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The SAS and Tactical Intelligence: Normandy 1944 – Operation Haft 702

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ABSTRACT

After more than eighty years it is time to re-evaluate the role of the Special Air Service (SAS) and intelligence gathering during the Normandy campaign of 1944. This study examines Operation Haft 702 which ran between the Allied breakout in July and the closing of the Falaise pocket in August. The article combines original syntheses of archival research and landscape analysis to reveal a rich historical record which contributes to an understanding of how SAS human intelligence influenced the use of tactical airpower.

Introduction

The Normandy Campaign of 1944, formed the beginning of the Allied liberation of Western Europe where the use of intelligence was a key part of the success of the operation.¹ An important, if rather overlooked, element contributing widely to success between June and August 1944 was the role played from behind the German lines by Special Forces and the French Resistance in support of Allied Tactical Air Power's disruption of German supplies. While much has been written regarding the French Resistance and operations of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the

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¹F.H Hinsley with E.E Thomas, C.A.G Simkins and C.F.G Ransom, *British Intelligence in the Second World War. Its influence on Strategy and Operations. Volume Three Part II Overlord*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988), pp 3-277. Also David Abrutat, *Vanguard. The True Stories of the Reconnaissance and Intelligence Missions Behind D-Day*, (London: Uniform, 2019).

Special Air Service (SAS); interest in the activities of the SAS brigade in France has tended to concentrate upon high profile 'hit-and-run' actions conducted deep behind the German lines to delay troops and supplies reaching the battlefield such as operations Bulbasket and Gain.² Memorialisation of these events can be seen today in the French countryside through memorials and plaques marking sites of interest.³ However, an overlooked aspect of SAS activity was its role in providing tactical and targeting intelligence for the Allied Air Force from behind the lines. This article seeks to address that issue by focusing on Operation Haft 702, which was dedicated principally to that role. Described as a minor operation and one that avoided combat activity, it rarely features in the SAS narrative.⁴ The only known account for Haft 702 was published in 2014 by Randall and Trow.⁵ Randall was the radio operator for Haft 702 and the account uses his diary in conjunction with Haft reports from the UK National Archive (TNA).

This article will evaluate the value of the intelligence supplied by Haft 702 for influencing Allied air operations during the SAS team's deployment between 8 July and 11 August 1944. To do this a detailed and systematic study of intelligence gathered and reported by Haft 702 has been conducted for that period. The article then determines whether Allied tactical air operations were executed specifically in response to this intelligence by assessing primary sources. The foundation for this paper are: documents obtained from TNA; documents held at the United States Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama; and documents kindly supplied by the Special Air Service Association, and specifically Captain Blackman's summary report of German troop movements, petrol and ammunition targets and aerodromes.⁶ Adding to a better understanding of the

²Olivier Wieviorka. *The French Resistance*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France. An Account of the Work of the Special Operation Executive in France 1940-1944*, (London Portland Or: Whitehall History Publishing in Association with Frank Cass, 2006); Roger Ford, *Fire from the Forest: the SAS Brigade in France, 1944*, (London: Cassel, 2003); Ben Macintyre, *SAS Rogue Heroes the Authorized Wartime History*, (New York: Penguin, 2016), pp. 213-225 & pp. 242-248; Ford, *Fire from the Forest*, pp 105-116.

³Gavin Mortimer. *The SAS in Occupied France: 1 SAS Operations, June to October 1944*, (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2020).

⁴Ford, *Fire from the Forest*, p. 117.

⁵John Randall and Martin Trow, *The Last Gentleman of the SAS: A Moving Testimony from the First Allied Officer to Enter Belsen at the End of the Second World War*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2014).

⁶All tables and maps are primarily structured on information from the UK National Archive (hereinafter TNA) TNA WO 219/2343a SAS Daily Situation Reports, TNA WO 219/2414 SAS Suggested Targets for Attack (WO 219/2414); these appear to be

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effectiveness of the intelligence supplied by Haft 702, surviving features in the landscape have provided evidence of a number of these attacks (Tables 2 and 3), and two sites where there is a remarkable level of archaeological survival have been selected to illustrate the findings.

Classified tactical intelligence has been divided into two categories: firstly, that intended to inform general tactical analysis; and secondly, the subsequent targets recommended by the SAS. The latter must be considered conservative in the findings as much that was provided was integrated into larger aerial operations such as Armed Reconnaissance (AR), and railway disruption operations; an area the subject of wider and ongoing research.

Background To Events.

In addition to information being supplied by the French Resistance, by April 1944 there were additional sources of information arriving from Europe, and these were many and varied, such as aerial photographs, agent reports, annual reviews, ground photography, guidebooks, libraries, German prisoners of war, signals intelligence, and intelligence from men who had escaped and evaded the enemy. After the invasion, up-to-date intelligence on German troop movements, dispositions and logistics patterns became increasingly important in interpreting enemy intentions.

In the planning for the campaign, the Allies realised that once ashore, the option of inserting uniformed troops behind the lines to conduct offensive operations and gather intelligence would become a viable and supportable reality. The commander responsible for ground forces, General Bernard Law Montgomery, envisaged that the SAS deployment would be on a large scale with paratroopers dropped in small groups close behind the lines, attacking specific targets to delay enemy reinforcements.⁷ The SAS fiercely resisted this method of employment as it went against the operational doctrine of the regiment which was essentially for it to be used as a mobile force multiplier and strategic weapon deployed well behind enemy lines. By May 1944 this disagreement had erupted into a fierce argument between 21st Army Group Command and the commanding officer of No. 1 SAS, Bill Stirling, and which resulted

incomplete and are supplemented with data in 21st Army Group Headquarters Teletype/Signals in the TNA WO 171 series, Royal Air Force files in TNA Air 20,37, 40 operational reports and correspondence. In addition the Records of the Special Operations Executive (hereinafter SOE) HS series. In America US Ninth Airforce records held at the United States Air Force Historical Research Agency (hereinafter AFHRA) Alabama which include mission reports. At the US National Archives College Park, Washington Captured German records in Records Group 242.

⁷Andrew L. Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II British and American Irregular Warfare*, (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), p. 78

in his resignation.⁸ It was subsequently agreed that the SAS would be used in a strategic role, rather than a tactical role, by operating deep behind the enemy lines alongside the SOE and the Resistance, a role much more in keeping with the unit's original operational concept. The SAS brigade came under the command of the British 1 Airborne Corps, a part of 21st Army Group.⁹ The brigade was granted much latitude in its own command and control, working closely with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) Operations Section (G-3).¹⁰ However, after the initial deployment of the SAS, its operations were constrained by Special Forces Headquarters (SFHQ). One reason was that certain elements within SFHQ considered that parties of uniformed troops could compromise the established operations of the SOE and the French Resistance and that their actions could also present a threat to the local population in the form of reprisals while also being a drain on existing resources.¹¹ Even with these concerns, SFHQ instructed its own Jedburgh teams to, where practicable, work alongside the SAS when on the ground, but not to the extent where they would fall under SAS control. By 13 August 1 and 2 SAS had 12 teams on the ground in France.¹²

Evolution and Deployment of Haft 702.

In early July, German resistance in Normandy impeded Allied progress towards a breakout. By 8 July, the Americans were fighting to the west, their primary objective being the important road network hub of St Lo. To the east, the British and Canadians were engaged around Caen, where German resistance was also stubborn. It is against this backdrop that Operation Haft was conceived (Figure 1).

The original Operating Instruction No. 25 called for the dropping of ten to twelve small SAS parties behind the enemy lines north of the Loire River to attack infrastructure targets which would hamper German operations and resupply.¹³ The

⁸Mortimer, *The SAS in Occupied France*, p. 5.

⁹TNA HS 6/604, 'SAS operations under SHAEF control'. Letter from SF HQ to G3 SHAEF dated 18 May 1944.

¹⁰Hargreaves, *Special Operations*, p. 169.

¹¹Roger Ford, *Fire from the Forest*, p. 22.

¹²National Archives and Records Administration, (hereinafter NARA) Washington, D.C RG 226. MI 623-R8 V.4. Jedburgh was the codename of a combined British and American covert operation in Europe. It aimed to assist Resistance operations and relay back military information. Teams usually consisted of three members: one British, one American, and a National from the country in which they were operating. Records of the Office of Strategic Services.

¹³TNA WO 218/114, 'H.Q. S.A.S. Tps, War Office: Special Services War Diaries, Second World War. Special Services Units H.Q. S.A.S. Tps'. Operating Instruction 25. No date.

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targets consisted of airfields and aircraft emergency landing grounds, soft transport targets on main roads, telecommunications, bulk petrol, and any operation which would embarrass and delay the movement of reserves to the battlefield. Operation Haft was redefined as an intelligence-gathering operation because it was considered too close to the front line, circa eighty kilometres, to be offensive.

There was a clearly implied frustration within the SAS regarding the planning process. The final Operating Instruction No. 27 notes that the operation 'has now finally been approved by all concerned'.¹⁴ The inference of delay here likely emanates from friction between the SAS and SFHQ.¹⁵ The primary objective now was to conduct reconnaissance around Mayenne, Laval and Le Mans, paying attention to troop concentrations, strategic targets (not defined), petrol and ammunition stores, and possible parachute operations in the region (Figure 2). This main party was led by Captain Blackman and named Haft 702 A (Figure 1), with his adjutant Lieutenant Kidner and radio operator Lieutenant Randall. They were assisted by a French parachutist by the name of Maison and three other SAS ranks, Corporal Brown and Troopers Baker and Harrison. The second part of the operation, known as Haft 702 B, was led by Lieutenant Anderson with Trooper Hull and a French member, Lemée, and an unnamed fourth member.¹⁶ Their job on arrival in the area between Argentan and L'Aigle was to conduct reconnaissance of enemy landing grounds in the Alençon area (Figure 2) near Barville, Essay, and Lonrai. At least one of these sites, Lonrai, was being used by Focke Wolf 190 fighter aircraft of 2 Gruppe and by 13 July, both Lonrai and Essay had been bombed. The SAS were also granted permission to conduct hostile action provided it did not compromise the local Resistance. This included an attack on a railway tunnel and train outside Paris carrying wounded troops from the front.¹⁷

¹⁴TNA WO 218/114, 'H.Q. S.A.S. Tps, War Office: Special Services War Diaries, Second World War. Special Services Units H.Q. S.A.S. Tps', Operating Instruction No 27 Ref HQ/SAS Tps/TSB/5G.H.Q. S.A.S. Tps. No date.

¹⁵Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 355 observes that 'About a dozen different authorities had to consent to every new SAS venture.'

¹⁶Jean Planchais. *La Résistance à Coulonges-sur-Sarthe*, (Cahiers Percherons : Fédération des amis du Perche, 1998). No4 pp. 29-32.

¹⁷Martin Dillon and Roy Bradford. *Rogue Warrior of the SAS the Blair Mayne Legend*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream publishing, 1987), p.158. The location of the attack is unknown. This part of the operation is subject to further research. It is likely that this supplemental requirement was approved too late for incorporation into the Operating instruction.



Figure 1: Captain Blackman courtesy of the Peter Forbes collection.

Within days of 702 A and B landing, there was discussion between 21st Army Group and HQ Airborne Troops on inserting a further three parties consisting of men from the Belgian Independent parachute company with a brief much closer to the original Haft Operating Instruction which was to harass the retreating enemy but not to destroy infrastructure targets.¹⁸ On 31 July, and 2 and 8 August, they were dropped to the east of Haft 702. Originally codenamed Haft C 105, D 205, and E 305, they were renamed Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Bunyan, respectively. (Figure 2).

¹⁸TNA WO 205/652A. 'Reports on Special Air Services and special forces' War Office: 21 Army Group: Military Headquarters Papers, Second World War. G. Plans. Reports on Special Air Services and special forces.' Signal Date Time Group, (DTG) 180105 between HQ Airborne Troops and EXFOR Main copying in SHAEF, SFHQ and Command SAS Troops.

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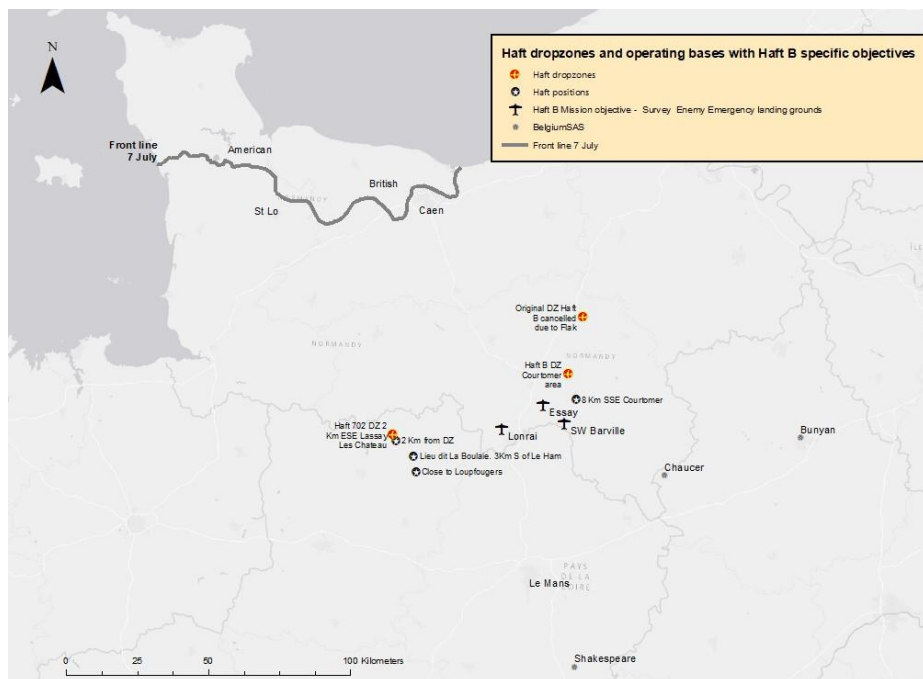


Figure 2: Haft Positions.¹⁹

The insertion by air of the party led by Anderson (Haft B) on the night of 7/8 July had to be cancelled as the drop zone, nine kilometres NNE of Gacé, was in an area covered by flak. Blackman's party, however, was successfully dropped in the vicinity of Lassay les Chateaux in the Mayenne department, an area garrisoned by one hundred and fifty Germans and members of the Gestapo.²⁰ They were met by an SOE Agent Major Claude de Baissac, codenamed Scientist, and by members of the Resistance. The party stayed in the near vicinity of the drop zone until 14 July. Within two days of landing, Haft 702 was embedded eighty kilometres behind the lines and was transmitting intelligence and targets back to Headquarters airborne troops by radio. Anderson's Haft B party arrived in the field with his two-man team on the night of 11/12 July at a position sixty five kilometres east of Blackman, close to Courtomer in the Orne department where they were housed with members of the local Resistance.

¹⁹Map created by the authors using ArcGIS Pro by ESRI. Basemap sources: IGN,ESRI,HERE,USGS.

²⁰Special Air Service Regimental Association Archive. Haft 702 report on German troop movements. No date.

Blackman and his party were installed in isolated farm buildings three kilometres to the South of Le Ham (Figure 3). Surprisingly they transmitted their exact position over the airwaves to HQ by two-way radio, even though it must have been obvious to Blackman and his team that the Germans were trying to intercept such radio transmissions.²¹ During this time Blackman and Kidner reconnoitred the area on several occasions to gather information. Major de Baissac also ensured that Haft 702 was well supplied with intelligence from networks in the wider Normandy area, appointing George Rabaud to function as the party's liaison link with the various Resistance organisations.²² De Baissac was, on occasion, using Haft 702 to duplicate intelligence that was being sent back by his wireless operator, Phyllis Latour. Anderson joined them on 8 August, and by 10 August, with little useful intelligence being gathered, they decided to end the operation.



Figure 3: Farm building used as the main base for Haft 702 south of Le Ham in the Mayenne Department.²³

²¹NARA 'Records of German Field Commands', RG 42 T311-R1, 'Oberbefehlshaber West'. Radio Networks of SAS known in France. p. 7000976. dated 27 July 1944.

²²TNA HS 9/76, 'Personnel file of Claude Marie Marc de Baissac C, aka BOUCHERVILLE, aka CLAUDE, aka DENIS, aka MICHEL, aka JACQUES, aka Clement BASTABLE, aka SCIENTIST, aka David - born 28.02.1907. Volume 2'.

²³Author's image.

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Haft 702 continued to operate at the Le Ham site until 2 August when German activity in the immediate area became intense, and it was decided to relocate to a hay barn near Loupfougers.

In parallel with Haft 702, two three-man Jedburgh teams, codenamed Gavin and Guy, were also parachuted into the same area fifteen kilometres to the southeast of Haft 702 on 7 July. This drop zone placed them seventy five kilometres to the east of their designated operating areas. The initial aims of these two groups were to assist the local French Resistance to the north and south of Rennes and to supply intelligence in the path of the anticipated American advance. This insertion of the two teams was conducted by two aircraft using the same drop point and timed to be within minutes of each other. Their subsequent reports mention their being told of an SAS party working nearby and they were also in contact with Haft 702.²⁴ Guy and Gavin observed that of the 'supposed' four thousand Maquis Resistants in the department where they landed there appeared to be only thirty active members. Their post-operation report also noted the friction between de Baissac and the local Resistance leadership. This appeared to be the cause of the loss of eleven days in deploying toward their designated operating area.²⁵

There was ill feeling between elements of the command of the Resistance in the area and de Baissac due to French interpretation of the lines of command and control.²⁶ Major de Baissac had an extremely high opinion of the Resistance but observed that weapons supplied by air-drop to certain members of the Resistance went unused, and on 8 June, he reported 'that the French Secret Army were so secret, nobody could find them'.²⁷ Subsequently, he distributed weapons to units where he felt they could be better employed, such as active Resistance units and the Communists. No doubt de Baissac was an outstanding and talented operative, but he upset elements of the Resistance establishment. A subsequent letter written in the aftermath by his Commanding Officer, Colonel Maurice Buckmaster, on 19 September observed that

²⁴TNA WO 171/110, '21 Army Group. G. (Ops.) with Apps. B-D'. Signal from HQ Airborne troops to EXFOR Main DTG 181830.

²⁵Liddel Hart Centre for Military Archives. Kings College. London. OSS/London: Special Operations Branch and Secret Intelligence Branch War Diaries. Frederick, Md. University Publications of America, c1985. Great Britain. Special Operations Executives.

²⁶TNA HS 9/76, 'Personnel file of Claude Marie Marc de Baissac', Vol 2.

²⁷TNA HS 9/76, 'Personnel file of Claude Marie Marc de Baissac', Volume 2. 'L Armee secret est tellement secret qu'on ne peut pas la trouver!' Report of Interrogation, of de Baissac dated 25 August 1944.

'His relations with the French have at times been strained, and he is not persona grata with the present French staff in London'.²⁸

Haft 702 operated in this difficult climate with success, working alongside the Resistance and de Baissac, although nowhere in Blackman's Haft official report did he mention the strained relationship between de Baissac and the Resistance. He did observe that 'Everybody encountered in this operation were 100% loyal and trustworthy', although noting inactivity in some areas.²⁹

The American forces in Normandy began moving south after Operation Cobra, and by 6 August they had captured Laval and were driving south toward Le Mans. On 7 August, the Germans mounted their last counter-offensive at Mortain in an attempt to cut the American advance by driving west towards Avranches. This ground to a halt and effectively ended any German chance of turning the tide against the Allied advance. In the eastern sector, on 7 August, the British, Canadian, and Polish forces launched Operation Totalise, pushing south of Caen towards Falaise. By 11 August, the Germans were retreating by night, but by 13 August, the retreat was being conducted in the open and in daylight; with many German troops subsequently surrounded in what became known as the Falaise pocket. On the night of 10/11 August Haft 702 assessed that it was providing little useful tactical intelligence and decided to end the mission. Making their way through the enemy lines the next morning, escorted by Rabaud, they met the Americans and were initially de-briefed at the American 20 Army Corps HQ on the road between Laval and Le Mans. They then proceeded to British 21st Army Group. From there Blackman flew back to debrief his commanding officer Brigadier McLeod. The rest of the party returned to the UK by ship. For his part in leading Haft 702, Blackman was awarded a bar to his Military Cross.

Intelligence Supplied by Haft 702: 8 July - 5 August.

Between 8 July and 5 August Haft 702 provided 44 intelligence reports. These are listed in Table 1 and, where given, the locations are shown in Figure 4. The intelligence provided by Haft 702 has been synthesised into three categories: Movements; Special Interest Reports (SIR); and General Observations. The first two are likely to have been turned into targets, while General Observations would have most likely been used to augment the overall intelligence picture.

²⁸TNA HS 9/76, 'Personnel file of Claude Marie Marc de Baissac', Volume 2.

²⁹TNA WO 218/114, 'HQ/SAS Tps Report on Operation Haft 702', by Capt. M.J.D.A Blackman. Not dated.

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Date submitted	Location or Comment	Detailed amplification	Intelligence Illustrated Fig. 4	Fig 4 ID
8/7/1944	Lassay les Chateaux.	150 Germans garrisoned in the area.	Intelligence Movements (IM)	1
8/7/1944		Germans using minor roads.	General Observation (GO)	
9/7/1944	Pre en Pail forest, and most large forest areas.	Germans present.	IM	2
9/7/1944		Comments on the Resistances method of operation; and strong local support.	GO	
10/7/1944		Road signs booby-trapped.	GO	
10/7/1944	St Pierre sur Dives.	Described as 'Transport centre SW Caen' (In reality SE Caen).	IM	3
11/7/1944	Ambulances go north from Alençon.	Carrying ammunition.	IM	4
11/7/1944		Troops from Russia on this front.	GO	
11/7/1944	Caen area, Putot SW Dozule.	Large HQ.	IM (HQ)	5
12/7/1944	Gonneville and Dozule.	German troop concentrations.	IM	6
12/7/1944		Stress Germans using minor roads and nearly all forest areas.	GO	
12/7/1944	Charchigne.	German troops bombed, heavy casualties returning to Le Mans.	IM	7
12/7/1944	Varaville, 1 Km W in farm. .	Allied Para doctor Colthorp? with 20 men. Request rescue or food (TNA WO 219/2343A).	Special Interest Report (SIR)	A
16/7/1944	Bernay-Dreux-Louviers-Mantes-Vernon.	German troop concentrations.	IM	8 - 12
16/7/1944	Bagnoles de l'Orne.	Rommel tactical HQ located.	SIR	B
17/7/1944	Mont du Saules.	Suggested good Drop Zone for British parachutists .	SIR	C
18/7/1944		Suggest RAF bomb road points not rail.	General Observation	
18/7/1944	Bagnoles de l'Orne.	Rommel not now in Bagnoles de l'Orne.	SIR (Rommel Continued)	B
22/7/1944	Lonrai	2 Airfields under construction.	SIR Aviation	D
22/7/1944	5 Km S of Laval in area Parne-Bignon-Mortigne.	3 Airfields under construction.	SIR Aviation	E - G
22/7/1944	Route Vitre-Laval-Le Mans-Fougeres.	Engineers improving route for heavy traffic.	IM	13
22/7/1944	Ecouves and Gouffern forests.	Approx 8 SS Divisions around the forests Then no more troops until Evreux and Dreux	IM	14 -15

		and Chartres where possible defensive line being prepared.		
23/7/1944		Personal comments on German morale and equipment.	GO	
24/7/1944	Homet wood and Bourgon forest.	Tanks, troops and ammunition believed left from front a week ago.	IM	16 - 17
24/7/1944	Bagnoles de l'Orne.	Huge hospital 10000 - 6500 pass through in week.	IM	18
26/7/1944	Beaumont sur Sarthe.	12 Flying bomb ramps.	SIR Aviation	H
26/7/1944	Woods surrounding Chartres.	Fighter bombers based.	SIR Aviation	I
26/7/1944	S of Caen.	3 SS Divisions present Das Reich, Adolf Hitler and Gross Deutschland.	IM	19
26/7/1944	Commer bridge.	'Not hit after 6 attacks worth another go.'	GO Not Haft target.	
26/7/1944	Mayenne.	American aircraft (B17) attack caused many civilian casualties.	GO	
26/7/1944		Good work by American P38s.	GO	
26/7/1944		Report on Resistance in Brittany that groups are active in major towns.	GO	
27/7/1944	St Quentin les Chardonets.	Admin HQ for front.	IM (HQ)	20
28/7/1944	La Ferté Macé and Falaise.	SS Gross Deutschland Division seen.	IM	21 - 22
28/7/1944	15 Km SW Caen.	SS Adolf Hitler Division seen.	IM	23
28/7/1944	Laval-Le Mans.	Supply rail line operational.	IM	24
29/7/1944	Domfront-Avranches.	Supply rail line operational.	IM	25
29/7/1944	Villaines. No record found of this being a HAFT 702 target.	Ammunition dump hit by RAF with good results.	GO	
1/8/1944		German troops bombed, heavy casualties returning to Le Mans.	GO	
1/8/1944	0,5 Mile from current position. Note Haft 702 transmitted its own position to HQSAS (VY 991775) 16 July. (TNA WO 219/2343A).	German troops.	IM	26
2/8/1944	Area NE Mayenne.	German mass withdrawal.	IM	
2/8/1944	Via Laval-Ernee.	SS advance to front.	IM	
2/8/1944	Area NE Mayenne.	5000 Germans in Area of La Baroche. Das Reich withdrawing.	IM	

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4/8/1944		Report on battle, enemy strengths, and suggestion that the Americans could break-through in area between near Sille le Guillaume-Le Mans.	GO	
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Table 1: Intelligence gathered by Haft 702 8 July – 5 August.³⁰

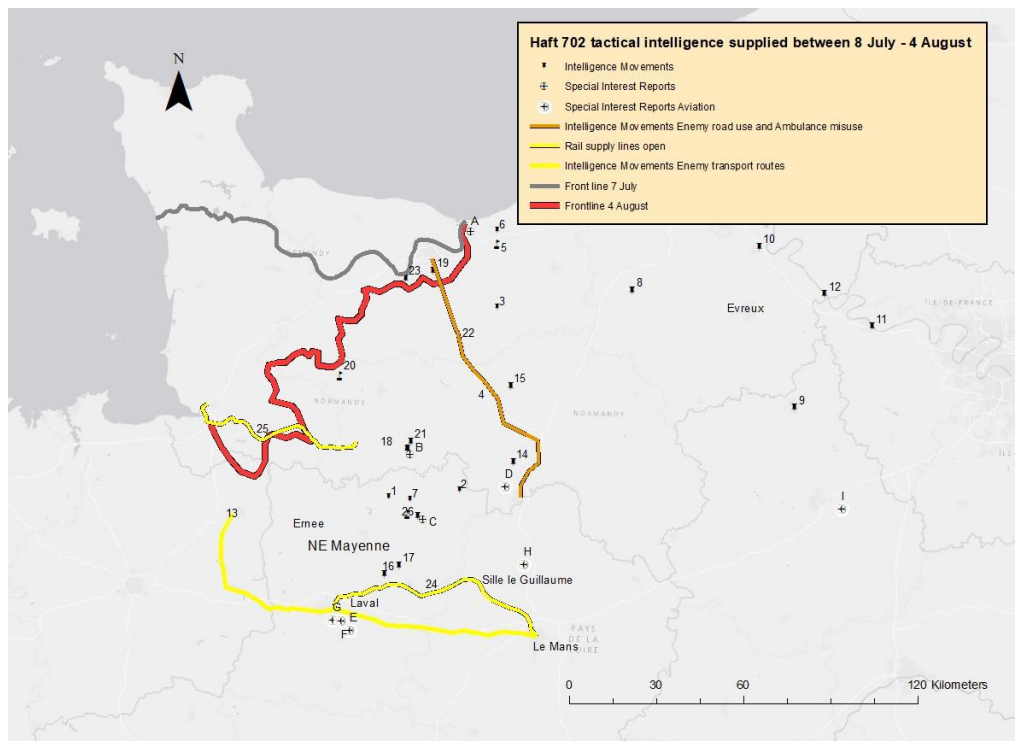


Figure 4: Haft 702 Intelligence supplied: Movements and Reports to end of 4 August.³¹

The intelligence supplied from 8 July until their move to a hay barn on 2 August was a period of relative stability for Haft 702. They were securely ensconced at an operating

³⁰Source TNA WO 219/2414 and WO 219/2343 and WO 171 110.

³¹See Table 2 for locations. Map created using ArcGIS Pro by ESRI. Basemap sources: IGN,ESRI,HERE,USGS. https://services.arcgisonline.com/ArcGIS/rest/services/Canvas/World_Light_Grey_Reference/Mapserver.

base away from the prying eyes of the enemy while their immediate neighbours brought them food.³² This fixed base enabled intelligence to be fed to them by members of the Resistance and de Baissac. During July Haft 702 targets and intelligence were mainly coming from the centre rear German supply areas, and a hundred kilometres to the north of their position to the British front line; but one report came from as far away as Paris, more than two hundred kilometres to the east. The scale and nature of their intelligence gathering partly reflects the geographic position of Haft 702 and the fact that de Baissac's operations were concentrated to the south and east of the front.

Troop & Vehicle Movements

Twenty-two of the reports dealt with movements across the area. Three examples are highlighted here. Firstly, the use of ambulances travelling north carrying ammunition illustrates the German dual use of what was a most valuable motorised resource. Secondly, the entire town of Bagnoles de l'Orne was reported by Haft 702 as being a large hospital holding ten thousand wounded and that six thousand five hundred men had passed through it in one week. The accuracy of these figures is not known, but the town was spared the fate of many others, escaping heavy bombardment and fighting. A debriefing document from January 1945 details the action of the Resistance in the area and noted that Blackman's efforts were the reason the town was saved from destruction.³³ Finally, towards the end of July, it was reported that rail lines were still operating between Avranches and Domfront, and later it was reported that a railway gun was located at Mortain, the site of which was attacked, but no gun was found, and to the south supplies were moving on an east to west axis by rail between Laval and Le Mans.

Special Interest Reports

Eight reports of special interest were made by Haft 702 and Haft B. Two such reports were made on 16 July; the first stated that Rommel, the operational commanding officer of German forces in Normandy, was using the spa town of Bagnoles de l'Orne as a tactical HQ. The Jedburgh team (codenamed Gavin) reported the same thing a day earlier on 15 July. SHAEF immediately required verification as the SAS Brigade was planning to kidnap/assassinate Rommel at a different location, a chateau at Roche Guyon on the banks of the Seine more than one hundred and fifty kilometres to the east. Blackman was tasked to reconnoitre Rommel's location in Bagnoles, and by 18 July, it was clear that Rommel was not present. Meanwhile, in the Theatre Intelligence Section, which dealt with compiling information related to the enemy order of battle,

³²Perso comment M. L. Leloup of Bel Air, Le Ham in the Mayenne Department who as a child remembers taking food from his nearby farm to Allied soldiers with red berets

³³NARA Record Group 498. ID 193 'Helpers files' Box 974. Report of M. A. Rave. 13 January 1945.

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it was declared that Bagnoles was a highly unlikely location for Rommel. They did observe, however, that the site was known to be an important logistics hub 'bristling with Ammunition and fuel depots', and they noted it was possible that Rommel could well have visited the site.³⁴ Independently of these events Rommel was injured by air attack on 17 July and subsequently relieved of command. The second report was a request made by Haft 702 to assist British paratroopers cut off behind the lines close to the front. This request was originally passed to SOE in London in June by de Baissacs team and then passed on to the 6 Airborne Division. Whether any assistance was provided to these troops is not known, but it is most likely that by the time this report was made by Haft 702, this intelligence was out of date.

A further aim of Haft 702 had been to locate landing areas for airborne assault. One location appears to have been submitted, close to their operating base at Mont du Saules. Of the reports made, four covered air intelligence subjects. Anderson's original brief had been to reconnoitre the advanced aircraft landing grounds to the east of the Orne at Essay, Barville and Lonrai. The 8th Air Force had already attacked Lonrai on 17 June, and subsequent aerial reconnaissance on 6 July noted craters to the north and south of the site and two single-engine aircraft parked near a clump of trees.³⁵ On 25 July, Haft 702 reported Lonrai to be hosting 50 Messerschmitt 110 aircraft. How many of these became targets and attacked is unknown.

General Observations

Fourteen General Observations were made. A number specifically criticised the precision of Allied bombing while others were, however, more constructive, suggesting air attacks would be better served on road points rather than rail lines. German morale and strength were also reported, noting that the enemy was using forests and minor roads, and warning that road signs were booby trapped. Two reports commented on the makeup and the operation of local Resistance.

Targets

These have been divided into three time periods 8 – 21 July, 22 July – 5 August and 5 August to the end of the operation on 11 August. The first-time period represents a period of relative stability for the location of the frontline as the Allies worked to expand their bridgehead, culminating in Operation Goodwood, 18-20 July, where British and Canadian forces completed the capture of Caen and attempted to secure the high ground beyond the town. The second period covers the time after the launch

³⁴British Online Archives. Documents discussing Rommel by those close to him. Letter from H.Q Airborne Troops to SHAEF 3 Special Operations dated 18 July 1944 referring to Team Gavins signal C.6513 or 65/3 DTG 151200 15 July.

³⁵ TNA Air 34/258, 'Interpretation reports: K2561-K2670'. Immediate Interpretation Report No. K 2664 dated 8 July 1944.

of the American Operation Cobra on 25 July that led to the breakout of American forces to the south and then eastward to envelop the Germans within the Falaise pocket as the British, Canadian, and Polish forces drove down from the north. The third period covers the closing days of Operation Haft as the Allied force came closer to the team's location.

The system for allocating a priority for all targets by the Tactical SAS HQ was formally adopted on 21 July. The priorities were defined from A to C as:

'A' – 'demands' for an air strike from deployed SAS troops for operational reasons;

'B' – targets of fleeting opportunity such as road convoys, trains etc.;

'C' – fixed targets for example bridges and depots.³⁶

Targets were sent directly to 21st Army Group for action and its representatives working alongside the advanced elements of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force in Uxbridge. Not all targets submitted by the SAS were accepted for action. Before 21 July records show that these target priorities were already being applied.

Between 8 July and 21 July of the sixteen bombing targets allocated by SAS HQ at least five were attacked in direct response to Haft 702's intelligence (see Table 2, and Figure 5). The majority of these were fuel and ammunition targets. Seven consisted of a column of guns, bridges, an HQ and the location of an SS division. Most of these targets were localised within the area of the Haft 702 operation. Targets coming from further afield such as Caen (FD Cinglais), (Belleville Viellet) were no doubt passed from de Baissac.

Date Supplied	Location	Type	Target Number	Aircraft despatched For attack. Y / N / ?	Military landscape trace
10/07/1944	Andaines forest I.	Fuel.	C ?	Y	Logistics storage earthworks Bomb cratering. Depot related artefacts (Remnants of fuel drums).
11/07/1944	NE 2 Km Lassay les Châteaux.	10 large guns on road.	B ?	?	Unconfirmed.
12/07/1944	Cinglais forest.	Ammunition.	C50	Y	Bomb cratering.

³⁶ SAS Suggested targets for bombing . Letter HQ Airborne Troops - Commander SAS Troops dated 21 July 1944. TNA WO 219/2414.

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12/07/1944	Varaville.	Divisional HQ.	C ?	?	Not assessed.
12/07/1944	Javron 1	Bridge No 1 & 2.	C ?	?	Unconfirmed.
12/07/1944	Javron 2	Bridge No 3	C ?	?	Unconfirmed.
12/07/1944	1 km E Lassay les Châteaux.	Ammunition with Flak	B ?	?	Unconfirmed.
12/07/1944	Ferriere Aux Etangs.	Fuel. In tanks 30 ft high.	C ?	Y	Bomb cratering.
12/07/1944	Andaines forest 2.	Fuel. 110 and 200 litre drums along road.	C ?	Y	Bomb cratering. Depot-related artefacts and logistics storage earthworks.
16/07/1944	La Ferté Macé.	Movements SS troops (Adolf Hitler division).	Not listed in target file although SHAEF aware.	?	Unconfirmed.
16/07/1944	Vingt Hanaps.	Railhead and Ammunition.	C ?	?	Unconfirmed.
16/07/1944	La Ferté Macé Forest	Ammunition	Not listed in target file although SHAEF aware.	N	Depot related artefacts and logistics storage earthworks.
18/07/1944	Gouffern forest.	Fuel and Tanks.	B ?	Y	Bomb cratering.
19/07/1944	Belleville Viellet.	Fuel.	C69	?	Not assessed.
19/07/1944	Chateau de la Lucaziere.	Ammunition and fuel in Chateaux.	C83	?	Unconfirmed.
19/07/1944	Sille Le Guillaume forest.	Ammunition dump (With FLAK).	C84	N	Unconfirmed.

Table 2: 8 -21 July Allocated target numbers by SAS HQ.³⁷

³⁷Source TNA WO 219/2414, WO 219/2343, and WO 171/114 .

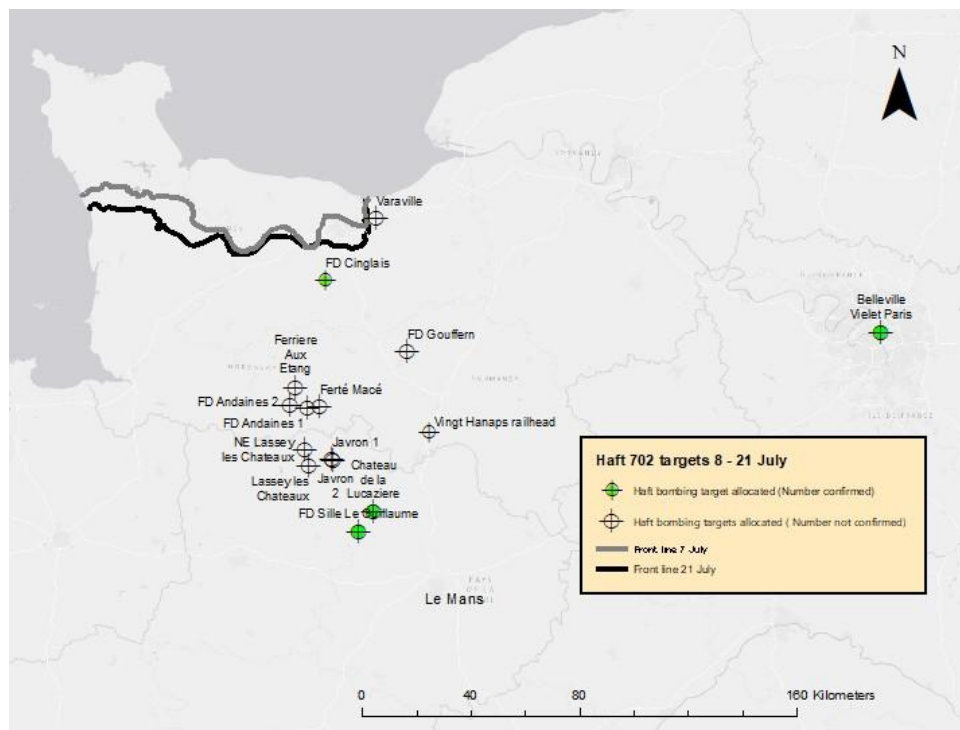


Figure 5: Haft 702 Targets 8 - 21 July.³⁸

From 22 July to the 5 August SAS HQ allocated at least a further fifteen targets (Table 3 and Figure 6). A further target number B136 was also allocated, but as to whether this can be attributed to Blackman remains unknown. The temporary airfield at Lonrai was confirmed to be hosting aircraft. Nine of the targets supplied focused on fuel and ammunition, The remainder consisted of two related to administration installations and a repair facility and two to movements, which included a railway gun at Mortain. Blackman's report included a further three targets but these were made by the three Belgium parties. They have been included in Tables 3 and 4 for completeness (shaded rows).

³⁸Locations supplied by Haft 702. Target identified by SAS HQ and allocated by HQ Airborne Troops. Map created using ArcGIS Pro by ESRI. Basemap sources: IGN,ESRI,HERE,USGS. https://services.arcgisonline.com/ArcGIS/rest/services/Canvas/World_Light_Grey_Reference/Mapserver.

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Date Supplied	Location	Type	Target Number:	Aircraft despatched For attack. Y / ?	Military landscape trace
22/07/1944	Le Teilleul.	Fuel. 50000 litres in drums.	C78	?	Unconfirmed by landscape.
22/07/1944	Andaines forests No 2.	Fuel. Much fuel in the Drums S side of track.	C79	Y	Logistics storage earthworks: Bomb cratering. Depot related artefacts, (Remnants of fuel drums).
22/07/1944	SE Mayenne Chateau/Farm.	Fuel, Ammunition, and troops.	B81	Y	Unconfirmed by landscape.
25/7/1944	Lonrai.	50 Messerschmitt type 110 aircraft at airfield.	B105	Y	Unconfirmed by landscape.
25/7/1944	Butte Chaumont wood.	Fuel (Aviation?).	C106	Y	Logistics storage earthworks Depot related artefacts, (Remnants of fuel drums).
28/7/1944	St Paul Gautier.	70 lorries and repair depot.(Moving in 1 week).	B111 amended to B113 by signal.	Y	Unconfirmed by landscape.
29/7/1944	St Honorine Wood.	Fuel (SS).	B117	Y	Bomb cratering.
29/7/1944 Still occupied 4/8 with 200 men.	Malhouse NW end of village on river 4 Miles NW Lassay Les Chateaux.	Engineering technical HQ.	C118	?	Unconfirmed by landscape.
29/7/1944	1,5 Miles W of Frenes on river.	Administration HQ.	C119	?	Unconfirmed by landscape.
29/7/1944	St Berthevan.	Fuel.	C120	Y	Unconfirmed by landscape but full report made by RAF evaluation team of depot attack. 27 Nov 44 TNA WO291/1366. ²

²	Mortain Railway Station.	Railway gun.	B121	Y	Unconfirmed by landscape.
29/7/1944	Ferté forest. Part of Andaines forest.	Ammunition.	B123	Y	Logistics related earthworks. Bomb cratering.
31/7/1944	Vibraye forest.	Ammunition.	B124	?	Not assessed.
1/8/1944. Still occupied 4/8	Woods c.1.5 miles NW Javron.	Fuel, Ammunition and 300 SS troops.	B126	?	Unconfirmed by landscape.
1/8/1944	Chateau. VY797543— Y794530.	Fuel c 9000 Gallons. Ammunition 20 tons on both sides of road running past Chateau.	C128	?	Unconfirmed by landscape.
4/8/1944	Direction Le Mans-Paris.	Movements retreat.	B132	?	Not examined;

Table 3 22 July – 5 August Allocated target numbers by SAS HQ.³⁹

³⁹Source TNA WO 219/2414 and WO 219/2343.

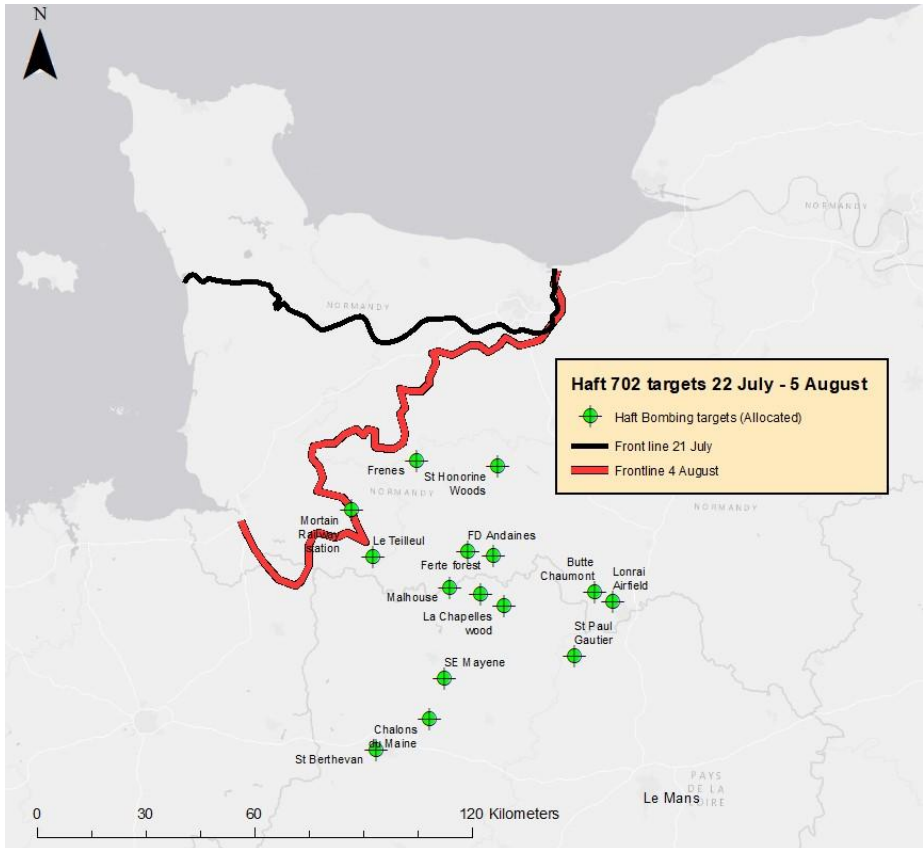


Figure 6: Haft 702 targets 22 July – 5 August. Locations allocated target numbers by SAS HQ.⁴⁰

Intelligence gathered by Haft 702 5 – 11 August

From 5 August with the front fast approaching, enemy activity in the Haft 702 operating area intensified and most of their reports highlighted troop concentrations (Table 4 and Figure 7). Targets not specifically allocated are known to have been

⁴⁰Map created using ArcGIS Pro by ESRI. Basemap sources: IGN,ESRI,HERE,USGS. https://services.arcgisonline.com/ArcGIS/rest/services/Canvas/World_Light_Grey_Reference/Mapserver.

incorporated into wider Armed Reconnaissance sorties and form part of further research.

Date submitted	Location or Comment	Detail	Intelligence Illustrated (Fig7)
05/08/1944	VP476992-444976	2 Tankers loaded with Nitro Glycerine.	B133
?	?		B136
7/8/1944	Château.	German Occupation.	B139
5/8/1944	La Baroche VY 9489 and VY 9977.	3000 Troops S all night from 0320 including Das Reich at 1000 on 4/8.	Intelligence Movements (IM)
7/8/1944	Domfront–Mayenne.	Reports say 5 German Divisions in area but no troops seen by Haft on road situation confused.	IM
8/8/1944	VZ 040750.	Road mined.	Intelligence Report
8/8/1944	Villaines.	German tanks S.	IM
8/8/1944	VY 960772.	German.	IM (HQ)
8/8/1944	Mortagne–Sees	Petrol supplies moving between nightly 0200?	IM
8/8/1944	St Pierre des Nids.	Large troop concentration.	IM
9/8/1944	In area between Mamers–Belleme–St Cosmev. V59	Reports 500 tanks night of 9/8.	IM
9/8/1944	VZ 195895.	Tank concentration.	IM
9/8/1944	SE Alençon	Tiger tanks part of Corps at chateau.	IM

Table 4. 5 – 11 August Intelligence supplied by Haft 702 (Source TNA WO 219/2414 and WO 219/2343a).

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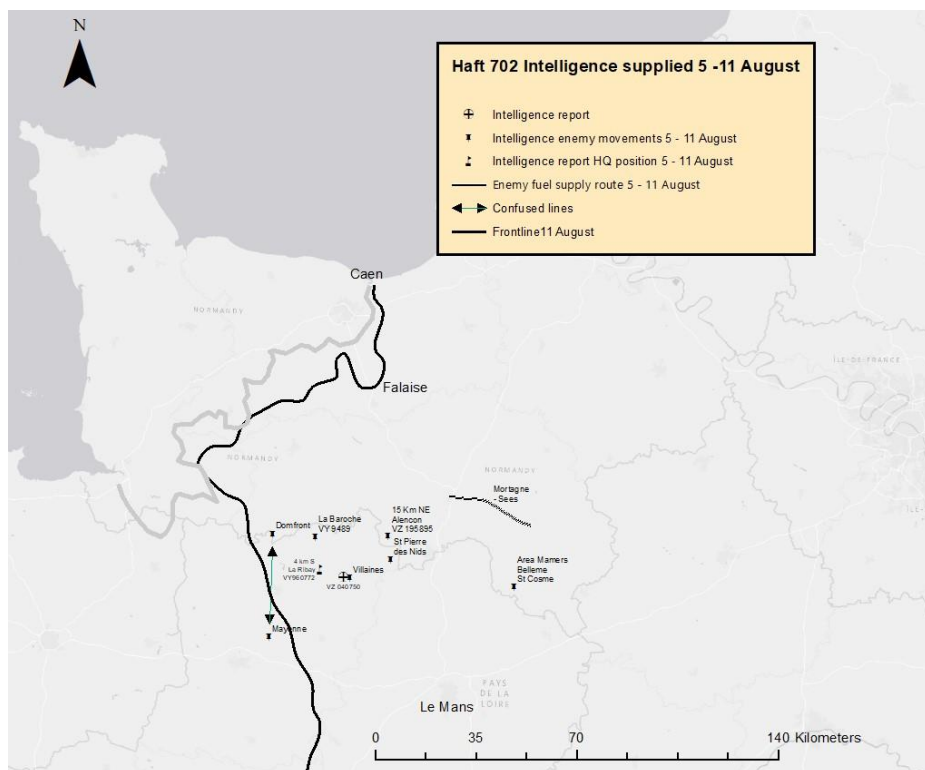


Figure 7: Locations of tactical Intelligence supplied in the closing days of the operation by Haft 702.⁴¹

Landscape Evidence – the influence of Haft 702 intelligence on Allied air strikes?

Tables 2 and 3 include a provisional assessment of whether a target area identified by Haft 702 intelligence reporting still contains any evidence of air attack in the modern landscape. This is an emerging area of research interest that draws on the archaeological study of forested landscapes in Normandy. Previous work has documented exceptionally well-preserved evidence of German military installations, especially logistics depots, and the bomb craters testifying to Allied attempts to

⁴¹Map created using ArcGIS Pro by ESRI. Basemap sources: IGN,ESRI,HERE,USGS. https://services.arcgisonline.com/ArcGIS/rest/services/Canvas/World_Light_Grey_Reference/Mapserver.

destroy them.⁴² A particular challenge in this field of research is the attempt to link bomb craters to specific raids, including discriminating between separate flights or boxes of aircraft (in the case of medium bomber attacks) or discrete squadrons (in the case of fighter-bombers). This can be impossible for areas hit by multiple bombing attacks, but crater attribution has been successful in cases where craters are marginal to heavily bombed areas and for targets struck by single raids.⁴³

Two forest sites identified in this study serve to illustrate not only the challenge of crater attribution but also permit an evaluation of the influence of Haft 702 intelligence on target identification and the deployment of tactical air assets. The first is the Forêt Domaniale des Andaines, near Bagnoles de l'Orne, which at the beginning of the Normandy campaign was a key German Seventh Army logistics hub holding fuel, munitions and rations depots. The location of a major fuel depot had been identified and designated as a potential target in the January 1944 Tactical Target Dossier.⁴⁴ The area was repeatedly bombed by US Ninth Air Force medium and fighter-bombers during June 1944. However, Haft 702 reports fuel storage in this area on the 10, 12, 22 and 29 July (Tables 2 and 3), including a description of the target as 'well worth attacking again.'⁴⁵ It is likely this influenced the decision to conduct further raids on the 11, 12 and 24 July and 8 August. Today, the area formerly occupied by the northern part of the depot illustrates the extensive cratering as a result of multiple bombings (Figure 8). Further sites survive in this forest and are the subject of further work.

⁴²Capps Tunwell, D., Passmore, D. G., & Harrison, S, 'Second World War bomb craters and the archaeology of Allied air attacks in the forests of the Normandie-Maine National Park, NW France'. *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 41(3), 2016, 312–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00934690.2016.1184930>. Accessed 12 July 2025. Please note that this lies behind a paywall.

⁴³Capps Tunwell, D., Passmore, D. G., & Harrison, S., 'A witness in the landscape: The bombing of the Forêt Domaniale des Andaines and the Normandy Campaign, NW France, 1944', *War in History*, 25(1) 2017, 69–102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516650228>. Accessed 12 July 2025 and also behind a paywall.

⁴⁴TNA Air 40/1284, 'Tactical Targets Laval Area'. Issued January 1944.

⁴⁵TNA WO 219/2414, 'SAS Suggested targets for bombing', Signal Ref 00561, dated 10 July..

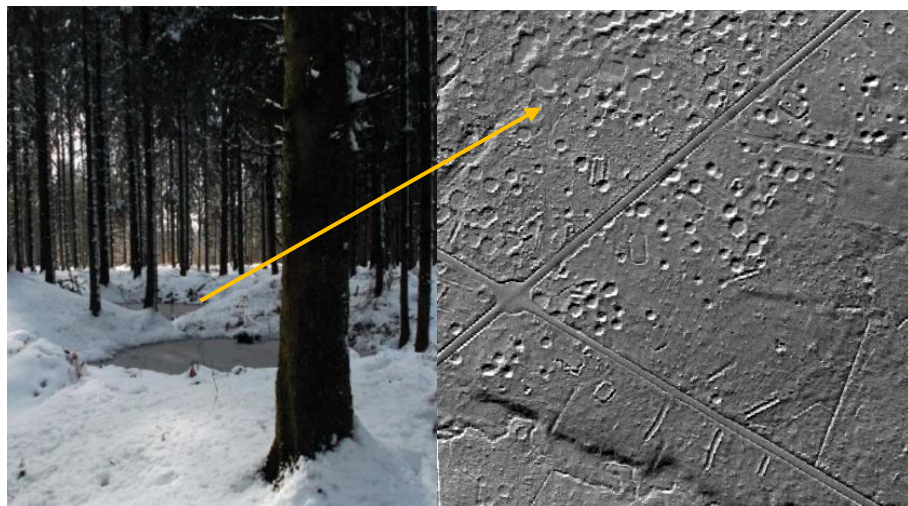


Figure 8. Cratering today in the Andaines forests.⁴⁶

Figure 8 shows the cratering resulting from the bombing of the German fuel depot and aerial imaging coverage using LIDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) of the same area showing extensive cratering and rectangular fuel earthwork bunkers for fuel storage.

The second forest site described here is in the Forêt de Grande Gouffern, Figure 9, which lies forty three kilometres to the northeast of Bagnoles de l'Orne. Reports of roadside fuel storage and tanks in the forest had been forwarded by Haft 702 on 18 July, and quick to act on this report, 2 Group (RAF Second Tactical Air Force) medium bombers were directed to attack on the night of 19/20 July. The raid appears to have struck the forest some two kilometres short of the target area. A second attack early on the 25 July by Typhoon fighter-bombers of 439 and 440 Squadrons. 143 Wing succeeded in dropping thirty eight one thousand pound GP bombs in the general area of the aiming point. Some thirty six impact craters in this area can be identified on an aerial photograph taken in June 1947.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Courtesy of the Office National des Forêts, France.

⁴⁷Full details of these raids and an exploratory archaeological survey in Passmore and Capps-Tunwell, '143 Wing (RCAF) Typhoons Over Normandy', *Journal of Canadian Military History*, 33;1,5 pp. 25 – 31.

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2171&context=cmh>. Accessed 12 July 2025.

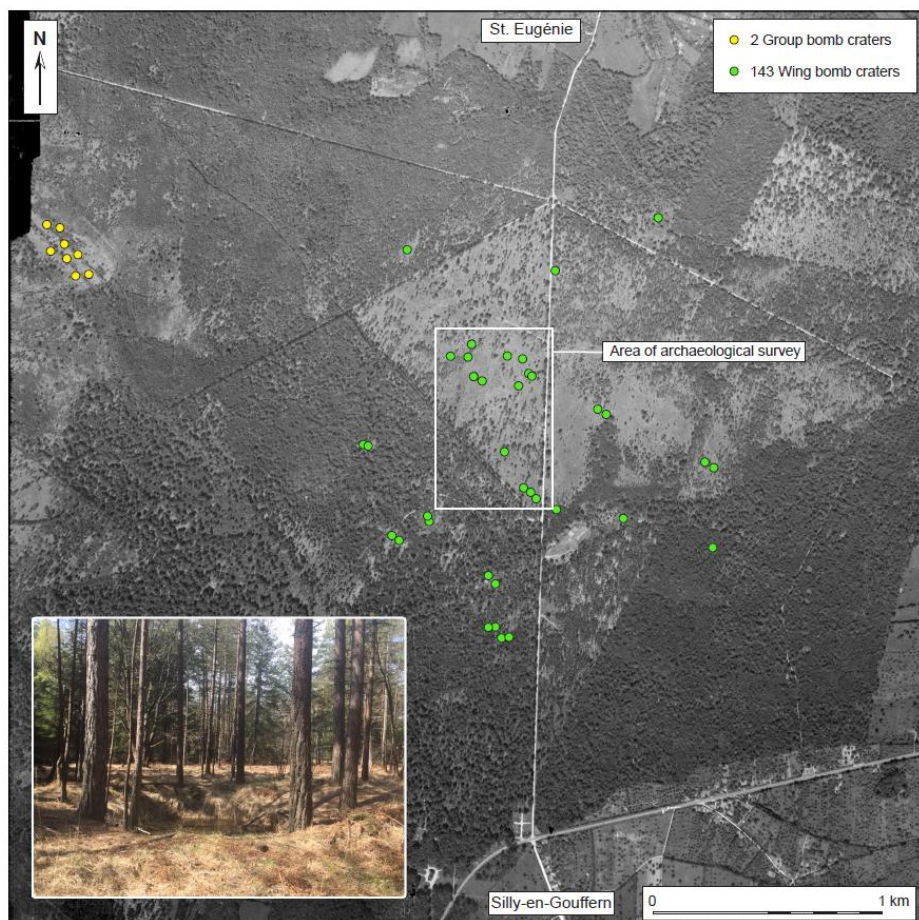


Figure 9: Aerial photograph of the Fôret de Grande Gouffern taken in 1947.⁴⁸ The inset image shows example of a surviving bomb crater.

No indication of petrol fires or explosions was observed during the second raid. It is possible that any fuel stocks present at the time were sufficiently well dispersed to avoid impacts. It is more likely that the observed fuel had been moved in the seven

⁴⁸IGNF_C1714-0021_1947_F1714-1815_0222 showing interpretation of bomb craters for 2 Group raid of 19/20 July and 143 Wing raid of 25 July, 1944, and craters located by archaeological survey.

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days between the SAS intelligence reports and 25 July. If so, then this would emphasise the short shelf-life of intelligence reports of targets sited outside of fixed installations.

Clearly, while analysis of the landscape evidence has much to contribute to the history of SAS operations, it also adds to the inventory of sites that link to and commemorate SAS activities in the Normandy campaign.

Discussion

The mechanics of the employment of the intelligence supplied by Haft 702 is a complex subject. The time between intelligence and targets arriving at SHAEF from 21st Army Group and it being acted upon depended on several factors. Procedures that were agreed by command prior to the invasion proved to be too slow and cumbersome to work effectively. For example, the initial plan had been to pass the intelligence gathered back to the Theatre Intelligence Section to evaluate the targets before priorities were allocated for attack.⁴⁹

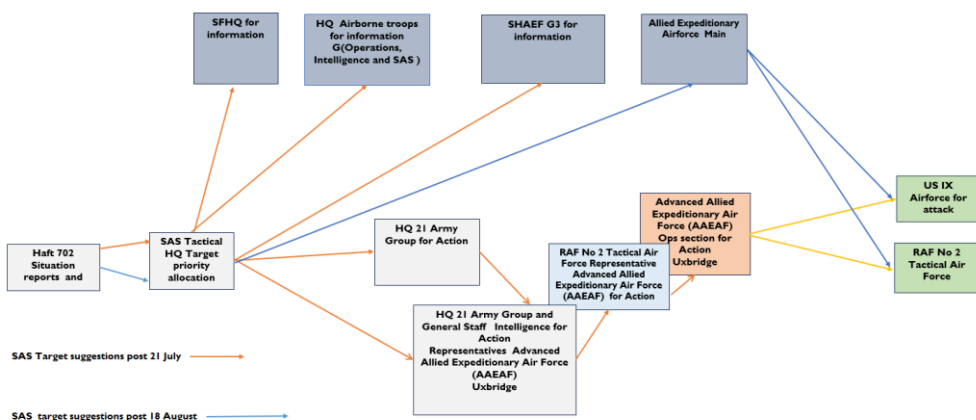


Figure 10: Theoretical Procedure for Handling SAS suggested targets post 21 July 1944.

As the campaign progressed handling procedures developed so that by 21 July it was agreed that HQ SAS were to pass potential targets direct to 21st Army Group and its two representatives in Uxbridge, as opposed to sending its request first to HQ Airborne troops who would then in turn forward to 21st Army Group and then to

⁴⁹TNA Air 20/8941,'SAS and SOE Targets and Operations'. Note: This file is incomplete, with minute pages and entries retained by the Ministry of Defence.

the advanced element of the Allied Expeditionary Airforce (AEAF; Figure 10).⁵⁰ This sped up the time between a target's submission and its attack. It was not until 18 August that AEAF 'Advanced' at Uxbridge were advised by the 'Main' element of the AEAF that the SAS were to send their urgent requests directly into AEAF 'Main' so that they could be 'filtered' and sent to the relevant tactical Air Force (Figure 10).⁵¹

A significant point to be made here is that Command at SHAEF recognised that away from the immediate battlefield area there was a gap in Human Intelligence (HUMINT) being supplied notwithstanding the data being supplied by sources such as the Sussex teams.⁵² To the south and east of the front intelligence was being supplied by de Baissac, Haft 702 and various units of the Resistance such as the Indou group.⁵³ The Americans on the western side of the battlefield needed to augment their existing HUMINT on enemy troop movements.⁵⁴ To provide this intelligence a British SOE operation codenamed Helmsman under Major Jack Beresford Hayes was parachuted into France on 10 July and was met by de Baissac. Helmsman recruited 'trusted' members of the French population to make their way to the front, gathering information as they went to provide tactical intelligence to the American forces. No less than thirty one locally recruited agents made the journey and sixteen static agents were positioned to give intelligence to the Americans as they were liberated.⁵⁵

Between 8 July and 11 August Haft 702 relayed around one hundred and twenty four messages, thirty-two were earmarked as targets by the SAS and thirty one can be attributed to specific points on the map; of these fourteen were attacked. The majority of these were fuel and ammunition sites (Tables 1 and 3), although this figure is likely to be conservative. A further fifty four reports on wider tactical intelligence were provided. As to how accurate some of the reports were must be questioned, such as the claim that some eight SS Divisions were present in the two forests, see Table 1; perhaps this was a typo or an exaggeration by local sources gathering information.

⁵⁰TNA WO 219/2414, 'SAS Suggested targets for bombing' Letter from HQ Airborne Troops - Commander SAS Troops dated 21 July 1944.

⁵¹TNA Air 20/8941, 'SAS and SOE Targets and Operations'.

⁵²Sussex teams were two man British and American teams dropped into France to gather tactical information and relay it back to London by radio. Winslow, D. R. (2016). Operation Sussex: your worst enemy is your ally. *Intelligence and National Security*, 32(2), 208–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2016.1248588>.

⁵³TNA Air 20/894, 'France and Low Countries CODE 55/2/3: SOE and SAS targets and operations'. & Fondation de la France Libre. <https://www.france-libre.net/>

⁵⁴Foot. *SOE IN FRANCE*, p.359.

⁵⁵TNA HS9/681/1, 'Personnel file of J.B. Hayes'.

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Initially, radio reports to SAS HQ were objective in content; however, by July 25 and 27, questions were being raised regarding bombing accuracy, observing 'extremely bad bombing on many targets'. In one report, after witnessing a lacklustre attack, Blackman went as far as to voice a view as to the 'lack of care and determination' of aircrew attacking.⁵⁶ The resulting exchanges between Allied Expeditionary Air Force Headquarters and HQ Airborne troops were handled with delicacy, not wishing to criticise the efforts of either the operation on the ground or the aircrew attacking targets.⁵⁷ Even now after eighty years have passed some residents still recall occasions when the Allies missed the target, for example the inaccurate bombing of Mayenne where 'Haft' reported between three and five hundred civilian fatalities.⁵⁸ A recurring theme during the operation was that when calling in targets, Blackman insisted on making the positions clear to avoid civilian casualties.

Overall, Haft 702 was operational at a key period of the Normandy campaign. By 5 August, the Americans were in the Avranches area (Figure 6, and Table 4). Between 5 August to the termination of the operation on 11 August as the front became more fluid, the nature of Haft 702 Tactical intelligence changed drastically. Before Cobra most targets concentrated on logistics targets with fewer being related to movements, with the battlefield becoming fluid this trend reversed.

The use of Haft 702 party to gather intelligence and assist with the 'instruction and advise to the local Resistance' forces without engaging the enemy appears unique in the Normandy campaign. However, the role played by Anderson with Haft 702 did allow the potential for some offensive activity.⁵⁹ When considered against other operations behind the enemy front line such as 'SAS Operations' Bulbasket and Gain, which were attacking and harassing targets between one hundred and thirty and three hundred kilometres southwest of Paris, the role played by the main party of Haft 702 had more similarities to a Jedburgh operation than that of a contemporary SAS deployment.

The other SAS operation in lower Normandy at this time was Defoe which took place between 19 July – 23 August. Defoe's aim was similar to that of Haft 702, but its

⁵⁶TNA Air 20/8946, 'Operation, France the Low Countries: SAS operations: progress reports and returns'.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Perso comment M. Gallienne L. 2nd Generation Mayenne resident.

⁵⁹TNA WO 218/114, 'H.Q. S.A.S. Tps, War Office: Special Services War Diaries, Second World War. Special Services Units H.Q. S.A.S. Tps', Operating Instruction No 27 Ref HQ/SAS Tps/TSB/5G.H.Q. S.A.S. Tps. No date. And TNA WO/373/50/475 'Recommendation for Award for Blackman, Michael D'Arcy Rank Temporary Captain'. Blackman. Author comment. Blackman appears to have been using his initiative here.

success depended upon its ability to infiltrate through the front line in jeeps to establish itself in positions to transmit target information. It proved to be ill-conceived in its planning and its implementation. On arrival at its operating base, British Second Army HQ, they discovered the officer who had requested their presence had left. Subsequent operations attempted to penetrate the German lines facing the British and Americans to supply tactical intelligence but the results were mixed due to 'minefields, the confined countryside, and the concentrated presence of German troops.'⁶⁰ The SAS war diary for July judged such operations were 'not sufficiently practicable to justify the employment of SAS specialist troops.'⁶¹ A Defoe unit did contact de Baissac and was told that no useful intelligence could be gathered. The likely reason for this assessment is that a roaming unit in jeeps would likely have attracted unwelcome attention from German forces and compromised both his work and that of Haft 702.

Clearly Haft 702 operations fitted into the space nearer to the frontline and not so far back in the enemy rear where jeep operations were not suited.

Shortly after the Normandy campaign, Browning, the Commanding Officer of British Airborne Forces, wrote to 21st Army Group observing that the collation between SAS targets submitted in relation to those that had been attacked had not been done.⁶² Available resources at the time likely contributed to the reasons why this was never undertaken. Future research will focus on the impact of the SAS on the employment of tactical airpower during the Normandy Campaign. and will seek to answer this question.

Conclusions

Haft 702 played a significant role in augmenting tactical target intelligence from behind the enemy lines during a key period of the Normandy campaign. The emerging picture here is enhancing our wider understanding of the use of intelligence in tactical bombing during the period.⁶³

⁶⁰TNA WO 218/114, 'War Office: Special Services War Diaries, Second World War. Special Services Units H.Q. S.A.S. Tps'.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²OPERATIONS, France and Low Countries CODE 55/2/3. SAS operations: progress reports and returns. Letter to 21st Army Group, 8 September 1944 TNA AIR 20/8946.

⁶³Capps-Tunwell et al, 'An Evaluation of Allied Intelligence in the Tactical Bombing of German supply during the Normandy Campaign. 1944', *Journal of Military History*, Vol 84, No 3 2020; Passmore and Capps-Tunwell, '143 Wing (RCAF) Typhoons Over Normandy: Some Operational, Geographical and Archaeological Perspectives', *Canadian Military History*, Vol 33, No 1 2024.

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The operation was no doubt cost effective, fourteen targets highlighted by Haft 702 were attacked and the actual total was likely to have been much higher. In addition, valuable intelligence was supplied on German troop movements, morale, and locations of road improvement, the operation of railway lines and the construction of airfields. When taken as part of the wider context of intelligence gathering during the Normandy campaign, its contribution needs to be considered as a valuable tile in the overall intelligence gathering mosaic. There can be no doubt that the information being fed into the intelligence picture contributed to the general planning of aerial Armed Reconnaissance operations behind the lines but it was not the sole source of intelligence being fed back. Further study is ongoing to better understand the use of SAS intelligence during the campaign. Haft 702 clearly does not fit into the generally accepted narrative of the wartime SAS which highlighted fast hit-and-run tactics to undermine the enemy's ability to operate and damage morale.