

REVIEWS

ARB Linderman, *Rediscovering Irregular Warfare: Colin Gubbins and the Origins of Britain's Special Operations Executive*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. 272pp. ISBN: 978-8061-5167-0. Hardback. £20.73.

Much has been written recently on something called 'hybrid warfare'. While there is no one agreed definition, the current storm of books, articles and blog pieces claiming authority on the subject concur broadly that it is a novel, 21st-century concept centring on using local malcontents, organised covertly by secret services into plausibly deniable paramilitary formations supported by agents and special forces, propaganda and diplomatic pressure to achieve strategic aims in lieu of overt military force.

The authors of such pieces really could do with reading some more history, perhaps starting with *Rediscovering Irregular Warfare*, as these methods are not only far from new, but, ironically, have been forgotten and then rediscovered at least once before. ARB Linderman's impressive new book describes such a process in painstaking detail, its main – and very important – contribution to knowledge being in its tracing of the evolution of Special Operations Executive's (SOE) concepts and doctrine for paramilitary support of resistance movements in Axis-occupied territory in the Second World War, when it was adopted by the British government as one of the few means of striking back at Nazi Germany, post-Dunkirk. The front cover of the book is dominated by a much-reprinted portrait photo of SOE's most famous Director, Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, and this is entirely appropriate, as Gubbins was the main driving force behind this process and the book is as much about the evolution of his ideas as it is on the doctrine he promulgated.

Linderman traces this process in meticulous detail, leaning heavily on Gubbins' own papers in the Imperial War Museum, others in the British and US national archives, official histories and manuals as well as a very long list of primary and secondary works. His key argument is that what Gubbins promulgated through his most famous authored works, *The Art of Guerrilla Warfare* and *The Partisan Leader's Handbook*, has no one single source, but is a synthesis of Gubbins' own operational experience dealing with guerrillas in Russia and Ireland (something hinted at in previous works, but not covered in detail), his observations of the rise of the Indian National Congress and Soviet attempts at subversion during his seven years in India from 1923 to 1930, his readings on recent insurgencies (the Boers, Lawrence and von Lettow-Vorbeck seem to have been particularly influential) and on contemporary guerrilla operations in Spain and China and Nazi subversion in Austria and the Sudetenland.

The result was not a formula for 'revolutionary war', but for partisan operations as part of a wider strategy combining overt with covert force. The difference becomes particularly clear in a short passage comparing Gubbins' theories of guerrilla warfare with Mao's. Gubbins certainly knew about what was happening in China in the 1930s, but there is no evidence of any influence upon him doctrinally: Gubbins loathed communism and was concerned with the practicalities of guerrilla warfare, while Mao sought an all-encompassing theory of 'people's war' rooted in the agitated masses, and while Mao's aim was eventually to escalate the guerrilla struggle to conventional warfare, Gubbins always believed that being too big and too organised was a liability for resistance forces, who could never take on the Wehrmacht or Imperial Japanese Army on even terms. Instead, he envisaged small bands of saboteurs, raiders and ambushers recruited from the local population with Allied personnel attached in to provide logistical and staff support, liaison with friendly regular forces in theatre and, although not stated explicitly, a degree of conformity with Allied strategic aims. There is much interesting material on how these personnel were organised and trained (William Fairbairn at last gets his fair measure of credit, although Michael Calvert perhaps deserves more) and how lessons were passed on, particularly to the Americans, strong evidence being presented showing just how much Wild Bill Donovan based the Office of Strategic Services on SOE and just how much SOE contributed to OSS training at 'Camp X'.

While there are some passages which can be questioned – Linderman takes issue with the idea that SOE was 'Churchill's brainchild' though this has long since been dispersed, at least in the academic literature, and very few serious authorities now pay attention to John Keegan's opinions on anything – this is, on the whole, a serious contribution to the literature on the history of SOE and covert military operations, and should be in the core reading of any courses teaching these things as well, perhaps, as being recommended to anyone claiming to see new forms of war where perhaps there aren't any.

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James Lyon, *Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914: The Outbreak of the Great War*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Notes, Bibliography, Index. 328pp. ISBN 978-1-4725-8004-7. Paperback. £19.99.

For all that the path to war during the July Crisis seemed – on the face of things – to turn on whether the Kingdom of Serbia would accept every demand in Austria-