
Opening Extract from...

Great Escapes

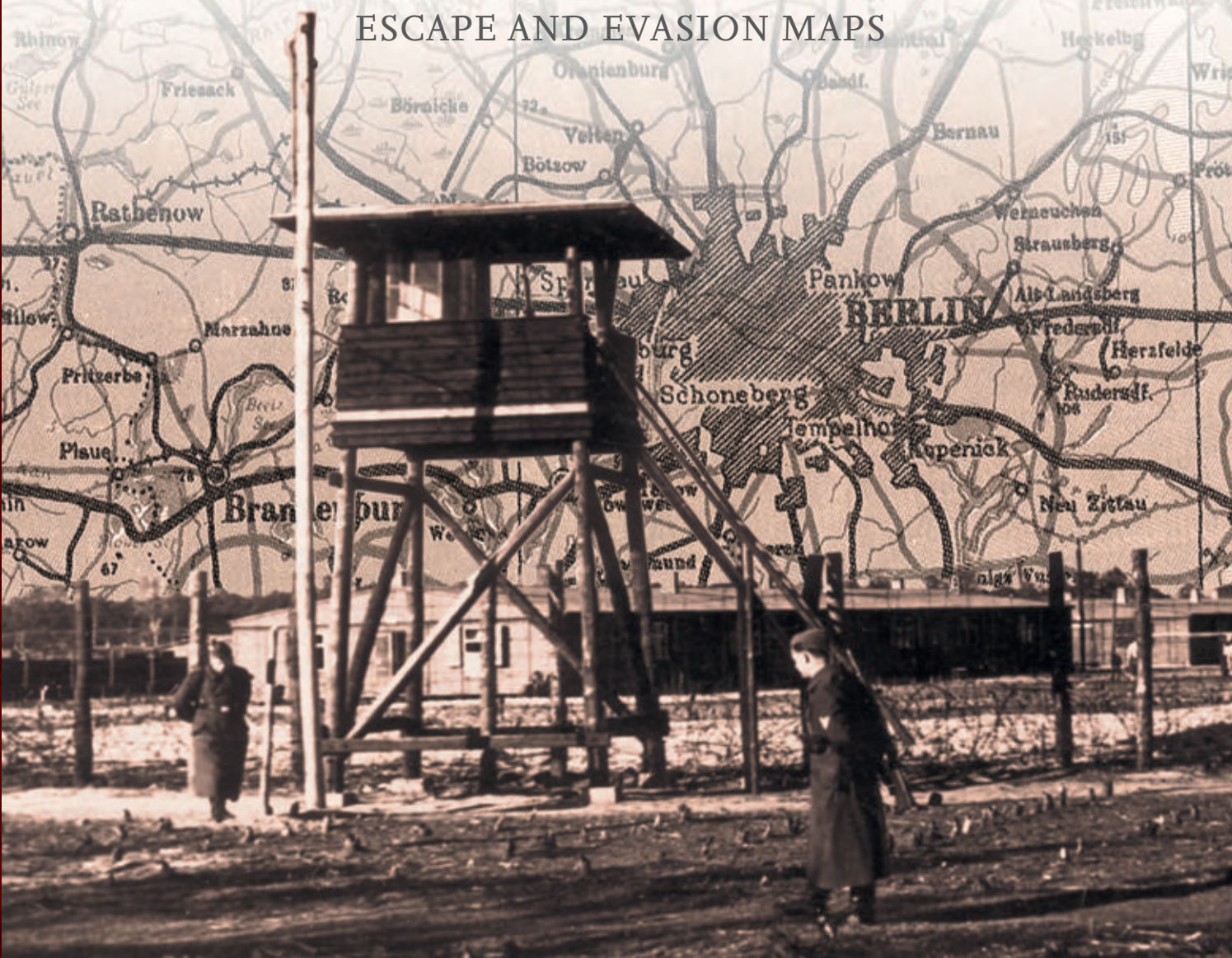
Written by Barbara A. Bond

Published by Collins

THE TIMES

GREAT ESCAPES

THE STORY OF MI9'S SECOND WORLD WAR ESCAPE AND EVASION MAPS



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BARBARA A. BOND

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My deepest thanks go to them all.

This book is dedicated to Roger, Abi and Ben, Adam and Johanna, for their love and support.

INTRODUCTION

'It is the intelligent use of geographical knowledge
that outwits the enemy and wins wars.'
(W. G. V. Balchin in *The Geographical Journal*, July 1987)

This book is the culmination of the author's personal fascination with maps and charts, and especially with military maps on silk. To be given the task, as a young researcher in the Ministry of Defence Map Library over thirty years ago, of identifying MI9's escape and evasion maps and creating an archival record set of them was a piece of serendipity. That small task ignited an interest which has never been extinguished. It was, however, only after retirement that the opportunity arose to commit to a detailed and more in-depth study of the subject: the reward was the discovery of a story of remarkable cartographic intrigue and ingenuity, and the opportunity to make this small contribution to the history of cartography in the twentieth century.

During the course of World War II, a complex and daring operation was launched by MI9, a newly formed branch of the British intelligence services, to help servicemen evade capture and, for those who were captured, to assist them in escaping from prisoner of war camps across Europe. Ingenious methods were devised to deliver escape and evasion aids to prisoners, and intricate codes were developed to communicate with the camps. In stories that often appear stranger than fiction, such materials proved critical and made many escapes possible. Maps were an integral part of this operation, with maps printed on silk and other fabrics commonly being secreted in innocent-looking items being sent to the camps, for example in playing cards, board games and gramophone records. The role of maps in this operation has often been overlooked and, because of strict instructions to service personnel at the time not to speak about the maps, the story has remained largely untold.

The principal aim of this book is, for the first time, to reconstruct, document and analyse the programme of escape and evasion mapping on which MI9 embarked. Such an exercise has never previously been attempted. The book charts the origins, scope, nature, character and impact of MI9's escape and evasion mapping programme in the period 1939–45. It traces the development of the mapping programme in the face of many challenges and describes the ways in which MI9 sought to overcome those challenges with the considerable assistance of both individuals and commercial companies. Through a number of examples, the extent to which the mapping programme was the key to the success of the whole of MI9's escape programme is assessed. The Appendices contain

a detailed carto-bibliography, where all the individual maps are identified and described; production details are provided and location information on those surviving copies which have been identified is also provided.

The new intelligence branch was born in December 1939 and was charged with escape and evasion activities to support those who, it was anticipated, would either be shot down in enemy-held territory or would be captured. Its gestation had been lengthy. From the view held prior to World War I that there was something ignominious about capture, the military philosophy had evolved sufficiently in the inter-war period for escape activity to be regarded as a priority in the greater scheme of warfare. The new branch tried to tackle the aftermath of the disaster which befell the Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk in May 1940, but it took time and resources to mount the sort of organization which was needed. By then the nation was led by a new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who had had personal experience of escaping from captivity in the Boer War and was, undoubtedly, a natural ambassador for the changed philosophy. He had been a war correspondent for the *Morning Post* and was captured by the Boers in November 1899. He escaped on 12 December, and, travelling on foot and by train, he successfully made it across the border to Mozambique and freedom. In his account he noted that he was 'in the heart of the enemy's country' but lacked 'the compass and the map which might have guided me'.

The story of the mapping programme which became such an important part of MI9's escape programme has been difficult to piece together. No single, comprehensive record of the production programme has ever been found and the archival record set of the maps is only now (2015) being deposited in The National Archives by the Ministry of Defence. Copies of the maps have been found in many collections, both public and private, throughout the country. There is, however, very little mention of the maps in the published literature and some of the possibly relevant MI9 files in The National Archives are still closed. Reconstructing the story has proved to be like the reassembly of a jigsaw puzzle where some pieces are still missing, possibly lost for all time. Nevertheless, careful enquiry has yielded enough evidence to enable the narrative to be recovered. What emerges is a story of quite amazing inspiration and ingenuity in a country at war, fighting for the survival of its core democratic values and standards.

The intelligence world of the time also needs to be considered. MI9 was a new player in a world where others had already carved out for themselves a sizable role and niche. The part played by MI6, more commonly referred to as SIS (the Secret Intelligence Service), proved to be unhelpful and unsupportive to

the newly created branch. The key staff recruited to MI9, especially Christopher Clayton Hutton, who was ultimately responsible for the mapping programme, had some of the skills they needed, but absolutely no cartographic awareness. The dark fog which often surrounded the world of security and espionage meant that key contacts were not made at critical times and there was often a lack of awareness of where the experience and expertise which MI9 so badly needed actually lay.

Producing the maps was one thing, getting them to the prisoners of war was quite another. Just how they were smuggled into the camps, how MI9 communicated with the camps, and how the whole escape programme took shape is part of the unfolding story. The art of smuggling items inside hollowed out containers was used extensively by MI9, who persuaded the manufacturers of board games and other leisure aids to assist them in their endeavours. Coded communication with the camps proved to be the vital link in the chain and deciphering a number of surviving coded letters provided the proof of the importance of that system of communication. The prisoners of war themselves also rose to the challenge. They had been trained that it was their duty to attempt to escape, not least by MI9 itself, which promoted the philosophy of 'escape-mindedness' through its Training School. Escape committees were set up in many of the camps, certainly in the oflags (prisoner of war camps for officers). The many hours of the potentially excruciating boredom of captivity were funnelled into escape activity. Escapes were managed as military operations in both the planning and execution. Men used their talents and, in many cases, their professional expertise, to copy maps, to produce compasses and clothing, and to forge papers and passes to aid the escapers on their journey to freedom. Lessons were learned from both the successes and failures, and key experiences were either brought back to the camps by the failed escapers or relayed back to the camps by the successful escapers, for use in future attempts.

The structure of the book reflects the story of the mapping programme as it unfolded. Chapter 1 shows that MI9 was essentially a creation of World War II and it reflected a markedly changed military attitude to capture, escape and evasion. It was staffed with people who had been carefully selected by the head of the fledgling organization. The skills and experiences which they each brought to the task are described and acknowledged, and the development of the organization itself is traced. Chapter 2 looks at the background behind the development of the mapping programme and the long history of military mapping on silk, which was most certainly not prompted simply by a twentieth-century war. Chapter 3 describes in detail the whole map production programme

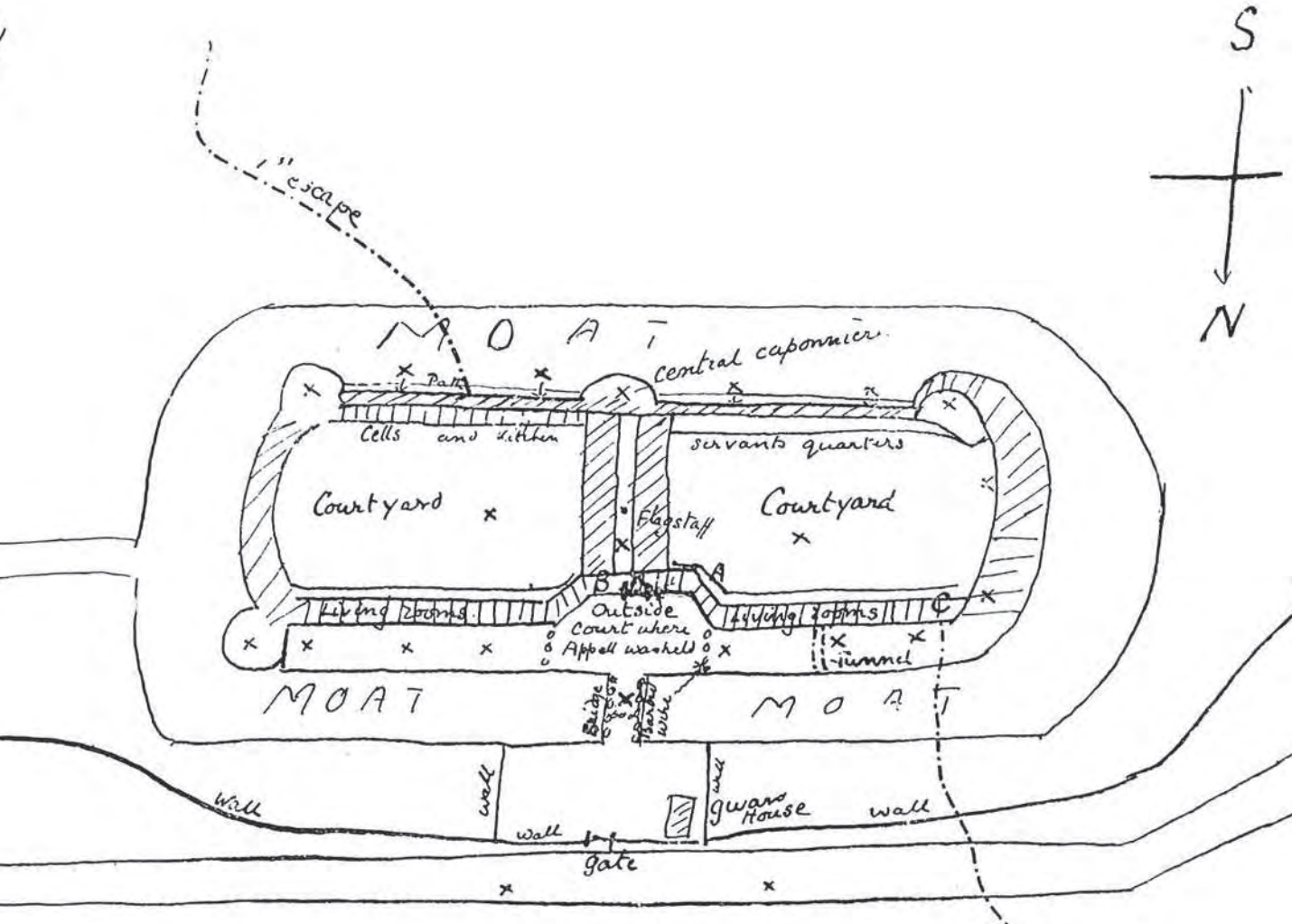
from the individual series, through the printing process to the sourcing of silk, and later, of man-made fibre. The covert nature of the programme and the compartmentalized way in which it was managed by MI9 resulted in their own unique, and arguably unnecessary, challenges. Having documented and analysed both the production programme and the maps themselves, the book continues in Chapter 4 by addressing the whole escape aids programme. The sheer ingenuity and originality of the smuggling programme which MI9 mounted in order to ensure that the maps reached their destinations is addressed. The whole of Chapter 5 is given over to a detailed discussion of the coded correspondence, augmented by the first deciphering of some of the original coded correspondence from a family archive.

A number of escapes were selected as examples to try to prove the value of the maps produced. The first of these, considered in Chapter 6, was based on one of the most successful escape routes which MI9 planned from occupied Europe to the safe haven of neutral Switzerland. Chapter 7 examines escapes via the Baltic ports to neutral Sweden, an even more successful route to freedom, and Chapter 8 studies the ways in which maps were copied in the camps and analyses two surviving maps apparently drawn in prisoner of war camps. Finally, Chapter 9 seeks to offer an objective assessment of the real success of the mapping programme in the light of the many obstacles and challenges which MI9 faced.

Without question, the maps produced by MI9 proved to be the key to successful escape: without them many, perhaps most, of the thousands of men who successfully escaped and made it back to these shores before the end of the war would have failed in their efforts.

The value of printing military maps on fabric has been long recognized. This map, printed on cloth, covers part of northwestern Georgia and adjacent Alabama to the west of Atlanta. It is annotated in blue pencil in the upper margin: 'Specimen of field maps used in Sherman's campaigns, 1864' (see pages 40–41).

Specimen of field maps used in Sherman's Campaigns, 1864.



A = Point, overlooking courtyard. ~~from~~ & where Frenchmen mocked the guard Chapter XV

B Commandants bureau

C Latrines

X Sentries as posted at night (fewer in day time)

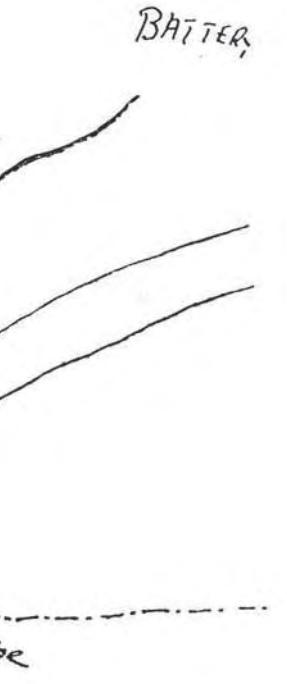
oooo Barber wire

Muck Heap

1

THE CREATION OF MI9

'Escaping and evading are ancient arts of war.'
(Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templar, in the Foreword to *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939–1945* by M. R. D. Foot and J. M. Langley)



Detail from a sketch map made by Johnny Evans (see page 22) showing his escape routes from Fort 9 Ingolstadt, during World War I. He brought his escape experiences with him when he joined MI9 in 1940.

MI9 was created on 23 December 1939 as a new branch of British intelligence to provide escape and evasion support to captured servicemen and to airmen shot down over enemy-held territory through the course of World War II. Arguably, it was not soon enough, as, less than six months after its creation, thousands of British Service personnel found themselves captured on the beaches at Dunkirk. MI9 was established within the Directorate of Military Intelligence, which came into existence in 1939 when, with the Directorate of Military Operations, it superseded a previously combined Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence. Five of the Military Intelligence sections, MI1 to MI5, continued their work within the new Directorate, dealing, as before, with organization, geographic, topographic, coded communication and security matters.

The creation of MI9 stemmed from the experience of many during World War I, when military philosophy about prisoners of war underwent a sea-change. From regarding capture and captivity in enemy hands as a somewhat ignominious, even shameful and disgraceful fate, the value that escaping prisoners of war might contribute to the success of the war effort gradually came to be recognized. Men who escaped or evaded capture and returned to Britain brought back vital intelligence and boosted the morale of the Armed Services and, not least, their own families. In addition, the considerable effort required to prevent escapes from the camps deflected the enemy's resources from front-line combat action.

In the late 1930s, as the prospect of war became increasingly likely, proposals for the creation of a section tasked to look after the interests of British prisoners of war came from many quarters, not least from Lieutenant Colonel (later Field-Marshal) Gerald Templar who had written to the Director of Military Intelligence in September 1939. A number of conferences with those who had been prisoners of war during World War I had also been arranged by MI1, seeking to benefit from their collective experiences. The actual proposal to the Joint Intelligence Committee to create such a branch came from Sir Campbell Stuart, who chaired a War Office Committee looking at the

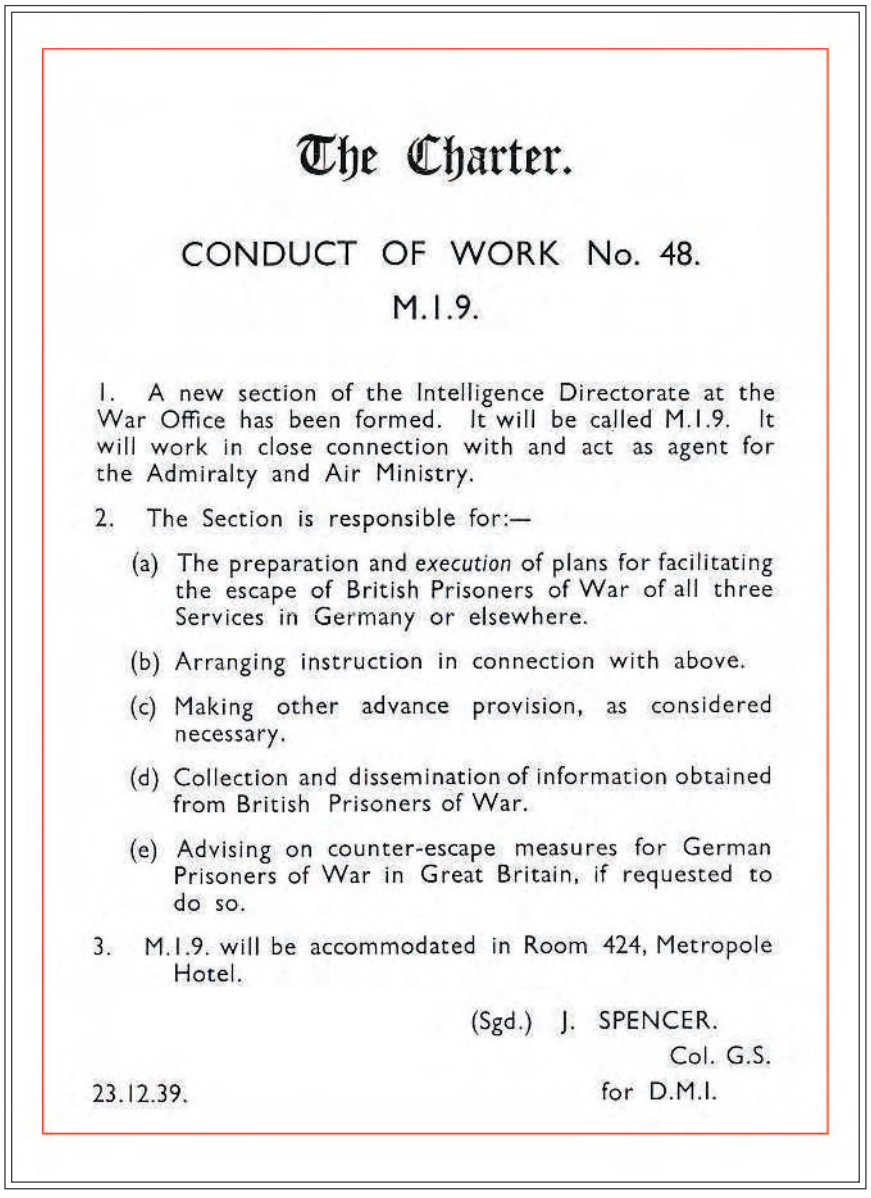
Three British prisoner of war escapers who tunnelled out of Holzminden prisoner of war camp in Germany during World War I on 23 July 1918. That night twenty-nine men made good their escape, ten of whom made their way to the neutral Netherlands some 320 kilometres (200 miles) from the camp and eventually back to Britain. Left to right: Captain Caspar Kennard, Major Gray and Lieutenant Blair, all of the Royal Flying Corps.

Sir Campbell Stuart (1885–1972), who made the initial proposal for the creation of MI9 to the Joint Intelligence Committee in 1939.

coordination of political intelligence and military operations. There had clearly been some robust discussions, since Viscount Halifax, appointed Foreign Secretary in February 1938 by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had indicated in a letter dated 5 December 1939 to Sir Campbell that his preference was for the section to be under Foreign Office control, with direct Treasury funding, presumably to ensure joint control and coordination with MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Notwithstanding this high-level opposition, the creation of MI9 went ahead in the War Office and it was made responsible to the Deputy Director for Military Intelligence, initially working closely with the Admiralty and the Air Ministry. With hindsight, the later animosity and conflict between MI9 and SIS (see Chapter 9) might well have had its roots in the initial difference of opinion as to where the newly formed section should sit in the governmental hierarchy.

MI9's objectives and methods were first outlined in the 'Conduct of Work No. 48', issued by the Directorate of Military Intelligence on 23 December 1939. In MI9's War Diaries (the regular record of daily, weekly or monthly activities undertaken by the War Office branches during the war), its objectives were more fully described as:

> i) To facilitate the escape of British prisoners of war, their repatriation to the United Kingdom (UK) and also to contain enemy manpower and resources in guarding the British prisoners of war and seeking to prevent their escape.



The Charter.

CONDUCT OF WORK No. 48.

M.I.9.

1. A new section of the Intelligence Directorate at the War Office has been formed. It will be called M.I.9. It will work in close connection with and act as agent for the Admiralty and Air Ministry.

2. The Section is responsible for:—

(a) The preparation and *execution* of plans for facilitating the escape of British Prisoners of War of all three Services in Germany or elsewhere.

(b) Arranging instruction in connection with above.

(c) Making other advance provision, as considered necessary.

(d) Collection and dissemination of information obtained from British Prisoners of War.

(e) Advising on counter-escape measures for German Prisoners of War in Great Britain, if requested to do so.

3. M.I.9. will be accommodated in Room 424, Metropole Hotel.

(Sgd.) J. SPENCER.
Col. G.S.
for D.M.I.

23.12.39.

The original Conduct of Work No. 48 for MI9, produced by the Directorate of Military intelligence (DMI) and issued to MI5 and MI6, as it appears in Per Ardua Libertas, *a photographic summary of MI9's work, produced by Christopher Clayton Hutton in 1942.*

ii) To facilitate the return to the UK of those who evaded capture in enemy occupied territory.

iii) To collect and distribute information on escape and evasion, including research into, and the provision of, escape aids either prior to deployment or by covert despatch to prisoners of war.

iv) To instruct service personnel in escape and evasion techniques through preliminary training, the provision of lecturers and Bulletins and to train selected individuals in the use of coded communication through letters.

v) To maintain the morale of British prisoners of war by maintaining contact through correspondence and other means and to engage in the specific planning and execution of evasion and escape.

vi) To collect information from British prisoners of war through maintaining contact with them during captivity and after successful repatriation and disseminate the intelligence obtained to all three Services and appropriate Government Departments.

vii) To advise on counter-escape measures for German prisoners of war in Great Britain.

viii) To deny related information to the enemy.

The responsibilities included a mixture of operations, intelligence, transport and supply. The newly formed section was initially located in Room 424 of the Metropole Building (formerly the Metropole Hotel) in Northumberland Avenue, London, close to the War Office's Main Building.

NORMAN CROCKATT

The newly appointed Head of MI9 was Major, later promoted to Colonel and eventually to Brigadier, Norman Richard Crockatt (1894–1956), a retired infantry officer who had seen active service in World War I in the Royal Scots Guards. Crockatt had left the Army in 1927, worked in the City and was in his mid-forties at the outbreak of World War II.

Whilst he had been decorated in World War I (DSO, MC), he had never been captured and, therefore, had no experience of being a prisoner of war. He proved, however, to be an admirable choice to ensure the fledgling section made good progress in its infancy and throughout the war, being 'clear-headed, quick witted, a good organizer, a good judge of men, and no respecter of red

Brigadier Norman Crockatt in the MI9 headquarters at Wilton Park near Beaconsfield in 1944.

tape' (as recorded by M. R. D. Foot and J. M Langley in their definitive history *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939–1945*, hereafter referred to as Foot and Langley). These qualities were to stand him in good stead for the work he tackled in the next six years. He also recognized the importance of keeping his section small, concentrated in its activities and low profile among other intelligence sections, attributes which appeared to ensure that when the time came to expand its activities, it received little opposition from those competing for military priorities and budgets. Crockatt realized the value of having the experience of former prisoners of war, especially those who had successfully escaped, and appointed many with that experience to the small cadre of lecturing staff based in the Training School established by MI9.

The initial budget given to Crockatt to set up the entire section was £2,000. In present day terms, this equates to a sum of approximately £90,000. He embarked on a recruitment campaign and, by the end of July 1940, the complement of officers in the whole of the MI9 organization had risen to fifty. By that time, Crockatt was looking to move his organization out of London and by September 1940, he had selected Wilton Park, near Beaconsfield, as an appropriate location. After necessary refurbishment and the installation of telephones, most of the MI9 staff moved there on 14–18 October and occupied No. 20 Camp at Wilton Park.

ORGANIZATION

The section was initially organized into two parts: MI9a was responsible for matters relating to enemy prisoners of war and MI9b was responsible for British prisoners of war. The former subsequently became a separate department, MI19, to facilitate the handling and distribution of the intelligence information emanating from the two groups. On separation, the remaining MI9b was re-organized into separate sections and the staff complement was significantly increased:

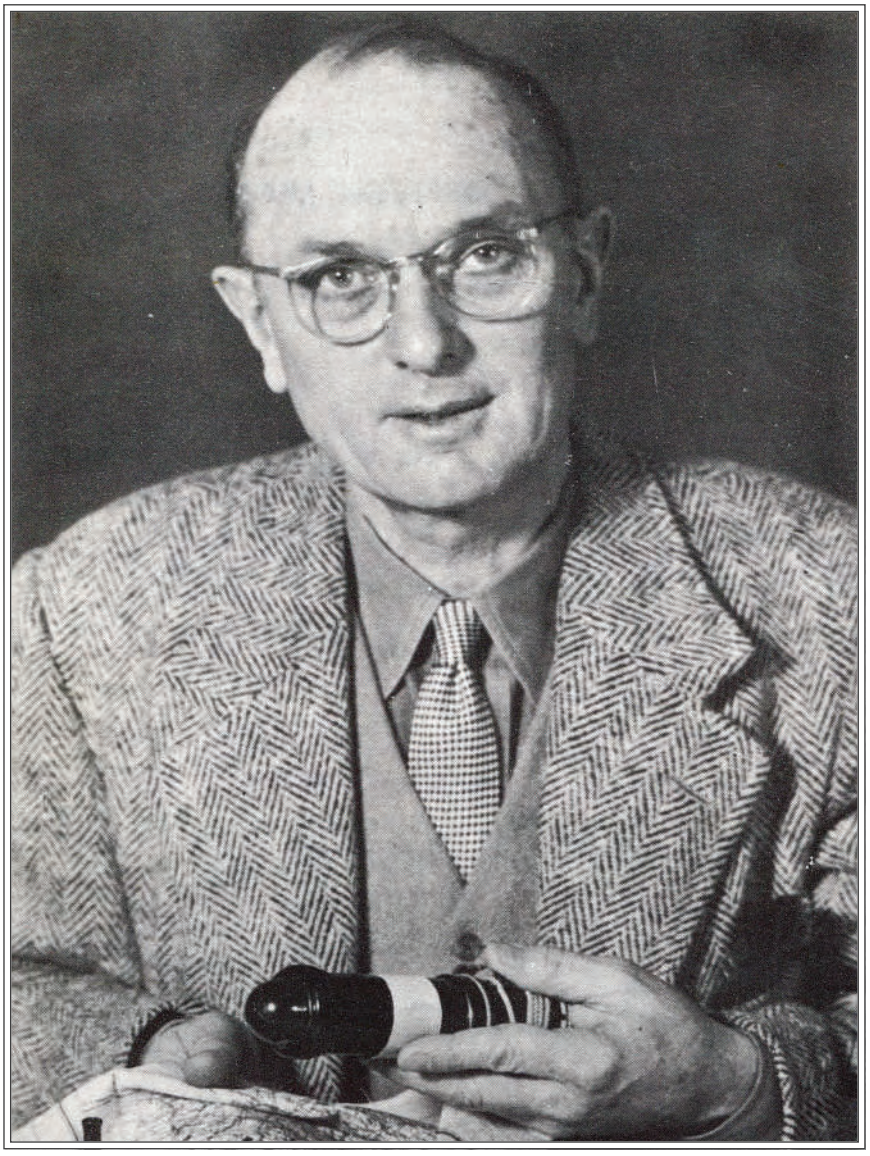
> Section D was responsible for training, including the Training School which was established at the Highgate School in north London, from which the staff and pupils had been evacuated. It was subsequently designated the Intelligence School (IS9) in January 1942.
>
> Section W was responsible for the interrogation of returning escapers and evaders, including the initial preparation of the questionnaires which the interviewees were required to complete. The principal aim of the questionnaires was to identify information for use in the lectures and the *Bulletin*. The section was also responsible for the preparation and distribution of reports and for writing the daily, later to become monthly, War Diary entry.
>
> Section X was responsible for the planning and organization of escapes, including the selection, research, coordination and despatch of escape and evasion materials. Because of the small numbers of staff, the section was unable to spend much time on this activity until January 1942 when its establishment was boosted. At that point, they were also able to increase the volume of information to Section Y for transmission to the camps.
>
> Section Y was responsible for codes and secret communication with the camps. The development of letter codes as a means of communication with the camps was regarded as a priority from the start and the role which coded communication played in the escape programme is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
>
> Section Z was responsible for the production and supply of escape tools, including all related experimental work.

It is primarily these last three sections whose activities largely, but not exclusively, form the focus of this book.

KEY STAFF

Christopher Clayton Hutton

Christopher William Clayton Hutton (1893–1965), known as 'Clutty' by all who worked with him, was appointed on 22 February 1940 as the Technical Officer to lead Section Z. He was the boffin, the inventor of gadgetry. His fascination for show business, particularly magicians, was apparently regarded as sufficient qualification for the post he was given as the escape aids expert in MI9. It was



Christopher Clayton Hutton, who led MI9's Section Z from 1940 to 1943, where he developed many ingenious escape aids and initiated the escape and evasion mapping programme.

his innate interest in escapology and illusion which was to prove the source of his imagination and ingenuity. Whilst working in his uncle's timber business in Park Saw Mills, Birmingham prior to World War I, he had challenged Harry Houdini to escape from a packing case constructed on the stage of the Birmingham Empire Theatre. Houdini escaped, for, unbeknown to Hutton, he had bribed the carpenter. In the inter-war years, he worked as a journalist and later in publicity for the film industry.

Hutton had served in the Yeomanry, the Yorkshire Regiment and as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. Realizing that another war with Germany was imminent, he tried to volunteer for the Royal Air Force and, subsequently, for the Army. When these approaches did not receive the encouragement he sought, he wrote a number of times to the War Office seeking an opening in an Intelligence Branch, an approach which eventually resulted in his appointment to the newly formed MI9 under Crockatt's leadership.

'Clutty' was regarded as both enthusiastic and original in his approach to the task to which he was appointed. He is variously described by his contemporaries as 'eccentric', 'a genius' and by Foot and Langley as 'wayward and original'. He wrote an account of his time in MI9, which ended during 1943 as a result of illness, under the title *Official Secret* (1960), but the publication of the book was not straightforward (see Chapter 9)

Crockatt very quickly recognized the value of having those who had experienced the reality of escape and was also conscious of the need to have representatives of all three Services in his organization. To this end, he appointed two Liaison Officers from the Royal Navy and the RAF.

Johnny Evans

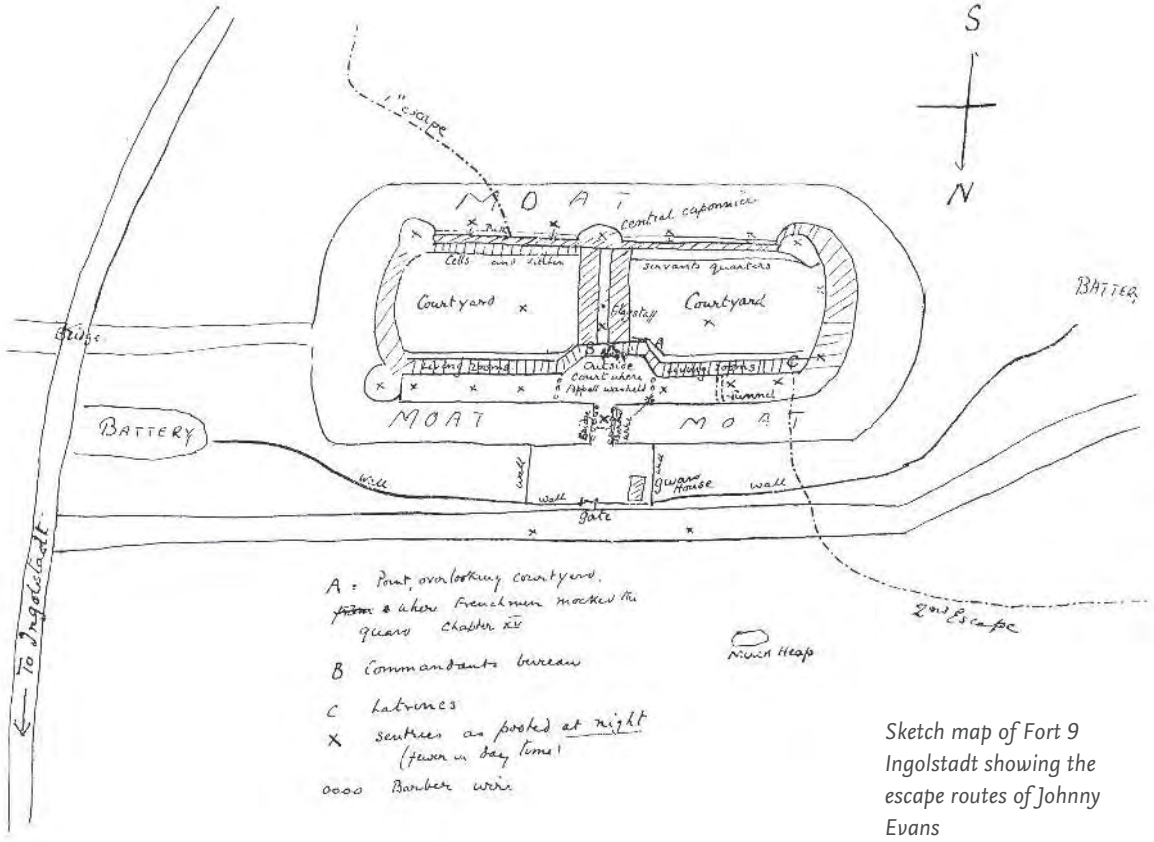
From the RAF he appointed Squadron Leader A. J. Evans, MC (1889–1960). Johnny Evans, as he was always called, was an inspired choice. Appointed in January 1940, Evans very rapidly became a most valuable member of the MI9 team, becoming one of the star performers as a lecturer at the Training School. He had been an Intelligence Officer on the Western Front in World War I and had then been commissioned as a Major into the fledgling Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Shot down behind German lines over the Somme in 1916 and captured, he was eventually sent to the prisoner of war camp at Clausthal in the Harz Mountains.

For Evans, remaining in captivity was apparently never an option. Whether this in any way reflected his upbringing and public school education at

Winchester is unclear but it certainly did not reflect military training at the time. He escaped, only to be recaptured. On recapture he was sent to the infamous Fort 9 at Ingolstadt, north of Nuremburg, the World War I equivalent of Colditz in World War II. It was the camp to which all prisoners of war who had attempted to escape were sent and was located over 160 kilometres (100 miles) from the Swiss frontier. Evans described in considerable detail both his failed escape and his eventual successful escape in his best-selling book, *The Escaping Club*, published in August 1921, and reprinted five times by the end of that year. It took him and his companion almost three weeks to walk, largely at night, to the Swiss frontier which they crossed at Schaffhausen, west of Lake Constance.

Johnny Evans, from his classic book, The Escaping Club, *published in 1921.*

Evans described the attitude of the men in Fort 9 and the extent to which they spent their time in the all-consuming occupation of plotting to escape. It really was a veritable 'Escaping Club' where failed escapers were only too ready to share the knowledge of their experiences outside the camp with their



Sketch map of Fort 9 Ingolstadt showing the escape routes of Johnny Evans

fellow inmates. Evans described the receipt of clothes and food parcels from family and friends in which maps and compasses were also hidden. This was apparently accomplished by the prior personal arrangement of using a simple code in correspondence detailing the specific needs, maps, compasses, saws, civilian clothing and the like. Maps arrived in the camp secreted inside cakes baked by his mother or in bags of flour, and compasses inside bottles of prunes and jars of anchovy paste. The maps were copied in the camp so others could also use them and were then sewn into the lining of jackets.

It is fascinating to consider the extent to which Evans brought these experiences to bear in his work for MI9 and understandable that his book was dedicated:

> To MY MOTHER who, by encouragement and direct assistance, was largely responsible for my escape from Germany, I dedicate this book which was written at her request.

He went further, however, spending time prior to the outbreak of World War II visiting the Schaffhausen area of the German–Swiss border, across which he had made his own successful bid for liberty in World War I, photographing the border area and making copious notes. It cannot be coincidence that the MI9 *Bulletin* contained two large-scale maps of the Schaffhausen Salient, together with ground photographs of the local topography, showing distinctive landmark features, for example the stream and footpath where the German border guards patrolled. MI9's map production programme also included sheet Y, a large-scale map of the Schaffhausen Salient which carried very detailed notes of the topography and landscape features to help escaping prisoners of war (see Chapter 6 for the significance of this map in the MI9 programme and Appendix 1).

Jimmy Langley, who organized covert escape routes for MI9, and later co-authored the definitive history of MI9.

Jimmy Langley

Lieutenant Colonel James Maydon Langley (1916–83), called 'Jimmy' by friends and colleagues, was born in Wolverhampton, educated at Uppingham and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. As a young subaltern in the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards, he was badly injured in the head and arm and left behind at Dunkirk: on a stretcher as he would have taken up space which four fitter men could have occupied. He was taken prisoner, hospitalized in Lille and had his injured left arm amputated by medical staff. He subsequently escaped, in October 1940, by climbing through a hospital window and managed, with a still suppurating wound and with help from French families who befriended him, to reach

Marseilles from where he was repatriated, with help, through Spain to London. Langley successfully navigated by using the maps of the various French departments which appeared in every public telephone kiosk in France. The couple of times he travelled in the wrong direction resulted from the maps being oriented in a non-standard fashion, with East at the top. So Langley, too, knew the value of maps as an escape tool.

He arrived back in the UK in the spring of 1941 and initially joined SIS. He soon transferred to MI9 but remained on the payroll, and therefore technically under the command, of SIS. In practice he became the liaison point between the two organizations and was responsible for the work of the escape lines in northwest Europe. These were the covert routes along which the escapers and evaders travelled on their journey home, being helped by members of the local communities along the way. The network was established by MI9 working from London and also through legation staff and embassy attachés. If discovered by the Germans, as many of the French, Belgian and Dutch nationals were, they were executed or sent to the concentration camps. He remained in post for the duration of the war, and subsequently married Peggy van Lier, a young Belgian woman who had been a guide on the Comet Line (the organized escape route through western France and across the Pyrenees into Spain – see page 148). Over thirty years later, he co-authored with M. R. D. Foot *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939–1945*, which came to be regarded as the definitive history of MI9. He also wrote his own account of his early life, capture, hospitalization and subsequent escape in *Fight Another Day*, published in 1974.

Airey Neave

Of others in Crockatt's team, perhaps Airey Middleton Sheffield Neave (1916–79) is the most famous. As a young lieutenant, he was a troop commander in the 1st Searchlight Regiment of the Royal Artillery. He was wounded and captured in Calais Hospital in May 1940 as the Germans over-ran northern France. He was held in various oflags and, after a number of unsuccessful escape attempts, he was eventually imprisoned in Oflag IVC, the castle in Saxony more commonly known as Colditz. Working with his Dutch colleague, Toni Luteyn, Neave escaped from Colditz on 5 January 1942, the first British Officer to escape successfully from that infamous camp. After reaching Switzerland, Neave was repatriated through Marseilles and into Spain via the organized escape route known as the Pat Line (see page 148). After a short period of leave, he joined MI9 in May 1942 under the pseudonym (code-name) of Saturday. It is clear that his name had been on an MI9 list of targeted officers

Airey Neave was the first British officer to escape from Colditz.

who had been specifically helped to escape, and his experience was to prove invaluable. His escape and the extent to which it reflected the value of MI9's mapping programme are issues considered in detail in Chapter 6. His account, *They Have Their Exits* (1953), covered his experiences on the frontline, his capture and initial, unsuccessful attempts at escape followed by his escape from Colditz. Neave also wrote about MI9 in *Saturday at MI9* (1969), which is discussed in the Bibliography.

THE TRAINING SCHOOL AT HIGHGATE

Section D of MI9 was responsible for training and briefing the Intelligence Officers who attended courses at the Training School in Highgate and who then returned to their individual units to provide training to operational crews. Certainly in the early years, these training courses concentrated on the RAF whose crews were constantly overflying occupied Europe. The lecturers engaged were largely those who had personal experience of escape in World War I. Their remuneration was set at two guineas (£2. 2s. 0d.), the equivalent of around £82 today, for each lecture they delivered and they were also provided with travel and overnight hotel expenses when they travelled to deliver lectures at operational units. As early as January 1940, a conference was organized in Room 660 of the Metropole Building to hear a lecture delivered by Johnny Evans. By the end of February 1940, lecturers from the Training School had delivered their training lectures to seven Army Divisions, and five RAF Groups, and were undertaking a tour of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

The content of the general lecture given to officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) included emphasis on the undesirability of capture, instructions on evasion, conduct on capture and a demonstration of some of the aids to escape which were issued to units prior to deployment. The lecture emphasized that the job was to fight and avoid capture. If captured, it was their first and principal duty to escape at the earliest opportunity. Later on in the war, with the increasing numbers of prisoners of war and the increasing organization of Escape Committees in the camps, the lectures were updated to include mention of the Escape Committees, which were the responsibility of the Senior British Officer in each of the camps.

Those attending the training courses were told that money, maps, identity papers, provisions and many other escape aids would be made available through the Committees. The officers and NCOs who attended the lectures were then responsible for cascading the briefing down through the ranks, but they

were, initially at least, specifically directed not to mention the aids to escape as they were only available for issue in limited numbers. It was recommended that they deliver the lecture as an informal talk, classified SECRET, and to audiences which should not exceed 200 at any one time. Later on, and certainly by early 1942, a supply of aids for demonstration purposes was provided to local commands.

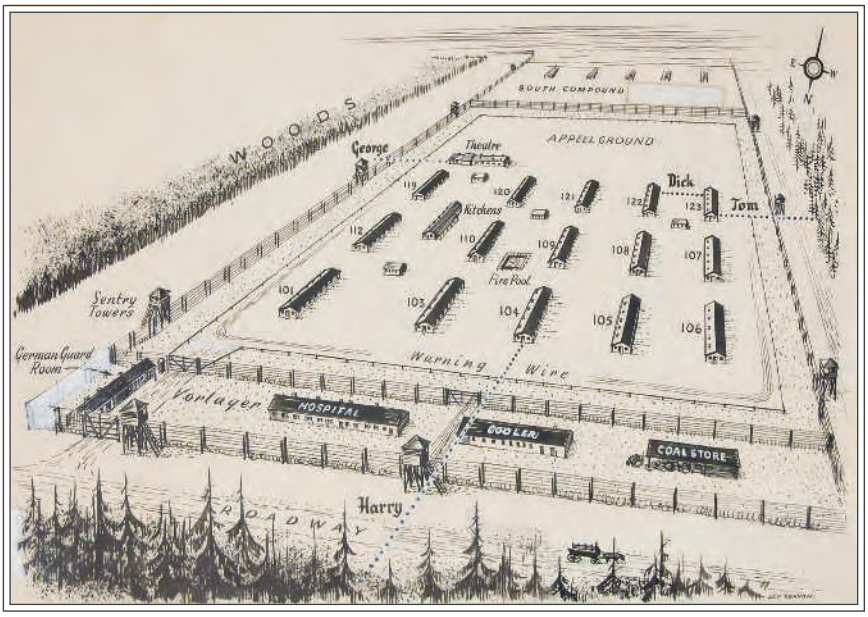
There was also a classified TOP SECRET lecture on codes which was delivered under the title of 'Camp Conditions' to very limited audiences, never more than ten at a time, all of whom had been carefully selected. Those selected for this special briefing were required to practise the use of letter codes and their work was carefully checked before they were formally registered as authorized code users. Section Y was responsible for codes. The development of letter codes as a means of communication with the camps was also regarded as a priority from the start and the role which coded communication played in the escape programme developed apace. This aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The staff in the Training School steadily compiled a training manual which became known as the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* served an important role as a tool in educating potential prisoners of war about possible escape routes and the nature of escape aids, including maps, which were being produced (see Chapter 4).

The pressures on the lecturing staff were considerable and continually increased as the war progressed. Initially both the Royal Navy and the Army had appeared uninterested in the training courses offered and, certainly in the first year or so of its existence, MI9 staff worked hard to stimulate interest and used many personal contacts to raise awareness of their work. They appeared to overcome some initial opposition from the Royal Navy and some Army commands, and by May 1944 the record shows that very significant numbers in all three services had been briefed: 110,000 in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, 346,000 in the Army and 290,000 in the Royal Air Force, and a total of 3,250 lectures had been delivered.

ESCAPE-MINDEDNESS

Escape-mindedness was the term which Crockatt coined to describe the philosophy which he sought to instil into the frontline forces which his staff regularly briefed and trained. Inculcating and fostering this philosophy was the primary aim of the training, and the rest of the MI9 team was working to ensure that the approach was supported in a very practical way. They stressed that, if



Stalag Luft III (Sagan), drawn by the artist Ley Kenyon, who was a prisoner in the camp. It shows the position of Tom, Dick, Harry and George tunnels. Harry was used in the 'Great Escape'.

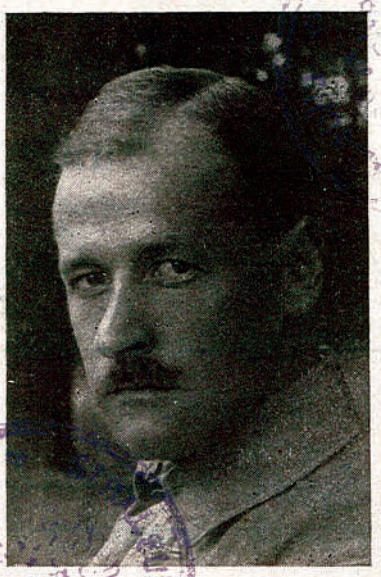
captured, it was an officer's duty to attempt to escape and, not only officers, it was a duty which extended to all ranks. Many years after the end of the war when Commander John Pryor RN came to write his memoirs of the years he spent as a prisoner of war during World War II, it is not surprising that he recalled that:

> escaping was the duty of a PoW but with the whole of NW Europe under German control and with no maps or compass it seemed a pretty hopeless task.

The briefings and training which MI9 provided alerted officers to every aspect of potential evasion and escape. The emphasis was on evading capture whenever possible or, if captured, to attempt to escape at the earliest opportunity and certainly before being imprisoned behind barbed wire in the many prisoner of war camps. It was standard practice for captured officers to be separated into oflags from the other ranks who were kept in stalags . Officers were, therefore, made responsible for ensuring that their men were appropriately briefed about what to do in captivity and the organization of Escape Committees became one of their principal priorities.

It is perhaps a reflection of the extent to which the philosophy permeated the camps that by the time the Allies were landing in occupied Europe and slowly advancing east, it was felt necessary to issue a 'stay-put' order to prisoners of war to ensure they did not get caught up in the frontline whilst trying to flee

OVERLEAF:
A forged identity card made in the Holzminden camp in World War I and used by H. G. Durnford in his escape.



Vor= und Zunamen: Karl Stein

Geburtstag: 4. Juni 1880

Geburtsort: Stralsund

Staatsangehörigkeit: Preussen

Grösse: 1,60. Mund: gewöhnlich

Gestalt: untersetzt Augen: braun

Kinn: gewöhnlich Bart: Schnurrbart

Nase: groß Haare: braun

Besondere Kennzeichen: —

Karl Stein
(Eigenhändige Unterschrift.)

Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, dass der Passinhaber vorstehende Unterschrift eigenhändig vollzogen hat.

STRALSUND POLIZEI SEKRETARIAT

STRALSUND, den 1. Mai 1918
DIE POLIZEI=SEKRETARIAT.
I.A.

[illegible]

captivity. The order was sent by MI9 on 18 February 1944 in a coded message: it directed that

> ON GERMAN SURRENDER OR COLLAPSE, ALL P/W ALL SERVICES INCLUDING DOMINION & COLONIAL & INDIAN MUST STAY PUT & AWAIT ORDERS

Many families also wrote to their sons in the camps strongly discouraging them from any escape attempts, as a result of the Stalag Luft III (Sagan) experience when fifty of the men who had taken part in the 'Great Escape' in March 1944 were executed on being recaptured.

The MI9 staff who subsequently wrote about their escapes, notably Neave and Langley, and even Evans who had escaped during World War I, all highlighted the importance of an escape philosophy. Neave described the way in which escapers had 'to think of imprisonment as a new phase of living, not as the end of life' and the extent to which the real purpose of the escaper was 'to overcome by every means the towering obstacles in his way'. It was a state of mind that MI9 encouraged.

It was understandable that some might prefer the relative safety of the camp rather than life on the run. Even for these men there were jobs to be done to support the escapes of others. It was strength of mind and purpose which was needed rather than just physical health and strength, a point epitomized by the escapes of Jimmy Langley, still suffering from a suppurating amputation wound, and Douglas Bader, restricted by his two artificial legs. Initiative, foresight and courage were needed and luck also came into it: as Evans stressed, 'however hard you try, however skilful you are, luck is an essential element in a successful escape', while David James noted in *A Prisoner's Progress* (1947) that:

> Luck is the most essential part in an escape . . . for every man out, there were at least ten better men who would have got clear but who did not have the good fortune they deserved.

Teamwork is the one competence which comes through all the stories and plans relating to escape. This almost certainly reflected the public school philosophy where your efforts were for school, house and team rather than for self. As an Old Wykehamist, Evans personified this approach and it is not surprising to learn that between the wars he captained the Kent county cricket team. To some extent it could be argued that MI9 was pushing at an open door in seeking to inculcate Crockatt's philosophy into a new generation of young

men. Many of them had been educated at preparatory and public schools and apparently raised on a diet of escape classics of the last war. Some of them acknowledged this when they came to write their own accounts of their escape experience during World War II, as James recorded:

> In my prep-school days at Summer Fields, I had read all the escape classics of the last war – such books as *The Tunnellers of Holzminden*, *Within Four Walls*, *I Escape*, and *The Escapers' Club* [sic] – and as a proposition the business of escaping fascinated me.

It is clear from their post-war accounts that many escapers spent every waking moment of captivity plotting their escape. Some identified the very human traits which they believed could most aid them. Gullibility (of the captor) and audacity (of the escaper) were high on the list, as was luck. There was a psychology attached to escaping, as James recognized:

> I came to the conclusion that escaping was essentially a psychological problem, depending on the inobservance of mankind, coupled with a ready acceptance of the everyday at its face value.

The Germans were apparently well aware of this philosophy and the extent to which it sustained British prisoners of war and constrained their own resources in guarding those captured and seeking to prevent their escape. Once the Allies had landed in mainland Europe and started to advance east, they captured not simply German troops but also a number of key German documents amongst which was a document identified as GR-107.94. It must have made fascinating reading for MI9 as it revealed the extent to which the Germans were well aware of their work. It is a lengthy document and relates entirely to the escape methods employed by Allied Flying Personnel. It was dated 29 December 1944 and described the escape philosophy, the duty to escape, and the maps provided on silk and thin tissue. It goes so far as to list nine maps which they knew had been produced. Whilst it reflected the extent to which the Germans were aware of what they were up against, it also indicated that, if they were aware of only nine escape maps when MI9 had by that time produced over 200 individual items and over one and three quarter million copies, they had arguably only discovered the proverbial tip of the iceberg.