Geographers at War: the Office of Strategic Services mapping program

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Western Association of Map Libraries
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“Geography as environment and terrain, as well as spatial distance, is not some neutral plane on which war unfolds but enters into its bones and sinews, directing its form and content, determining whether it occurs at all. Knowledge of geography and concomitant expertise in the use of spatial technologies are therefore vital to the performance of war.

-- Trevor J. Barnes
July 11, 1941: Presidential Order establishes the U.S. Office of the Co-ordinator of Information

June 13, 1942: Reorganized as the Office of Strategic Services

September 20, 1945: The Office of Strategic Services is dissolved by President Truman (effective October 1, 1945)

Research and Analysis branch moves to the State Department
Organization of the OSS

Director
William J. Donovan

Deputy Director of Intelligence
John Magruder

Research & Analysis
William L. Langer

Projects Committee
Richard Hartshorne

Regional Divisions

Maps Division
Arthur H. Robinson
Organization of the Map Division

Chief
Arthur Robinson

Special Photography

Cartography

Map Information

Topographic Models

Color Photography

Research

Compilation

Construction

Map Research

Map Collection

Terrain and Compilation

Map Construction
Organization of the Regional Divisions

Projects Committee

Europe-Asia
USSR
Far East
Latin America
Division Example

- Far East
  - Political
  - Geographic
    - Physical Geography
    - Transport and Communications
    - Port and Urban Studies
  - Economic
    - Industrial Resources
    - Military Supplies
    - Civilian Economics
    - China
    - Japan
    - Korea, Manchuria
    - Southern Asia
    - Pacific Islands
    - East Asia
    - Civilian Economics
By the Numbers

- 224 geographers in Washington – summer 1943
  - Office of Strategic Services – 77 (38 in the map division)
  - War Department – 55
    - Primarily the Army, including the Army Map Service
  - US Board on Geographical Names - 17
  - Office of Economic Warfare - 12
  - Department of State – 12
- 45 of whom were trained at the University of Chicago, 35 trained at Clark University
Map Division

- Division Chief: Arthur H. Robinson (Ohio State University)
  - Changed his focus from population studies to cartography after the end of the war
Map Division

- 38 geographers, no trained cartographers
- 5,752 unique maps released in reports (approximately 3,000) and individually
- Three goals
  - Procurement and maintenance of a collection containing comprehensive intelligence and reference foreign map coverage or records of its availability.
  - Preparation of map research and analysis studies pointed toward the evaluation and use of maps in the field of intelligence.
  - Preparation of the maps required in the fulfilment of the intelligence functions of the Branch.
Output over Four Years

- Answered 50,000 requests for map information
- Distributed over 5 million intelligence maps
- Provided the cartography for 4 Roosevelt-Churchill summits
- Produced 8,200 maps*
  - * Not according to John Anderson!
Why?
What?

Ports and Transportation
What?
Terrain
What?
Manufacturing and Supplies
What?
Urban Studies

INDIA
DISTRIBUTION
OF
MOHAMMEDANS

PER CENT OF POPULATION
5 TO 10
10 TO 20
20 TO 50
50 TO 75
75 AND ABOVE

MAP NO 7399 SEPT 10 1942
DRAWN IN THE GEOGRAPHY DIVISION, O.S.S.
Office of Strategic Services Maps

Limit your search

| Date  | Topic | Region |

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World War II map production by the Office of Strategic Services

The Office of Strategic Services was formed in June 1942 in response to the entry of the United States into World War II. This was a time of codification of efforts around the collection of intelligence information in order to more effectively understand and respond to the events of the day. This effort brought together a number of experts, many from academia including a large number of cartographers. These cartographers created maps on demand that either stood alone or were part of reports. The maps were eventually distributed through the Federal Depository Library Program to libraries throughout the United States. The best estimate is that 5,752 unique maps were produced of which Stanford Libraries holds over 700.

https://exhibits.stanford.edu/oss-maps