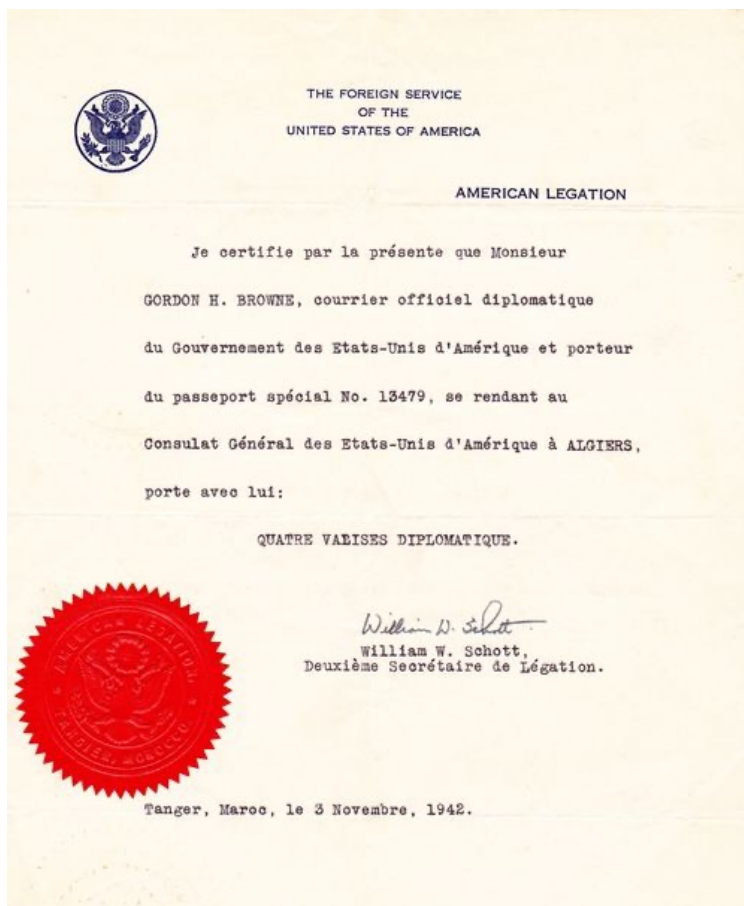


OSS Diplomatic Courier Gordon Browne's Fateful Pouch Run

Adapted from a 2012 TALIM blog by
former Resident Director Gerald Loftus

2012 marked the 70th anniversary of the creation of the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, barely six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor.



*From the Gordon Browne papers at the Tangier
American Legation (TALIM) library*

The American Legation in Tangier in 1942 was the headquarters of the first OSS foray into a major theatre of war, when it helped prepare the way for Operation Torch, the November 1942 landings in Vichy French North Africa. One of these "glorious amateurs" was Gordon Browne, who carried this innocuous looking document with him on a mission to Algeria.

Look at the date: November 3, 1942. Browne is to carry "4 diplomatic pouches" from the American Legation in Tangier to the American Consulate General in Algiers.

Only Browne didn't make it as far as Algiers. His mission was to carry "Rebecca" – code name for a radio beacon that

would guide paratroopers to a drop zone near Oran – and install it on the eve of the Operation Torch landings.

The incident is dramatically retold in [Hal Vaughan's FDR's 12 Apostles: The Spies Who Paved the Way for the Invasion of North Africa](#):

Browne warned: "For God's sake, take it easy, our cargo is delicate... The set is sealed. If it is thrown out of whack, there is nothing we can do about it. I have orders not to let it be captured intact. It is fitted with a self-destruct explosive charge which I can set off at a moment's notice."

Finally, on D-Day for Torch, November 7, when the overdue airborne operation suffered a series of disasters, Browne "dragged Rebecca a few yards into the brush, flipped a switch, ran like hell, and watched the lady blow to pieces." For his role in this piece of Operation Torch, Gordon Browne of Tangier was awarded the Medal of Merit. The citation reads:

... for exceptionally meritorious acts on the night of November 7-8, 1942. Gordon Browne, a civilian... volunteered to render this service for the landing of the American paratroop force near Tafaraoui, Algeria. Realizing the consequences if apprehended, disregarding his own safety, he remained with the instrument for four hours under fire, and then upon completion of his mission, assisted in its disposal. The heroic and fearless loyalty of Gordon Browne, who voluntarily jeopardized his life for the success of his country's cause in battle, reflects great credit and glory upon the whole nation.

Not bad for a glorious amateur. His later award of a Silver Star notes his profession as "anthropologist." After postwar service in the CIA, Gordon Browne settled in Tangier, where he lived his last years.