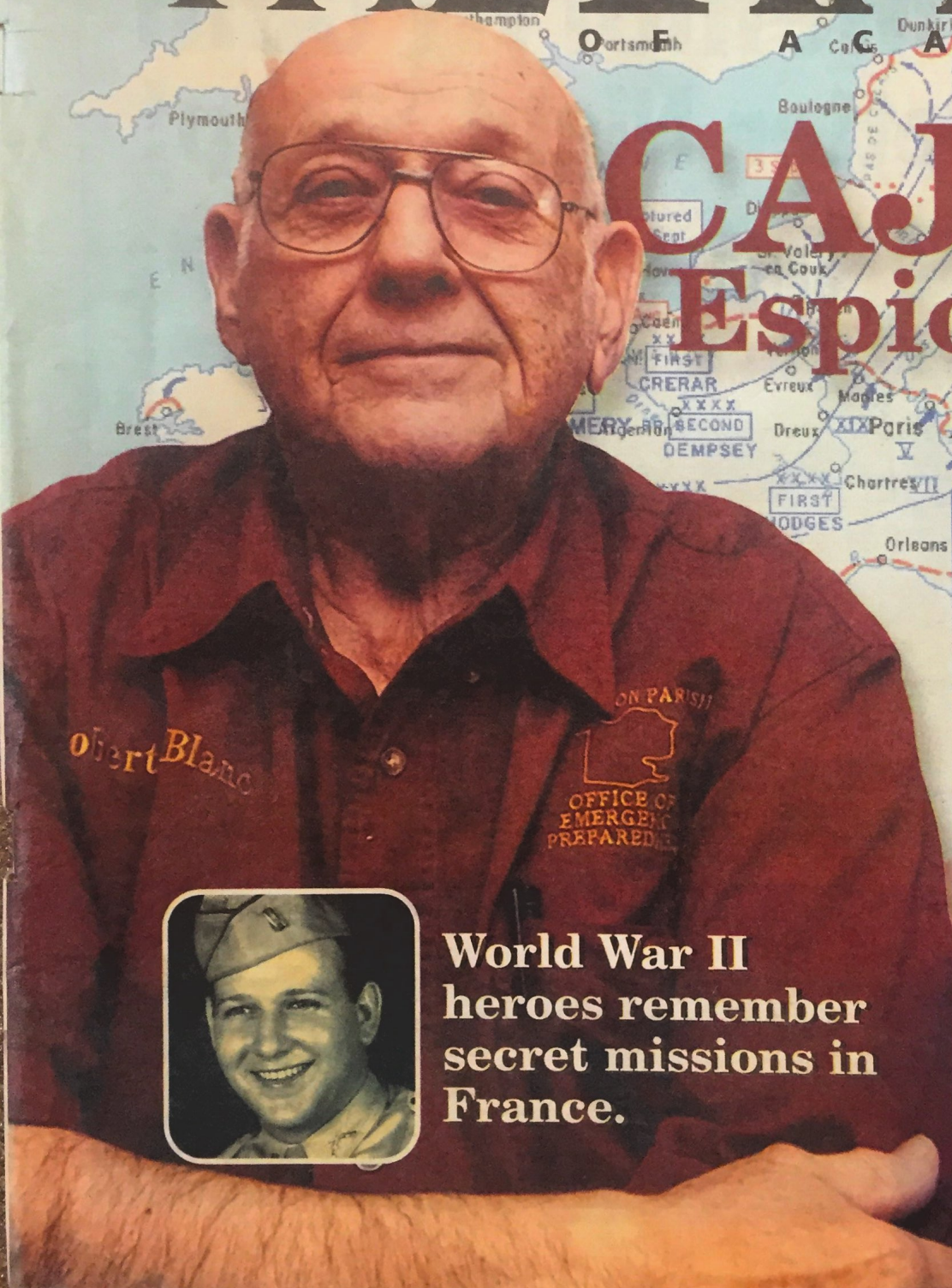


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MARCH 16, 2005 / VOL. 25, NO. 27  
www.timesofacadiana.com

# THE TIMES

## CAJUN Espionage



**World War II  
heroes remember  
secret missions in  
France.**

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# Cajun Espionage

World War II  
heroes remember  
secret missions  
in France.

By Jason P. Theriot  
Contributing Writer



Robert LeBlanc (left) celebrates with fellow soldiers during World War II.

As the invasion of Normandy unfolded in June 1944, thousands of Free French Resistance fighters emerged from their hideouts to sabotage German communications and transportation. The Maquis, as they were known, played a key role in liberating France and became the muscle behind Allied Special Forces operations and intelligence gathering.

During the campaign in France, U.S. French-speaking Special Forces operatives worked closely with the Maquis to undermine the enemy through the secret art of espionage. Their exploits became legendary and their contributions were immeasurable. Among this special band of soldiers were a handful of young men of Acadian descent, whose Cajun-French upbringing made them ideal undercover operatives in America's first clandestine intelligence agency.



Roy Armentor (second from right) poses with civilians and other French-speaking soldiers in 1944 in France.

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Robert LeBlanc sits in his Abberville home near some of his military memorabilia.



After Robert LeBlanc returned home from the war, his mother made his daughter's christening gown out of a parachute he salvaged in France.



Robert LeBlanc (left) meets with other French-speaking soldiers in 1945.

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Col. Bill Donovan, a World War I hero, created the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner to the CIA, in 1940. By 1944, the OSS had grown into a powerful subversive arm of the American military, which specialized in unorthodox warfare, including sabotage, counter-intelligence and guerilla activities behind enemy lines.

During the first years of the war, the OSS staff combed the ranks in search of qualified individuals with the unique characteristics and talents required for special operations in combat. Those select few who were chosen for OSS training had to agree to volunteer for hazardous duty. Above all, these soldiers had to be fluent in a foreign language. When it came time to select French-speaking agents for the invasion and liberation of France, the OSS recruited a handful of Cajun soldiers who were born and raised in the heart of the Acadian settlement along the bayous of south Louisiana. In no other aspect of World War II did such a small group of Cajun soldiers contribute so much to its outcome.

**Robert LeBlanc**, a Cajun from Abberville, was recruited by the OSS in the fall of 1943. When he was first approached, he says they asked, "Do you want to volunteer for a strenuous mission. We can't tell you much about it, but we need your knowledge. And you must be willing to parachute."

LeBlanc had been through ROTC at Louisiana State

University and basic training, but nothing had prepared him for this. He says the decision was pretty simple.

"Well," he thought at the time, "I'm at the mercy of Uncle Sam, so whatever I can do to help, I will."

At the OSS headquarters in Washington, D.C., LeBlanc went through several months of extensive espionage training.

"We were trained in weapons and demolitions ... They taught us Morse code, ambushing techniques and sabotage," he says.

In addition, French officers taught the agents how to "master the local customs and mannerisms and patois of the areas" where they were to be deployed.

"For instance, the Frenchman does not eat his gumbo like we do," LeBlanc explains. "He doesn't lift the far side of his plate toward himself; he lifts the near side of his plate up and scoops his soup outwards."

According to LeBlanc, small details were important. "Frenchmen don't smoke cigarettes like Americans. A Frenchman will take a toothpick and smoke it down to the end. If you smoked, your hands and your teeth should be brown," he says.

Five weeks after the invasion of Normandy began,

### Bayou Cajun Veterans Reunion

Jason P. Theriot will speak on the contributions Cajun OSS soldiers made to World War II at 2 p.m. March 19 at the Duchamp Opera House, 200 South Main St., St. Martinville. Cajun World War II veterans, including Robert LeBlanc and Roy Armentor are expected to attend. The event is part of the Acadian Memorial Festival, a 250th anniversary commemoration of the Acadian deportation. For more information, call 394-6604.



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Roy Armentor keeps many of his photos, medals and awards from his military service in a scrapbook in his New Iberia home.

LeBlanc was sent to France to "to coordinate activities with the French underground."

Almost immediately, LeBlanc, who later moved up the ranks to brigadier general, encountered friendly locals who were eager to share their Calvados (cognac) and Brie cheese with a French-speaking GI.

Following the breakout at St. Lô, LeBlanc was rushed to the Brittany Peninsula to make contact with the Maquis and to infiltrate the German-occupied area. With the Maquis leading the way, Lt. LeBlanc aided the famous 4th Armored Division — "Patton's Best" — in destroying the enemy forces and liberating the land of the Acadian forefathers.

"The first agent who I came in contact with was a priest," he says.

After a phony confessional, the priest revealed that he had killed a German soldier who came looking for water. As the German soldier bent down to get a drink from the well, the priest grabbed his helmet, hit him over the head with it and killed him.

To encourage the troubled priest, who "had done some good underground work for us," LeBlanc says he assured him, "Don't worry about that Father, the Pope will forgive you."

From Brittany to Orleans to Nancy, LeBlanc provided crucial contacts with Resistance forces, which in turn opened the path for Patton's Army across France.

"I'd cross over the line on foot with a French underground guide and conduct my mission," LeBlanc says. "We had a few problems along the way, but we took care of the problems."

According to LeBlanc, more than 50 percent of Allied intelligence in France came from OSS operations with the French underground.

"Many lives were saved because of them," LeBlanc remarks.



ROY ARMENTOR

**Roy Armentor** was another Cajun who volunteered for the dangerous duty of the OSS.

"None of us had any idea what we were getting into," Armentor says.

Armentor trained for OSS reconnaissance operations and became proficient in demolitions, knife-

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SAM BROUSSARD

## In Memoriam

Sam Broussard, who passed away in 1995, was an intelligence officer with the OSS in France and Belgium. He came from a long line of "reared, honest, hard working" Acadians who settled in Breaux Bridge.

"Apparently, they [Broussards] came down the Bayou Teche, and they must have been good lovers, because they really populated the area with Broussards," Broussard joked in an interview before his death.

The "hard living" farm life and 12 years of National Guard service had prepared this legendary Cajun for his conspicuous role with the French underground.

"My job was to interrogate the French people behind enemy lines to find out about the German forces. We supplied the underground with weapons and explosives. I organized bands of Maquis and attached them to various American infantry units as our forces moved into occupied areas where the French were experts at infiltration," Broussard explained.

According to Broussard, the Maquis "were poorly clothed and poorly armed, but they wanted to fight. It was just unbelievable how much damage they did to the Germans."

Broussard sat in on a briefing with General Eisenhower's staff on the heels of the invasion, and he landed at Omaha beach on D-Day with the famous 1st Infantry Division. Broussard made headlines back home hunting down enemy snipers and captured a German general.

Broussard's efforts helped change the outcome of the war.

As commander of resistance forces, Le Commandant Broussard led attacks against the enemy and orchestrated the surrender of 150 Germans defending a hilltop.

Broussard's accomplishments in the OSS are the stuff of legend.

— Jason P. Theriot





Robert LeBlanc cherishes the numerous medals he received for his military service.



Robert LeBlanc (top left) with fellow JET officers in Washington, D.C.



Robert LeBlanc in 1944.



Roy Armentor (left) stands with a group of trainees during training in 1943 in Washington, D.C.

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fighting and hand-to-hand combat.

"We even learned Kung Fu," he remembers.

Armentor was part of a 15-man operational group, which was codenamed "Peg," stationed in North Africa.

"All of us had the same training, the same skills, same weapons, same specialty — and we all spoke French," he explains.

The Algiers base became the epicenter of American, French and British Special Forces operations in the Mediterranean. The desert provided ideal parachute training, and maneuvers in the Atlas Mountain taught these commandos how to live off the land.

"A coonie is hard to beat when he gets on the outskirts. He knows what to steal and what to kill to survive," Armentor says.

The recon teams were masters at sabotage and demolitions.

"We were trained to cut rails for trains, blow up bridges and attack an enemy column. It was a hit and run deal. And we did all this in conjunction with the

French underground," Armentor says.

On August 12, 1944, Armentor's group parachuted into southern France "to cover the German escape route into Spain and to destroy enemy communications and supply lines."

"Our job was different from a regular GI," Armentor remembers. "We lived in danger. There was danger around you all the time. Our mission was to stop the Germans from getting into Spain."

For 10 days, the OSS saboteurs and their small army of Maquis destroyed bridges, railroads and causeways. They attacked, killed and captured hundreds of enemy soldiers throughout these raids, effectively sealing off a German retreat.

During those agonizing days in combat, Armentor performed his mission with excruciating pain in his back, which he had injured on the initial jump. He managed to sneak into a hospital in Toulouse, France, but not without being detected by his enemy counterparts.

Armentor recalls how the French locals saved his life from the Nazi spies.

"The first night I was there, the French had shot some German agents who were trying to get to me. They were on our tail all the time because we were with the French underground, and they knew where I was. If those Germans had gotten into that hospital, that would have been it for me. I would not have come back. They would have done it right there in the room," he says.

A resident of New Iberia, Armentor remembers being ridiculed for speaking French in school. But he says he found retribution in the ranks of the OSS.

"We were looked down on because we were from Louisiana. They thought they were better than us. But I was always proud of being able to speak French," he says. ☞

Jason P. Theriot is the author of "To Honor our Veterans," an oral history of World War II veterans from the bayou country. To comment on this article, e-mail [timesedit@timesof-acadiana.com](mailto:timesedit@timesof-acadiana.com). Read the story online on our Web site [www.timesofacadiana.com](http://www.timesofacadiana.com).