# WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: RESISTANCE AND SOE

# Extracts from the SOE descriptive catalogue of special devices SOE training advice on disguise

Catalogue ref: HS 7/55

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### 4. POINTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN YOUR DISGUISE.

#### a). Golden Rule.

Never come out of character. By this we mean not only from the clothes point of view but from the mental side also, E.g. if you are a workman do not wear a white collar and black tie, have clean hands and behave like an aducated man.

#### b). Clothes.

Study in every detail the clothes you are going to wear not forgetting smell items such as cut, socks, tie, handkerchiefs, etc. Different shapes and kinds of hats will alter type.

#### c). Personal Effects.

Cigarettes, type of newspaper, contents of paper, E.g. watches.

#### d). Hair.

If it should be long or short, whether it should be tidy or untidy.

#### e). Your Face.

Whether it should be dirty or clean, whether it should be shaved or unshaved, whether it should be pale or sunburnt.

## f). Teeth.

Whether they should be clean or not.

## g). Hands.

Nails, dirty or clean, and your hands white or dirty or hard worked.

## h). Feet.

Whether you wear shoes or boots, whether these should be clean or dirty.

## i). Mannerisms.

Practice until your old mannerisms (such as playing with your right ear, etc.) are forgotten and your new mannerisms have become part of you.

#### j). Walk

If you had any peculiarity in your carriage or your walk, practice until you have conquered the old ones and obtained new ones.

## k). Handwriting.

For signature or name if needed, educated or not. Whether you should sign as if you are used to signing it or whether you should handle your pen as though it were strange to you.

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#### What is this source?

The devices shown here come from the Descriptive Catalogue of Special Devices and Supplies used by the SOE. It was compiled and issued by the War Office. The advice about disguise comes from the special training programme used at SOE's training schools. Here, agents would learn how to operate in occupied countries.

These sources suggest a wide range of skills that were required to be an effective agent and the many dangers they faced.

## What's the background to this source?

From 1939 to late 1942 Germany and its allies had the upper hand in the war. During this period it was difficult for Britain and its allies to take any direct action against German forces. To tackle this problem British Prime Minister Winston Churchill set up the Special Operations Executive (SOE). SOE's job was to go into occupied countries and spread propaganda, collect information and attack important targets.

SOE had two main departments. SO1 dealt with propaganda while SO2 dealt with active operations. SO2 agents went into occupied territory to blow up railways, bridges, radio transmitters and similar devices.

## It's worth knowing that...

The catalogue contains many other devices that could be used on a mission. Agents are shown how to conceal explosives in fake logs and plaster fruit. They are shown how to hide information in soap, sponges and tubes of toothpaste. Vital equipment such as radio sets is shown camouflaged (disguised) as vacuum cleaners, portable gramophones and bundles of twigs.

Many SOE agents were not British. The majority of these had been driven out of their home countries by the German occupation. They were then recruited because they would be able to blend in easily to the country they were working in.

## What do we learn about SOE from this source?

1. What does this source show about the work of SOE agents and the dangers they faced?

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- 2. Do these sources provide any evidence that SOE took good care of its agents?
- 3. Can we learn anything from these sources about the type of people who became agents?

Use this outline to plan your poster.