "To VENDEUIL," answers SEIGNEUR.

Finding the trip too short, they stay where they are. COSTEAUX refills the gazogene and we are off.

At CORNET D'OR, no stop, since one man is missing.

At HOMBLIERES, FORTIER Emile gets down with his bicycle; for the moment, nothing to report.

Third stop near RAMICOURT, where we pick up FONTAINE and drive on to CLARY.

We arrive at the safe house at 11.00 - a short wait, for an unknown car is parked in the yard. As soon as it leaves, the farmer reassures us and puts us in touch with our three friends.

SEIGNEUR and FONTAINE go into the house, and COSTEAUX prepares the load to receive and hide the radio equipment and the camping kit.

Inside, the "AUGUSTUS" pack their bags and also choose their identities; SEIGNEUR, FONTAINE and BASTIEN make out the cards, and meanwhile the Captain hands the papers to COSTEAUX. The equipment is at the bottom, the weapons within reach under the tarpaulin, ready to fire.

At 11.30 we leave, the Captain and the Radio in the cab with the driver, the Commandant on the rabbit skins with SEIGNEUR and FONTAINE. At RAMICOURT, FONTAINE gets off and hands the commandant a package containing 600,000 Frs.

Along the way each man learns his new identity by heart. In the cab, the Captain questions the Sergeant.

- What's your name?
- Rene CHABAUD, he answers, rolling his R's a little.
- Where were you born?
- In the UNITED STATES, he says.
- No, you fool - if you ran into the Gestapo you'd be done for on the spot. Come on, where were you born?
- At MOTTEVILLE (BASSE SEINE).
- No, not BASSE SEINE. It's SEINE INFERIEURE. You are a student at SAINT-QUENTIN and you are coming on holiday to my place - I am your uncle.

The Captain called himself "Jean DERVAL, timber merchant at COUCY-le-Chateau". As for you, he said to COSTEAUX, you picked us up on the road, hitch-hiking.

In the back, with SEIGNEUR, the Commandant was studying his case, giving his name as "Joseph PORTEVAL, forestry operator at ANIZY-le-Chateau."

Here is HOMBLIERES. FORTIER calls out: "Nothing to report - but it's a busy spot; I counted more than ten Gestapo cars going both ways." Bicycle and lookout are hoisted onto the truck, and we head for LA FERE. Talk of the Gestapo leaves our allies hardly reassured, but after a few details about life in France they quickly understand and pull themselves together.

Crossing VENDEUIL we meet a German convoy; one of the trucks, cutting the bend too tight, forces our driver up onto the pavement at over 60 km/h, but thanks to long experience of the road, disaster is avoided. The truck continues on its way and stops at the entrance to LA FERE. Jean PLANTIER, who has pumped up his bicycle, arrives and climbs aboard while COSTEAUX refills the gazogene. The Commandant puffs and coughs, for the smoke from the wood-burner is suffocating.

- Petrol is handier all the same.
- America has it and will bring it to us, says SEIGNEUR.
- War is a great guzzler of petrol for its motorised machines.

As we were about to leave again, we spot our comrade Jean LEROUX, who has reached his post by bicycle after a 60 km ride. He explains the reason for his delay: "I managed to derail a train last night on the MONT NOTRE DAME line; I got back very late this morning."

So here we are, 5 in the back of the truck with 3 bicycles and kit picked up along the road, speeding towards BRAINE.

A few kilometres from PINON we see Jean NOEL, bicycle in hand, who tells us that a German tank has broken down about a kilometre from the village and is blocking the road - but, he adds, we can get by on the verge.

Sure enough, coming out of a bend, a "Panther"-type tank is stopped across the road; the truck slows and, guided by a German soldier, passes quietly by. Our 3 friends were thinking the worst, but no, all is well. In passing we see batteries all packed up - goods stolen from us.

The journey ends well - but what convoys in retreat! BRAINE is reached at 14.30; everyone gets off at Madame COSTEAUX's, who is expecting us. We enter a dining room decked out in the Allied colours. A good, well-earned lunch awaits us, with fine wines and champagne. The dishes are decorated with a superb Cross of Lorraine, which the Captain hastens to point out.

We wait there until 20.00. Meanwhile one of our team, Emile FORTIER, leaves us to join two of his colleagues 60 km away by bicycle, to carry out a drop on the terrain "Oseille" announced at 13.30.

At 20.00 the truck starts; our three friends climb aboard with SEIGNEUR, PLANTIER and COSTEAUX. We set off, and leaving BRAINE the level crossing is closed, a train blocking the way. After a 10-minute wait we turn round, go round the station and come to the other side of the crossing; this time the road is jammed with Boche trucks - another wait; it is raining.

At last the road is clear, and at 20.45 we arrive at M. MATHIEU's at RUGNY. We unload the bags, put the truck away, and get straight to work. The Commandant and the Captain prepare their messages with Jean PLANTIER. The radio operator, helped by SEIGNEUR and COSTEAUX, sets up the set, but the receiver does not work. Impossible to pick up the call signs. The Captain, told of this, is angry and absolutely wants to do the job, but there is nothing to be done. SEIGNEUR decides to bring a new set first thing the next morning.

We dine with Madame and Monsieur MATHIEU and their children, who have also prepared a kind reception. It is there that the mission will be lodged for 8 days.

WORK OF THE MISSION

Most of the messages contained an urgent appeal for the dispatch of parachuted arms; these messages stressed the scale of the Boche convoys in retreat and the lack of arms among the F.F.I. Cables containing information on enemy activity and on the defences of MARGIVAL were sent to LONDON. Trains and halted convoys were immediately reported by the F.F.I. intelligence services in close collaboration with the B.O.A. The detailed plan of the MARGIVAL entrenched camp was to be sent to LONDON via the terrain "BLERIOT". Another series of plans concerning a CHANNEL port was to go the same way.

It was the Major and the Captain who decided which cables to send; transmissions and receptions were often very hard for the radio operator owing to fairly strong jamming. He transmitted twice a day, and above all at night, when reception was better. Jean PLANTIER helped ARISONA in his task.

INDIANA and ARISONA hardly went out, except a few times to go to SEIGNEUR's H.Q., set up at the home of Madame MOLITOR, baker, at ARCY-STE-RESTITUE. Liaison between the "AUGUSTUS" and the H.Q. was carried out by Mlle GISELE MOTSCH [sic] twice a day, to avoid too many men coming and going at the farm.

The Captain, on the other hand, gave talks with SEIGNEUR on the role of the F.F.I.:-

1. At the ARTOIS farm, commune of BOUVARDOS [?], run by M. GEBERT, SEIGNEUR gathered all the sector chiefs of the CHATEAU-THIERRY and DORMANS area, joined by 2 airmen sheltered for more than a month by M. GEBERT, and by 6 B.O.A. men in the maquis since the arrests of last 9 May (round-up carried out on the terrain "EMPIRE").

2. On 23 August the mission received at RUGNY the departmental F.F.I. chief and the F.F.I. chief of SOISSONS, to discuss the guerrilla war declared imminent.

3. The next day, a visit to comrade "LEFORT", Bernard LESTRAS, intelligence agent (military and Gestapo).

In the afternoon, another conference, attended by all the SOISSONS-BRAINE sector chiefs.

On 26 August the Captain sends Jean PLANTIER to REIMS to contact "OSCARD" about Plan "TORTUE". HERAULT would like to go himself, but the radio tells us that the Allies are advancing, so he does not want to leave his comrades. Jean returns the same day without having seen OSCAR. The Captain therefore decides to leave on Monday morning, for COSTEAUX finds Sunday too risky: indeed, no vehicle may go out on Sunday and all the bridges over the AISNE are guarded; we risk being captured. The Captain drinks with us, then returns to his safe house.

Sunday passes well; in the morning SEIGNEUR and COSTEAUX go looking for tobacco, but the Boches have been there first. But towards [5 or 9 - reading uncertain] o'clock the retreating convoys begin to pour through. SEIGNEUR and JEAN decide to lay nails 2 kilometres from ARCY. After dinner they go out around 23.00 - just in time, for FORTIER and COSTEAUX barely have time to get back and hide their weapons; the Boches blow the locks and drive trucks into the yard. COSTEAUX's truck tempts them; we have the greatest trouble removing a "27" tube (F.[M.?] ammunition), which we hide among the sacks of flour; an S.S. man lifts all the sacks of rags ready for departure, but the

truck stays there; a 4-ton jack is stolen by another Boche.

SEIGNEUR and PLANTIER cannot get back into ARCY - there are more than three thousand Germans. They go and put their weapons in safety at VAUX, then return empty-handed to the H.Q. to prepare the journey. The truck starts at noon; no more Boches in the village; the Americans are 12 km away. We must leave.

At 1.00 the truck starts and we arrive at RUGNY; bags, equipment, etc. are hidden under the rags, and off we go towards CHAUNY. We make a small detour via VAUX to fetch our weapons when, a kilometre from the hamlet, a column of American tanks appears on the horizon.

- What's that? asks Fortier.
- Those are American tanks, answers the Commandant.
- The devil - they're firing; maybe they'll do the same to us.
- Maybe, answers the Commandant - and they shoot straight.

Arriving at VAUX without incident, we run to meet the liberating tanks, heedless of the Boches still roaming the region.

The Commandant and the Captain want at all costs to regain the lines and follow the Boches in their retreat. After a few moments' thought, they decide to leave the next day with a patrol of 3 or 4 tanks that will attempt to break through the lines. If it succeeds, they will stay on the other side.

We make ourselves known, and the Major asks for the Commander of the Column. We leave our three friends talking with our allies, to see the general. The Captain orders us to go back to RUGNY with their belongings and await their return.

The next day, Tuesday 29 August, they do indeed come back in a Jeep, and in the evening COSTEAUX drives them to SOISSONS, to the American General commanding the division. There their fate was decided, and we took them to the Hotel de la Croix d'Or, where they were lodged until 17.00 the next day.

The Allies are already at LAON; the mission goes there by Jeep, then continues the journey in a tank.

The Captain knows the region well and has himself driven to M. Magnez, farmer at BESNY-LOIZY, a few km north of LAON, and asks for a vehicle to cross the lines. They dine, and around 21.30 they leave with a German horse-drawn cart (this cart had been abandoned that very day). M. MAGNEZ goes with them to show them the way, for the Captain wanted to avoid the main roads. Around 22.00 they went on alone, M. MAGNEZ returning to his farm. The mission was to go to his brother-in-law's at FROIDMONT. What happened next?

Around 22.15 the rain began to fall - a torrential rain, making visibility almost nil in the rather dark night and suspicious sounds harder to hear.

Coming onto the main road of BARENTON-sur-SERRE, they did not see three Boche tanks at the intersection of the two roads. They were probably stopped by the soldiers and held at gunpoint while others searched the cart. At the sight of the equipment their fate was quickly settled, and it was at 22.45 that the inhabitants [heard] 7 shots, first 2, then shortly afterwards 5 in a row.

The bodies of the Commandant and the Captain were found side by side, arms raised. The radio operator lay about a dozen metres away on the other side of the road, face down, arms twisted (he had probably tried to escape).

All three bore large wounds to the head.

The tanks left at 23.15.

According to information gathered from the Mayor, they were disarmed and searched, but not thoroughly, for their identity cards, small items and their signet ring were still on them. In the cart, found at MORTIER[S], nothing remained.

It is by pure chance, and thanks to M. MATHIEU, who informed the Lieutenant's team, that we found the trace of the mission "AUGUSTUS".

All three rest in the little cemetery of BARENTON-SUR-SERRE (AISNE).

The two B.O.A. agents in charge of the inquiry:

COSTEAUX Gaston, Rue Parmentier, BRAINE (AISNE).

FORTIER Emile, ARCY-STE-RESTITUE par FERE-EN-TARDENOIS (AISNE).

Scene of the Tragedy: Rue Haute - junction with the Chemin de la Gare.

Date and Time: 30 August 1944 at 22.45.

Miscellaneous objects found at the scene:-

Upholstered cart seat bearing on top the following inscription in pencil:-

Troupe d'occupation [Occupation troops]
Voiture No. [Vehicle No.]
A cart rug
A sack from the agricultural cooperative of Fere-en-Tardenois.

According to the statement of Monsieur _____, residing at _____, witness to the departure of the three victims, the cart and the horse had been lent by Monsieur MAGNIER, farmer at BESNY-LOISY.

Description of the three men.

1. DERVAL Jean. Born 8 December 1910 at CHAMONIX (Haute-Savoie), residing at COUCY-le-Chateau. Forestry operator. Appears to be the Group Leader. Black suit, white shirt with fine close-set blue stripes, plaited tan leather belt. Black high boots. Black tie with white polka dots. Grey soft felt hat, crown creased square; brown leather-type gloves; black leather coat over the suit; a holster.

Objects found in the pockets:-

1 identity card No. 2741 - series left blank, issued 15 July 1944 by the Prefecture of the AISNE.
1 note of 5,000 Francs
3 notes of 1,000 Francs
2 notes of 500 Francs
10 notes of 100 Francs
5 notes of 100 Francs
1 wallet, initials D.J.
1 lighter, English make "The Parr U L M F G. Co."
2 road maps No. 55 & 56.
1 purse containing: 1 wick and lighter flints; 1 one-franc coin in aluminium bronze; 4 safety pins; 1 religious medal of St. APOLLINE (patron of dentists); 1 small medal: the Infant Jesus of Prague, with inscription 1628 and initials G.D.
1 small-calibre bullet tip.
7 photographs
1 black leather wallet
1 pocket knife marked S.S.P. 1942.
1 tobacco pouch.
1 broken pipe
1 miscellaneous-foods ration card, Category A, issued by the Mairie of LONPEIGNE [?], unnumbered.
750 grams of bread tickets from a Category J.2 card
1/2 meat card (5 tickets of 90 g and 5 tickets of 30 g)
1 photo of a woman taken in front of a house in snowy weather.

2. CHABAUD Rene. Born 12.7.28 at MOTTEVILLE (S.I.) - student, residing at Saint-QUENTIN. Dark grey wool suit with black stripes, Basque beret - new tan high boots - no tie - blue shirt. Wore around his neck a silver chain with a tiny cross and a religious medal bearing the inscription "I am a catholic please call a priest".

Objects found in the pockets:-

1 identity card No. 2121, no series, issued 5.8.44 by the Prefecture of the AISNE.
1 packet containing 4 "LUCKY STRIKE" cigarettes
1 small missal (French-Latin, Librairie St. Michel, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.) containing a hotel room ticket, "Cumberland Hotel".
1 note of 100 Francs
1 note of 50 Francs
1 new pocket knife marked "ULSTER KNIFE CO."
1 box of matches, American make
1 lighter, English make
1 crucifix on a cord
1 rosary, white beads
1 broken rosary, black beads
1 ring bearing inside the following inscription: T & H 9 375.
1 ship's anchor T.

3. PORTEVAL Joseph. Born 11 June 1919 at YVETOT (S.I.) - forestry operator residing at ANIZY-le-Chateau. Grey suit, white shirt with black stripes, dark green tie found in pocket, bareheaded, low tan shoes with fur-lined heels - old ulcerated wound on the right ankle, sock [worn] over this wound.

Objects found in the pocket:-

1 identity card, model 4, No. 2917, issued 15.6.44 by the Prefecture of the AISNE, no series.
5 notes of 100 Francs
10 notes of 100 Francs
1 gold ring

FORCES FRANCAISES COMBATTANTES

Bureau des Operations Aeriennes
ZONE NORD (Aisne)

Barenton-sur-Serre
3.10.44.

Objects removed from the Mairie of BARENTON-SUR-SERRE by the B.O.A. (Jean Pierre):

Belonging to the American Commandant, "Mission Augustus", B.C.R.A. London, killed 30 April [sic: August] 1944:- 1 gold signet ring - 1 identity card - 400 Francs. Belonging to the American radio NCO, "MISSION AUGUSTUS", B.C.R.A. London, killed 30 August 1944:- 1 identity card, 1 packet of cigarettes (4 Lucky Strike), 1 small missal, 1 note of 100 Francs, 1 note of 50 Francs, 1 pocket knife, 1 lighter, 1 crucifix with cord, 1 rosary of white beads, 1 ring T & H 9 375, and a ship's anchor T.

The Deputy to the Chief of Zone A 5
In charge of the inquiry: FORTIER Emile
at ARCY-STE-RESTITUE

Pseudonym: Jean Francois

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

English translation of the typescript filed as Dossier 4, "Mission Auguste (Aisne), aout 1944": the B.O.A. report on Mission Augustus by Gaston Costeaux and Emile Fortier, with the inventory of effects dated Barenton-sur-Serre, 3 October 1944. Page breaks, page numbers and layout follow the original. The inventory pages carry their own numbering in the original (unnumbered, then "- 2 -").

Conventions: names, cover names and places are spelled as typed, including the typist's variants. Square brackets [ ] mark translator's additions; [?] marks a word that is hard to read on the scan.

Team: INDIANA = Maj. John H. Bonsall (typed "BONSALI"); HERAULT = Capt. Jean Delwiche/Delviche; ARISONA = Sgt. Roger E. Cote. Cover identities: Jean Derval (Delviche), Joseph Porteval (Bonsall), Rene Chabaud (Cote).

Resistance pseudonyms (per Archives de l'Aisne J 1438): GRAMME / Jean-Pierre = Pierre Deshayes; FONTAINE = Edmond Bricout; SEIGNEUR = Andre Dodart; Jean-Francois = Emile Fortier.

Spelling variants in the original: MATHIEU (the Rugny farm is the ferme Mahieu); MAGNEZ / MAGNIER (the farmer elsewhere called Magnien); Mlle Gisele "MOTSCH", most likely Gisele Molitor, Fortier's future wife and daughter of the household at the Arcy H.Q.; "30 Avril 1944" for the Major's death is a typing error for 30 August.

Abbreviations: B.O.A. = Bureau des Operations Aeriennes; B.C.R.A. = Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action; D.M.R. = Delegue Militaire Regional; D.D.M. = Delegue Departemental Militaire; F.F.I. = Forces Francaises de l'Interieur; G.M.R. = Groupes Mobiles de Reserve (Vichy police); S.I. = Seine-Inferieure; gazogene = wood-gas generator fitted to the truck; Plan "Tortue" = Resistance plan against German road movements; MARGIVAL = the Wolfsschlucht II headquarters complex near Soissons.