

OG PAT—A Fresh Look

*Operational Group (OG) PAT was one of thirteen OSS teams parachuted into southern France in the summer of 1944 from Algeria. PAT was the only section dropped into the département known as the **Tarn** (Capital: Albi) in the Midi-Pyrénées. Though the deeds of some of the OG groups have been well documented, little has been published on OG PAT.*

Last year an American journalist who lives in the Tarn received a Fulbright grant to research their story. Meredith Wheeler, formerly a writer and producer at ABC News, shares some of her discoveries:

Yankee doodle, do or die.....

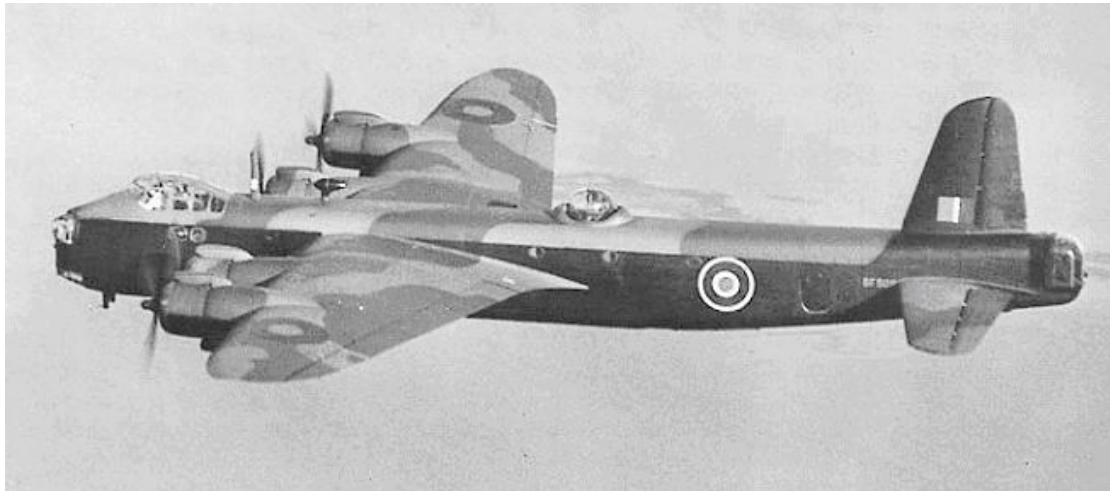
By Meredith Wheeler



OG PAT at Blida, Algeria in May 1944

Summer, 1944. Just past midnight on August 6th/ 7th, fifteen American paratroopers jumped from a Sterling bomber and floated down into the Tarn—occupied France—under the light of a waning

moon. "We were scared to death," says George Maddock, one of 13 who survived the mission.



Stirling Bomber of the kind converted for parachuting OSS OGs into France

The night flight from their base in Blida, Algeria had taken about three hours. To break the tension and keep up their spirits, Lieutenant Conrad LaGueux, PAT's commanding officer, suggested they sing.



Lieutenant Conrad LaGueux was 22 years old when he was put in command of OG PAT

"We sang like mad," wrote Michael Demarco, in an unfinished

memoir. “Old songs, new songs, even a few French songs.” Staff Sergeant Bernard Gautier, a descendent of French Canadians, knew all the French words—but was tone deaf. They sang *Yankee Doodle*—twice. “I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy, Yankee Doodle *do or die*....” Two of the men would indeed be dead within the week.

As the bomber crossed the Black Mountains of southwest France, anti-aircraft fire lit up the sky. “Like the 4th of July,” George Maddock recalled. “Nice—until we found out that they were shooting at us.” The ack-ack missed, but signaled their arrival in enemy territory.

Over 100 *maquis*--the rural resistance fighters—were waiting at the drop zone, a remote hilltop, gazing skyward in anticipation. Never before had Allied soldiers parachuted into this remote part of the Tarn.

Lieutenant Michael DeMarco vividly remembers the nighttime jump—hooking onto the static line and running toward that empty black rectangle in the aircraft floor—the gaping void: “I went out the hole [and] seemed to stop and hang suspended in the air. I looked up at the khaki chute. It looked beautiful up there with the blue sky and stars all around.”

To his right and left, he saw his comrades floating to earth. “The air was heavy and we came down slowly. Already the roar of the plane had left the sky and now we could see the lights moving on the ground, hear people shout and yell.... When we got a little closer, I saw that I would have to try and avoid a tree landing.”

DeMarco tugged on his suspension lines and managed to miss the trees. The unit medic, Sergeant Augustus Kitchen wasn't so lucky. He ricocheted down through the branches, gashing his face.

Staff Sergeant Roberto Esquenazi, a Cuban-American, was more seriously injured. The jump was at low-altitude—about 500 feet--and he landed awkwardly on his gear, breaking his left leg. (The barrel of his Marlin submachine gun *bent* from the impact.)

Esquenazi was swiftly spirited away to a French doctor. He would spend the rest of the mission hidden in the attic of a chateau owned by the Resistance leader (at some peril to the family who were in residence).



Chateau Bousquet near Vabre in the Tarn where S/Sgt/ Roberto Esquenazi was hidden in the attic while he recovered from a broken leg sustained during the parachute jump



S/Sgt. Roberto Esquenazi with Odile Derouville (seated) and her mother-in-law Louise in Vabre (photo taken after the liberation) The husband of Odile, Guy Derouville, was the head of the *Maquis de Vabre*, the group in charge of the drop zone. Odile spoke English and supervised the care of the wounded American.

As Michael DeMarco unfastened his parachute harness, he noticed a man and a boy hurrying towards him with a light, and thought: "Friend or foe?" He duly gave the password--which the Frenchman ignored. Instead, the *maquisard* slapped him on his back and grabbed his musette bag, saying, "I will carry this for you!" in heavily accented English. The boy rolled up the chute and they headed down the hill to join the others. "I had never dreamed that my landing would be received like this," wrote DeMarco.

OG PAT's official orders were to "harass and destroy the enemy, cut German communications and supply routes and strengthen the resistance movement". But the overarching goal—whether they knew it or not—was to tie up enemy forces in the southwest in anticipation of the imminent Allied landing in Provence—*Operation Dragoon*.

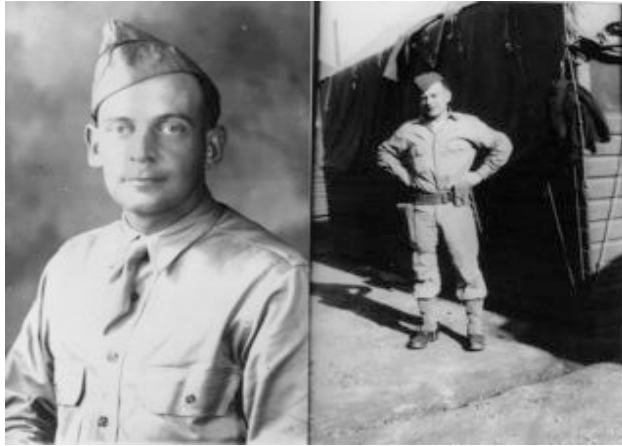
The team not only accomplished that mission, they also helped turned the tide in the region. Like all of France, the Tarn was still under the yoke of Nazi occupation. Within two weeks, the south Tarn was *liberated*. Some 4500 Wehrmacht soldiers *surrendered* to 12 OSS men and a few hundred Resistance fighters—most of them poorly-armed, under-trained maquis. As in a game of poker, skill, luck and bluff all played a role.



Three members of the OG PAT Team in March 1944 in Algeria
RT/5 Robert Spaur, T/Sgt. Joseph L. Vezina and T/5 Raymond Picard

But their success came at a cost. Two OG PAT men were shot dead during an ambush of a German patrol on a remote mountain road. It

was OG PAT's first experience of combat. The victims included the tone-deaf Sergeant, Bernard Gautier, and T/5 Robert Spaur. About a dozen Germans were also killed or wounded.



S/Sgt. Bernard Gautier, killed at the ambush near Le Rialet



T/5 Robert Spaur, killed in the ambush near Le Rialet

The Germans who survived brought back news that stunned the local Wehrmacht command: The attackers included *uniformed American commandos*—not just rag-tag maquisards. Until that moment, the

war had been 500 miles north in Normandy. Now it was on their doorstep.

The Resistance did their best to fan German anxieties by inflating the size of the American presence—which after death and injury had shrunk to just 12 men. German collaborators were told, however, that there were at least 50—maybe 75 or 100—American commandos infiltrating the hills. Combined with the ambush, the disinformation campaign sowed unease that turned to panic after OG PAT's next act of sabotage.

Sixty-six years later, those two fallen OSS men are still honored in this corner of France. Their names are inscribed on two war memorials and every year the French veterans organize a remembrance ceremony. It was at one such memorial that I first stumbled onto their story.



Marker stone honoring Bernard Gautier & Robert Spaur at the site of the American ambush near Le Rialet (Tarn)

My husband and I have had a home in the Tarn for 20 years, not far from the hilltop where OG PAT parachuted in. I carry the American flag at ceremonies in our nearby town of Castres—usually the November 11th Remembrance Day event and V-E Day ceremonies. (The French veterans had been searching for an American *porte drapeau*—and invited me to do it.) While not a veteran myself, I felt honored to take part—and the way they treated the American flag impressed me.

In their processions, the protocol officer always makes a point of placing the American flag at the front of the parade. When they

realized that I didn't have a flag-holding belt or the proper white gloves, they gave them to me.



November 11th Remembrance Day ceremonies in Castres, France;
Meredith Wheeler serving as American flag bearer

These ceremonies--on *French* soil--where so much blood was shed in both world wars, in a nation that suffered the trauma of enemy occupation for years—are particularly charged with emotion—even for an American onlooker like me.

In 2005, the *anciens combattants* asked me to carry the American flag at a smaller ceremony in the hill village of *Le Rialet* (population: 44). (This is near the site where OG PAT and a maquis unit ambushed the German patrol.) A special American guest from Washington D.C. was expected for the annual war commemoration.



Flags dipped in honor of the dead at the Remembrance ceremony at Le Rialet (Tarn)

That was how I first met Norma LaGueux. A retired CIA officer, she is the widow of Conrad LaGueux, commanding officer of OG PAT. Norma has loyally attended the ceremonies in Le Rialet for many years since the death of her husband. Her presence is greatly appreciated by the old maquisards who remember OG PAT.



Norma and Conrad LaGueux visiting the Tarn in 1989

Because the village is so remote, the ceremony is smaller and more intimate than in Castres—and more poignant.

After the color guard proceeded up to the war memorial, two elderly French veterans, grave and dignified, stepped forward to the granite stone. Their navy jackets jangled with war medals. The first man read in a loud, solemn voice, each of the twelve names inscribed on that monument—including the two Americans, Spaur and Gautier.

After *every* name, the other veteran called out to the assembled crowd: “*Mort pour la France*”—“**Died for France**”. This was done for the Americans too. “*Bernard Gautier—Mort pour la France. Robert Spaur, Mort pour la France.*” *La Marseillaise* was played, followed by

The Star Spangled Banner—a tinny recording, but still heart-wrenching.

Though I spoke briefly with Norma, I still had no idea *why* two American soldiers died on this unlikely hillside, far from any battle sites. I knew nothing about OSS missions in France. I was also perplexed by the surnames of the dead Americans—Gautier and Spaur. They sounded decidedly French.

It wasn't until last June that all these mysteries were cleared up. A new American Consul was appointed in Toulouse and he made it his business to attend WWII commemorative events in the Midi-Pyrénées. Last June, David Brown laid flowers and spoke at the ceremony in Le Rialet.



American Consul in Toulouse David Brown places flower at the

Remembrance ceremony at Le Rialet in June 2009

The presence of an official representative of the United States was greatly appreciated by the French veterans and the American expatriates who take an interest. The Consul also visited a smaller stone memorial down the hillside, at the site where the fatal ambush took place.

Engraved on that, in French, is the inscription: *“To the memory of the American heroes, Bernard Gautier and Robert Spaur, who fell here in combat on August 12th, 1944”*. A cluster of Americans looked on as David Brown laid another wreath.

Also present was a local historian—or so I thought—especially arranged by the anciens combattants for the benefit of the American Consul. He explained how the men had died. Gilbert Brial spoke with great authority and his story enthralled us all. As I listened, my jaw dropped. “Were you present?” I asked. It sounded like he was giving an eyewitness account. “Oui,” he replied. “I joined this maquis when I was 19. I’m 83 now.”



Gilbert Brial, former maquisards, explaining how the two OSS men died

While Monsieur Brial hadn't witnessed the actual ambush in which Spaur and Gautier lost their lives, he turned out to be closely linked to the chain of events that led to the ambush. That morning, over one hundred inexperienced maquis had attacked a small party of Germans in Le Rialet while they were scavenging for food. Nineteen-year-old Gilbert Brial was armed with a Sten gun. For him and most of the young maquis, it was their first experience of armed combat.



Gilbert Brial in 1944

Though the maquis out-numbered the Germans, 10 to 1, all the Germans *escaped*, except for one who was wounded in the arm. The only thing shot dead was a cow—by accident. The German command sent reinforcements up to Le Rialet—and it was these soldiers that OG PAT attacked.

They'd watched as the Germans sped up the hill to Le Rialet in four motorcycle sidecars, spaced about 20 yards apart. One sidecar had a mounted machine gun.

With the help of more experienced maquis who had been assigned to guide them, OG PAT organized an ambush. They broke into four groups, spaced out along the heavily-wooded roadside. Each group was supposed to take out one sidecar. The Germans feared an

ambush, and, on their return, separated their vehicles by 200-yard intervals, instead of 20. The ambush didn't go quite as planned.

Lieutenant LaGueux's group was waiting at the far end of the trap. When the first motorcycle sidecar approached, they opened fire, wounding all the occupants. The sidecar crashed into a tree. At that point, Sergeant Gautier leapt forward to disable the mounted machine gun. When he turned, one of the wounded Germans pulled out a pistol and shot Gautier in the back. He was in turn shot dead by T/5 Marcel Landry and the head of the maquis unit.

Lieutenant DeMarco later wrote that as he and a few men "crouched on the side of the bank, a burst of machine gun fire cut right over [our] heads. [I] turned and saw that T/5 Spaur had been hit and was dead".

After the medic, Sergeant Kitchen, verified that their two comrades were indeed dead, the Americans moved off swiftly into the safety of the woods. Heavily armed German reinforcements would soon arrive, but OG PAT was long gone. They circled back to their base, where they were about to receive the most important order of their mission.

Two days later T/5 Vincent Quercia, accompanied by a French priest and a few locals, recovered the bodies of Spaur and Gautier and buried them in the cemetery of a nearby church. There was a funeral service well attended by the French community.

This was just the opening salvo of OG PAT mission in the Tarn. Monsieur Brial's original version of these events was slightly different from what I later understood to be accurate. Nonetheless, we were all fascinated by his story and I asked, "Have you told this to French television or radio?". "Non," he replied, with a resigned Gallic shrug.

The American Consul, David Brown, and I both had the same thought: Before it's too late, record the oral histories of the survivors of these events, particularly those who knew and interacted with the OSS team. Time is running out—as few of these men are still alive. I soon began interviewing the old maquisards and investigating the OG PAT mission more carefully. Each dangling thread that I pulled led to more astonishing war stories.

Monsieur Brial became my guide to all the sites connected to OG PAT in the Tarn. He shepherded me around, just as the maquis had once guided OG PAT.



The stele marking the Drop Zone code-named Virgule where OG PAT parachuted in on the night of Aug. 6th/7th, 1944

After visiting the drop zone itself, marked now by a great stele, he showed me the maquis headquarters where OG PAT was sheltered for the first two nights.

Under cover of darkness, they were transported in an old truck to the safe house about 30 kilometers from the drop zone. The journey was dangerous, as the area was under curfew. The driver didn't dare use the headlights, so the only illumination came from the light of the moon. Fortunately, they didn't encounter any German patrols. The truck broke down 50 yards from the farmhouse--forcing the men to walk the last bit. "They weren't too reassured by that," Monsieur Brial observed dryly, as we toured the site.



Le Reclot, the farmhouse that served a maquis safe house where OG PAT spent the first two nights behind enemy lines

The old farm now has a plaque commemorating the American

connection.



The maquis awaiting the OSS team had prepared an elaborate welcome. The dining table was laid out with tricolor ribbon arranged to form the *Croix de Lorraine*—the cross with two horizontal bars, symbol of the French Resistance. Bottles of sparkling wine were chilled and glasses neatly lined up on the ribbon.

“Where is the enemy?” the Americans urgently wanted to know when they arrived. “Not here!” laughed the insouciant French, as they popped the corks and poured a toast to these long-awaited Yanks—who brought not just expertise, explosives and weapons—but *hope*.

Compared to most of France in 1944, food was relatively plentiful in the countryside of the Tarn and the Americans ate well. The two officers, LaGueux and DeMarco, conferred with the maquis chiefs, consulting various maps pinned to the farmhouse walls. Meanwhile the rest of OG PAT organized their gear in the attached barn and prepared to bed down on piles of straw.

Finally at 5.30am, when the adrenaline of the parachute jump had worn off, Lieutenants LaGueux and DeMarco were shown upstairs in the farmhouse, to beds with crisp, white sheets—an unexpected luxury on their first night behind enemy lines. Monsieur Brial still beams when he describes the civilized welcome that the Americans received: “They didn’t expect all that!” Codes of French hospitality in the Tarn had been upheld despite the adverse circumstances.

The team slept late into the next day, watched over by the maquis.



(n° 8) 10 Août 1944 – Groupe de parachutistes Américains au P.C du CORPS FRANC DU SIDOBRE à la ferme du Reclot près du Rialet.

Four members of OG PAT at Le Reclot on August 8th, 1944

Word of their presence spread fast. The 17-year-old Gilbert Brial walked two kilometers from his own maquis hideout, to see the miraculous American paratroopers. “We were *amazed* by all their weapons, ammo and equipment. We had practically nothing,” he

recalls. The French also marveled at the never-ending supply of Lucky Strike cigarettes and chocolate.

But most impressive was Corporal George H. Maddock of Gary, Indiana, who stood 6 foot 7 inches. To this day Monsieur Brial speaks of him with awe. “Over two meters tall!” he told me, shaking his head in disbelief 65 years later.

Despite their smooth arrival, OG PAT and the maquis soon had a terrible shock.

The next night the Germans attacked *Virgule*, the mountain drop zone. The four agents who had just parachuted in (including a British SIS Intelligence Officer) were safe. They had been swiftly moved to a secure area. But the Germans seized the parachuted containers with all the vital gear—weapons for the maquis, ammo, money and the precious radios. A bad blow, but worse was to come.

Seven young maquisards in a nearby safe house were caught sleeping. The Germans burst in and shot them dead. These were the same maquisards who had welcomed the Americans the night before.



Laroque, the maquis hideout, the day after a German attack in the early hours of August 8th killed all seven young maquisards sleeping there

When that news reached OG PAT, they insisted on having their own base. The maquis found them an isolated farmhouse nearby in heavily wooded terrain. They moved immediately but never slept *inside* the house, preferring to camp in the nearby forest in pairs, spaced well apart, always fearing a surprise attack, always on guard. “They taught us something there,” Monsieur Brial says.



San Fe, the farmhouse the became OG PAT's base after their first two nights at Le Reclot.

That terrain is still known as the "*Bois des américains*"--the American woods.



Local signs still refer to the woods near San Fe as "Bois des Américains"

Wherever the PAT men went, the French who saw them were heartened. DeMarco later wrote, “It was the first time the [French] had seen Americans. Some cheered, others cried, they all waved and wished us luck.”

The OSS team used a room at the top of the house to set up their radio for regular contact with HQ in Blida. Young Gilbert Brial used to watch as they unfurled the long antenna out the window and staked it on the lawn. In that way they received the order for what was probably their most significant action: They were to blow up a strategic rail bridge near the prosperous town of Mazamet, about 15 miles southeast of Castres, nestled against the Black Mountains to the south.

Guided by the maquis who knew the terrain, several reconnaissance trips were undertaken. The stone bridge, built in 1888 for the railroad, spans the river Arn with three great arches. All rail traffic running east from Mazamet—towards Provence--used that line.

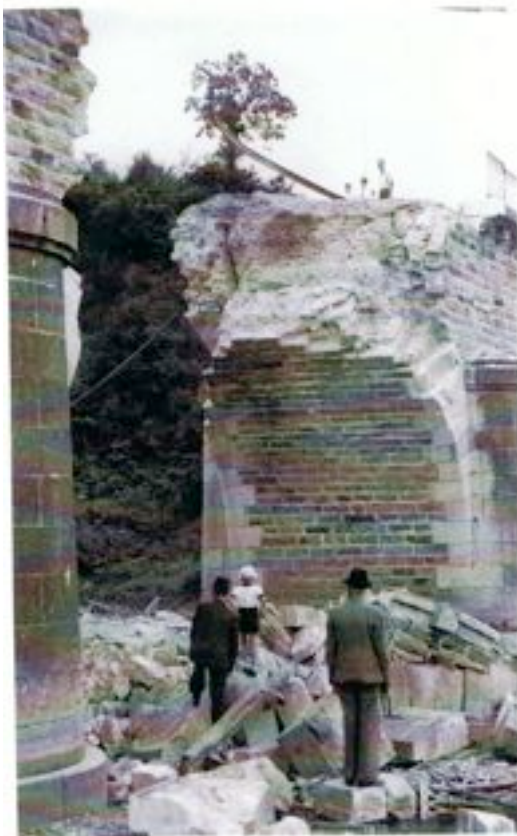
OG PAT brought 375 pounds of C-2 plastic explosives to do the job. The first sabotage effort had to be called off when the transport organized by the maquis failed to turn up. But everything worked perfectly on August 14th—just two days after the loss of Spaur and Gautier.

A nighttime sortie was organized with support from the maquis, who captured and bundled away the French bridge guards. The demolition team, lead by Lieutenant LaGueux, set the charges in 15

minutes. LaGueux set a 30-minute timer and they all made their escape. The deafening blast rattled windows up and down the valley.



The rail bridge, Pont de Gauthard , on the morning of August 15th, 1944, the middle arch destroyed by the OSS demolition team



The central stone arch of the bridge was destroyed, blocking any chance of German reinforcements being sent by train from the south

Tarn to Provence, where some 94,000 American and French forces were landing on the beaches near St. Tropez that morning, August 15th. This was the start of the southern D-Day—one of the most overlooked campaigns in the European theater of war.

At German headquarters, there was consternation. The scale of this sabotage was new and worrying. They decided to marshal their forces in Castres. In Mazamet they loaded a train with arms, ammunition, supplies and plunder. It required 44 carriages to carry all the cargo. About 60 Wehrmacht soldiers were on board to protect it. Normally the train journey north to Castres took 30 minutes—but that train was destined *never* to arrive.

This time it was the French Resistance who organized the ambush with the OG PAT providing the explosives and the expertise to derail the locomotive. The French had them change the placement of the charges three times. Then another last minute hitch. News came that the Germans had two rail guards walking in front of the slow-moving train. That meant the detonation device would have to be changed. DeMarco wrote, “Captain LaGueux was just doing that when the cry went up, ‘Here comes the train!’ We cursed. The Captain had not had time to put in the pull device. We all sweated as he calmly told Fischer to get wire, pliers and crimpers. It was done, taped and replaced and the primacord checked. The Germans had not arrived.”



Site of the train derailment and ambush outside of Mazamet (Tarn) on August 19th

Nonetheless the Germans were anticipating an attack. Four 20MM guns and five searchlights had been mounted on flatcars for protection. The train inched forward, with two soldiers walking ahead inspecting the track, looking for anything suspicious. “It creaked and strained as it rounded the bend,” wrote DeMarco. “We could hear the clank of the cars banging against each other. We waited for the explosion. Would it never come? Already it was dark If the hurried connection did not work, the Germans would surely escape.”

But the German scouts never saw the carefully concealed American explosives that blew the train off the rails. “A terrific explosion riffled

the air followed by the blast of grenades and the rattle of machine guns and small arms fire. Soon a new sound broke in, the *boom boom* of the 20 MMs firing. They sounded like cannons compared to the 9MM and 30 cal flying,” wrote DeMarco. “The section was close together hugging the ground.”

The cream of the maquis of Vabre fought the Germans all night, ably led by a professional French officer, Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac. OG PAT was held in reserve, should any Germans try to escape across country—just as well, as the Americans were exhausted. DeMarco says, “The plan for the day was to pepper and harass the enemy with long distance fire until the mortar could be put into action. I took the section up the road and down a creek bed to wait. We were so tired that when bullets hit the trees on the bank, no one noticed.”

When the mortar finally arrived, it had only ten rounds. Amazingly, one scored a direct hit on a heavily-loaded train carriage. At that point, the Germans surrendered. The entire train full of arms and munitions was now in the hands of the French Resistance. Captain LaGueux went forward with the French commander to accept the surrender of the 60 Germans. “It was probably the antiaircraft unit that had fired on our plane on August 6th,” wrote DeMarco in his *End of Mission* report. Sergeant Kitchen dressed the wounds of the wounded German prisoners.

When word of the train being captured reached Castres, the German Captain, Georges März, second-in-command of the occupation force, was able to persuade his Colonel to sign the surrender he had been

negotiating all night (another strand of this fascinating story that must keep for a later date).



Second-in-command of German occupation forces in the Tarn, Georges März, the key German figure who negotiated the surrender of German forces to the F.F.I.

This was two weeks after OG PAT had arrived in the Tarn. A well-armed force of 4 to 5 thousand men surrendered to 12 OSS men and a few hundred maquis, led by members of DeGaulle's Secret Army—former officers of the French military.



Jubilant crowds in Castres greet the maquis immediately after the announcement of the surrender of the occupation forces.

Of the liberation of Castres, DeMarco simply notes: “Everywhere there was jubilation.”



After the surrender, German soldiers being escorted out of Castres to prison



(n° 0) 20 Août 1944 – Avenue d'Hauterive à Castres, barrage des Maquisards du CORPS FRANC DU SIDOBRE – Rang assis : 3^e Bertrand Guy, 6^e Américain.
Rang debout : 1^{er} Américain, 4^e Pezet Jacques (grenade), 7^e Pezet Irénée (enfant)

Members of OG PAT are photographed with maquisards in Castres on August 20th, after the Liberation

When OG PAT took part in the Liberation Day parade in Castres, it was 6'7" George Maddock who led the unit, carrying an American flag.



(n° 5) Août 1944 – Défilé du COMMANDO AMERICAIN pour la Libération de Castres
avec son Porte Drapeau G. Maddok

T/5 George Maddock, the 6'7" giant of OG PAT leads the unit in the Liberation Day Parade in Castres. The rain did not dampen the joy.



(n° 6) Août 1944 – Libération de Castres
Poignée de main entre le Sous-Préfet et le Capitaine Conrad LaGueux, Chef du Commando Américain.

Lieutenant Conrad LaGueux shakes hands with the Sous-Préfet of the Tarn during the Liberation Day festivities, surrounded by the rest of the section



(n° 9) Août 1944 – Libération de Castres - Prise d'Armes au Monument aux Morts.
 A droite le parachutiste Américain Maddok avec le drapeau US.
 A gauche l'Adjudant Broize Arrieu avec le fanion du Groupe Coudert.

T/5 George Maddock carrying the American flag in the presentation of the Colors in the Liberation Day ceremony



In 1989, Conrad LaGueux, accompanied by his wife, Norma, holds the flag his unit paraded in Castres during the Liberation in 1944.

That flag still resides in a museum here. I was proud to carry it last August at the 65th anniversary commemoration of that Liberation.



Meredith Wheeler paraded the original OG PAT flag at the 65th anniversary celebrations of the Liberation of Castres in August 2009

George Maddock almost lived long enough to carry it himself. He died in 2008. So far as I know, he was the last living member of OG PAT. He had retired from his job as a high school coach in Valparaiso, Indiana, having once had the distinction of playing in the Rose Bowl in 1949 for Northwestern. (They won—the last time *that* ever happened.)



George Maddock in 2007 at his home in Valparaiso, Indiana holding a photo of himself from 1944.

One of my most exciting research finds was a video interview with Maddock recorded the year before his death. It is devoted entirely to his OSS experiences with OG PAT in France.

“We were Donovan’s boys,” he says with pride. “The war made a man out of me.”

The most touching moment of the 40-minute interview is his reaction when asked about the loss of Spaur and Gautier. He chokes up, flails with his hand as though warding off a blow and struggles to maintain

his composure. “I know I said I’d answer all your questions, but I’m gonna take a pass on that,” he says. “I’m finally over it. It takes a while....” That was 63 years after Spaur and Gautier were killed.

I understand now why those two (and Conrad LaGueux) had French names. They all had French or French-Canadian ancestry. Indeed they all spoke French, one of their qualifications for the mission. Seeking soldiers who had language skills--often first and second-generation Americans--was one of General Donovan’s criteria, of course, when it came to selecting men suitable for the OSS. They weren’t all French speakers though. Maddock spoke Russian, Esquenazi and T/5 Vincent Quercia spoke Spanish.

My great regret is that it took me 15 years of living in the Tarn before I discovered the story of OG PAT. It wasn’t until last year that I really understood it. Sadly, in that period Conrad LaGueux, Michael Demarco, George Maddock and the German Captain, Georges März all died—though they were all alive just 10 years ago. Fortunately, Michael DeMarco left behind the beginnings of his memoirs, which his family has generously shared with me.

Just before he died, Conrad LaGueux, who had retired after a long career in the CIA, turned his thoughts back to his first mission in the OSS--that period of youthful daring and adventure.

In 2001, he initiated plans to re-enact the parachute jump into the Tarn—57 years after the original. He contacted the maquis veterans in the Tarn for help. Taken aback at first by this extraordinary idea,

they dutifully set about getting permissions. In the midst of their preparations, Conrad LaGueux died of leukemia in Arlington, Virginia.

He might have been surprised to learn that a group of young Frenchman is hoping to mount a historical recreation of OG PAT. Eighteen-year-old Thierry Pauthe, who lives in the Tarn, contacted the OSS Society for more information about the mission. OSS Society President, Charles Pinck, referred him to me. He arrived at my front door eager to see old photos and documents and to hear the story. He and his friends had scoured the Internet, locating authentic OSS uniforms and kit.



Thierry Pauthe, a French resident of the Tarn who is part of a group of reenactment enthusiasts who are interested in OG PAT

Whether their reenactment will include a low altitude parachute jump by moonlight is in doubt! But now the interest in this story will not die with the old maquisards who knew OG PAT.



Contemporary photo of French recreation enthusiasts targeting OSS OGs



So far as I know, Conrad LaGueux was the only OG PAT member recruited into the CIA. He joined in 1949, two years after the CIA was

founded. He worked mainly in the Far East--where he'd also served for the OSS after leaving France. (He trained Chinese paratroopers.)

He served in senior positions in Taiwan, Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam. When Saigon fell on April 29th, 1975, he left on the same helicopter as the American Ambassador, Graham A. Martin.

There is an OSS Gallery in the CIA with a display devoted solely to Conrad LaGueux. No other OSS officer has that distinction.



The display devoted to Conrad LaGueux at the OSS Gallery in the CIA building in McLean, Virginia

But he also has an unusual mark of honor outside in the CIA Memory Garden.



Marker for Conrad LaGueux in the CIA Memory Garden, McLean

After he died, the veterans of the French maquis organized a memorial stone—made from gray granite like the stones in the Tarn—reading (in French)

To Captain Conrad E. LaGueux

From the Corps Franc du Sidobre

In Appreciation

August 6th, 1944, France



Conrad LaGueux was buried at Arlington Cemetery with full military honors. His widow, Norma, sent the flag that flew over that service to the maquis veterans in France, where it has a place of honor.



The President of the Veterans group associated the maquis known as the Corps Franc du Sidobre, Gilbert Boyer and Gilbert Brial standing beside the folded, framed American flag that flew over Arlington Cemetery when Conrad LaGueux was buried. The flag was a gift to the maquis from Norma LaGueux

Research on these events continues. This article is just a portion of the story.

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