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BOOKS AND WRITERS

By GEORGE SLOCOMBE

Men Against Myths

THE human adventure of Otto Skorzeny, the man who rescued Mussolini from an almost impregnable mountain in the Apennines, kidnaped the son and heir of Adm. Horthy and was ordered by Hitler to attempt other difficult or hopeless enterprises, is one of the most fascinating stories of the second World War. It did not seem quite so thrilling when I read Skorzeny's own modest account of his exploits—an account which, published in the Paris "Figaro," and cleverly exploited by "Humanité" with a photograph showing the author walking down the Champs-Élysées, led to a Communist riot outside the "Figaro" offices.

But Skorzeny minimized or was silent over the opposition from the general staffs with which he had had to contend. His story needed amplification by another hand. That amplification has now been expertly supplied by Charles Foley, in "Commando Extraordinary" (Longmans, London, 15s). Maj. Gen. Robert Laycock, who was first the deputy and then the successor to Lord Mountbatten, the first chief of the British Commando force, called Combined Operations, contributes a preface in which he insists on the ominous, but at the same time reassuring, significance (if the lesson of commando operations is learned in time) of this book.

For the lesson of the Skorzeny adventure and of the equal exploits of the unpublished British Special Air Service, led by Colonel David Stirling, is that resolute and imaginative men can fight successfully against myths—the myth of military tradition of a highly technical and all-intelligent bu-

reaucracy, of the overwhelming superiority of big battalions and mechanized forces.

Skorzeny, as Charles Foley shows, learned in the German campaign in Russia what improvised weapons,

Old Bird Book

Brings £2,100

LONDON, Oct. 19 (A.P.).—

The French government today paid £2,100 for a 270-year-old book of bird illustrations by the French artist Aubriet.

The book, put up for sale by Baroness Lucas and Dingwall, contains 46 watercolor drawings of birds made on vellum by Aubriet in 1684.

Individual resource, and small, well-trained groups can do against immensely superior arms and military technique. Two years later, launched into the last German offensive in the Ardennes, he threw confusion into the Allied camp without having had an opportunity to carry out Hitler's orders to destroy the Meuse bridges. His mere presence on the battlefield, revealed by a captured German, was enough to cause an 8 p.m. curfew in Paris and confine a raging Supreme Commander to his heavily guarded headquarters at Versailles.

Gen. Laycock in his preface points out that the opening phase of another world conflict may be decisive, if nuclear weapons are used in a surprise attack, but that "small numbers of picked men may find ways of introducing atomic weapons, among others, into their enemy's stronghold even in advance of the outbreak." Even when the last war was lost for Germany, Skorzeny had submitted a plan for the destruction, by commandos dispatched in long-range bombers, of the Russian oil wells at Baku. But the Germans then possessed no long-range bombers, and when he pressed for the use of a few captured Fortresses, the high command opposed him. This is a remarkable book, with a forcible and compelling argument.

Books Received

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