

The story of Odette Sansom, Jerrard Tickell 1949

Clothbound edition

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Review

This forceful book tells the whole story of Odette Sansom's experiences as a British agent in France during Second World War.

Starting with her early life in France, the biographer goes on to tell of her application to the War Office for a useful job. She was interviewed by a Captain in West End Hotel who suggested that she might care to return to France - to help with the enormous task of arming the Resistance, sabotage of railways, industrial plant, bridges and other objectives. She thought it over and finally accepted.

Intensive training followed including physical training, parachute jumping, morse and self-defense. Odette's run was short but lively. After her infiltration into Southern France, exhausting and hazardous work followed. The Nazis alarmed at the increasing success that saboteurs were enjoying, intensified their intelligence work significantly and succeeded to arrest Odette and her Commanding Officer already after six months.

One day Odette was approached by an officer of the German counter-espionage unit. "Germany is split," he said, "On one side stands Adolf Hitler and his blood thirsty satellites, on the other stand the High Command of the German Army." He said that with Hitler out of the way, Germany could sue for a honourable peace with the West, and he proposed that she should help him to get in touch with the British War Office. But War Office instructions told her to avoid further contact and to leave the area immediately: "You are in danger", they said. It was true that she was in danger, for within a few days she was arrested by the same officer and her long ordeal by prison and concentration camp began.

First she was taken to the Fresnes prison in Paris, where she was tortured horribly; tried for espionage and sentenced to death. But the Gestapo did not kill her. After a year in Fresnes she was moved to the infamous German concentration camp for women at Ravensbrück. Here she was buried for three months in total darkness, and witnessed the mass execution of her fellow-prisoners which occurred when, in the spring of 1945, the S.S. saw that their game was up. To save his skin the camp commandant took her with him to the advancing Americans.