

A Book Review  
Of Michael F. Dilley's  
**Behind the Lines: A Critical Survey of Special Operations in World War II**  
By Lance Zedric

Behind the Lines: A Critical Survey of Special Operations in World War II (Casemate, 2013), illustrates why Michael F. Dilley has been among the pantheon of America's special operations authors for over 20 years. In his latest work, he masterfully weaves the myriad nuts and bolts of 23 selected WWII spec ops missions—rich in historical content and military significance—into the contextual fabric of the time and deftly examines the success of each mission based on criteria established by top military writers.

The book is no staid retelling of history nor boring academic treatise. There's no falling out or dozing off with Behind the Lines. In a fast-paced, crisp writing style, Dilley clearly illustrates the imagination, flexibility, and physical and emotional courage common in the special operations forces of the time and examines how the mistakes made, successes achieved, and lessons learned apply today.

Painstakingly researched, meticulously documented, and always readable, Dilley offers incisive, straightforward, and page-turning analysis that informs, educates, and entertains. Rather than a taking provincial view, he serves up a tasty, international sampler of special ops missions from Axis and Allied forces alike. Readers will be enthralled with the daring rescue of Benito Mussolini by Germany's Otto Skorzeny; take pride in the obscure, but significant contributions of the all-black 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion; or experience the bitterness of loss by the British SOE in Operation Rimau just to name a few. Whether it's sneaking into a NYC apartment with a secret team from the Office of Naval Intelligence to crack a Nazi spy ring, or rowing ashore in a rubber boat with a team of Alamo Scouts on a harrowing mission to an enemy held island in the Pacific, Dilley provides the perfect blend of facts, figures, and fun.

The author, a long-time champion of the famed Alamo Scouts, devotes three chapters to the unit—more than to any other single organization. The first chapter examines the establishment and operation of the Alamo Scouts Training Center. Subsequent chapters recount an attempted rescue mission on Pegun Island; and the famous joint operation with Army Rangers and Filipino Guerrillas where they liberated over 500 Allied prisoners from the Cabanatuan POW camp in late January 1945. Dilley punctuated the section on the Alamo Scouts with the inclusion of eight glossy photos and an esteemed place on the back cover of the dust jacket.

The history of special operations forces is chock-full of amazing stories—each unique and distinct. But at their core exist a few basic commonalities—namely, the ilk of the men who filled their ranks, the unique or special training that they received, and the hardship and danger they endured undertaking what ordinary men could not. With books like Behind the Lines, it is certain that those who dared boldly and who lived at the tip of the spear will always be remembered, and hopefully, men like Mike Dilley will be there to write about them. Read the book!

Visit Dilley's website at <http://www.michaeldilley.com>



Michael F. Dilley  
- military historian and author

