

Acquisition of the Archives of the Fraternelle du service Hotton An valuable fonds for the history of the armed resistance in Wallonia at the eve of the Liberation

The service Hotton was a resistance organisation created in 1943 on the initiative of the Belgian and British authorities. Its mission: to harass the occupying forces militarily by attacking their communication channels and telecommunications. Operational from early 1944 onwards, the group made its mark on the forested area of Chimay-Couvin owing to the dynamism of its group D. Its archives, bequeathed in April 2018, document this remarkable activity.

The maquis emerges from the forest on September 3rd, 1944: first picture of finally free men. From left to right: A. Bruniau (G rard), quartermaster of the Chimay District; A. Van Glabeke (Stan), deputy of Groupe D ; J. Lejour (Mickey), head of the Section Sp ciale; F. Delporte (Albert), head of the Chimay District; L. White (Lonnie), American pilot and resistance fighter; M. Hannesson (Marino), American pilot and resistance fighter; M. Franckson (Martial), head of Groupe D.   CegeSoma/State Archives
An ambitious plan, a partial success

Launched in the summer of 1943 by the British Special Operations Executive with the approval of the Belgian national defence ministry, the Hotton mission only really took shape following the nomination, at its head, of civil engineer Alb ric Maistriau. Given the necessity to act swiftly, he rallied existing groups already well-versed in sabotage and capable of integrating in a global harassment plan. With the help of his immediate collaborators and three air-dropped agents, he was able to assemble, in just a few weeks, teams in Morlanwelz, in the Chimay-Mariembourg region, in Ottignies, Fosses, Eghez e, Namur, Melreux, Vielsalm, Li ge and Brussels ? totalling around 350 resistance fighters. The arrests, from the end of May 1944, of major actors of the new service (notably the head of the future group D, and two of the three parachuted agents) weakened the organisation considerably; its action would thereafter be mainly concentrated in the south of the Hainaut and Namur provinces.

The subversive war in Thi rache *

The group present in the forests of Thi rache, composed of a few dozen members around a nucleus of technicians and intellectuals from Brussels, and enjoying the support of the local population, started to deploy its activities in the fall of 1943. Its integration in the service Hotton and the encroaching Liberation accelerated the increase of its actions. From June to September 1944, the group executed around 60 operations: sabotage, ambushes, confiscation of military equipment, confrontations with the enemy, elimination of its agents. Concretely, Wehrmacht communication cables were regularly sabotaged, ten locomotives of the SNCFB damaged, ten enemy trucks, three armoured cars and one tank destroyed, and almost 150 German soldiers put out of action. Eight members of the group lost their lives in these engagements. Furthermore, 61 others were apprehended by German police services: 23 of them died, by execution or exhaustion in the Nazi concentration camps.

The archives

Although relatively limited in size (around two linear metres), the archives of the Fraternelle du service Hotton are very valuable, precisely because they include a mass of documents detailing the activities of the service (and in particular of its group D) during the occupation.

Indeed we find activity reports, documentation of a technical nature and around 350 individual files concerning agents of the service (for the most part dating from the immediate post-war period), but also a series of notes, messages, leaflets, instructions and forged documents from the underground. The fonds also contains several files related to cases of denunciation. As the personal data they contain could still be considered sensitive to this day, the donors have demanded that the archives can only be consulted by students and professional researchers. Lastly, a number of files deal with the activity of the Fraternelle since its gradual implementation from 1946 until the 2000s. The ensemble is registered under call number AA 2512.

* Title (translated in English) of the excellent work written by two of the major figures of the service Hotton (and on which this text is based): Marcel Frankson & Jacques Burniat, *Chronique de la guerre subversive. Le service Hotton en Thi rache*, Bruxelles, FDM edition, 1996. A digital version of this work can be

consulted through its description in the Pallas-catalogue, accessible via this website.

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