

In 1937, Professor von Brauchitsch delivered a lecture in Munich to German officer-cadets on escapology. It was the sort of lecture which did not arouse much interest except for one man, an ex-British Officer who made copious notes.

At the time he did not know that what he had heard would afterwards be discussed at the Headquarters of M.I.5 in London, and would be the reason for the opening of a separate department of M.I.5.

A certain Major C. H. was given the task of forming this special section, which could well have been the beginnings of the James Bonds' of that era, when escapology became a science and a study. Hence the escapes of the Great Train Robbers and others.

Escapers from a civil prison in peacetime are usually caught. Escapers from a prisoner-of-war camp are either shot or they find their way to freedom. The information they bring 'home' is often the most valuable part of the escape.

This special section of M.I.5. (Secret Service) had to be financed. A department at the Ministry of Supply was formed to take care of the exceptional expenses which were incurred by this new department of escapology.

About mid-1940 a civilian called at 40, Wakefield Road. His name was Mr. A. (For particular reasons we do not wish to give the names of these people). His call upon us was almost as mysterious as the individual himself. In appearance, in looks, in mannerisms, in dress, he was just like Sergeant Cluff of the television series.

It appeared that Mr. A. wished to buy some visiting cards for himself. On the maxim that we

have always followed, 'the customer is always right', we determined to give Mr. A. what he wanted.

It was some time afterwards that we realised that his first visit had been to 'vet' what sort of a firm we were. Shortly afterwards Mr. A. visited the Company and read to us excerpts from the Official Secrets Act, instilling into us the confidential nature of the exacting work which we might be asked to do and also making us realise its great value to the war effort.

In the years that followed we were asked to carry out so many interesting ventures that it is difficult to single out any one as the most spectacular.

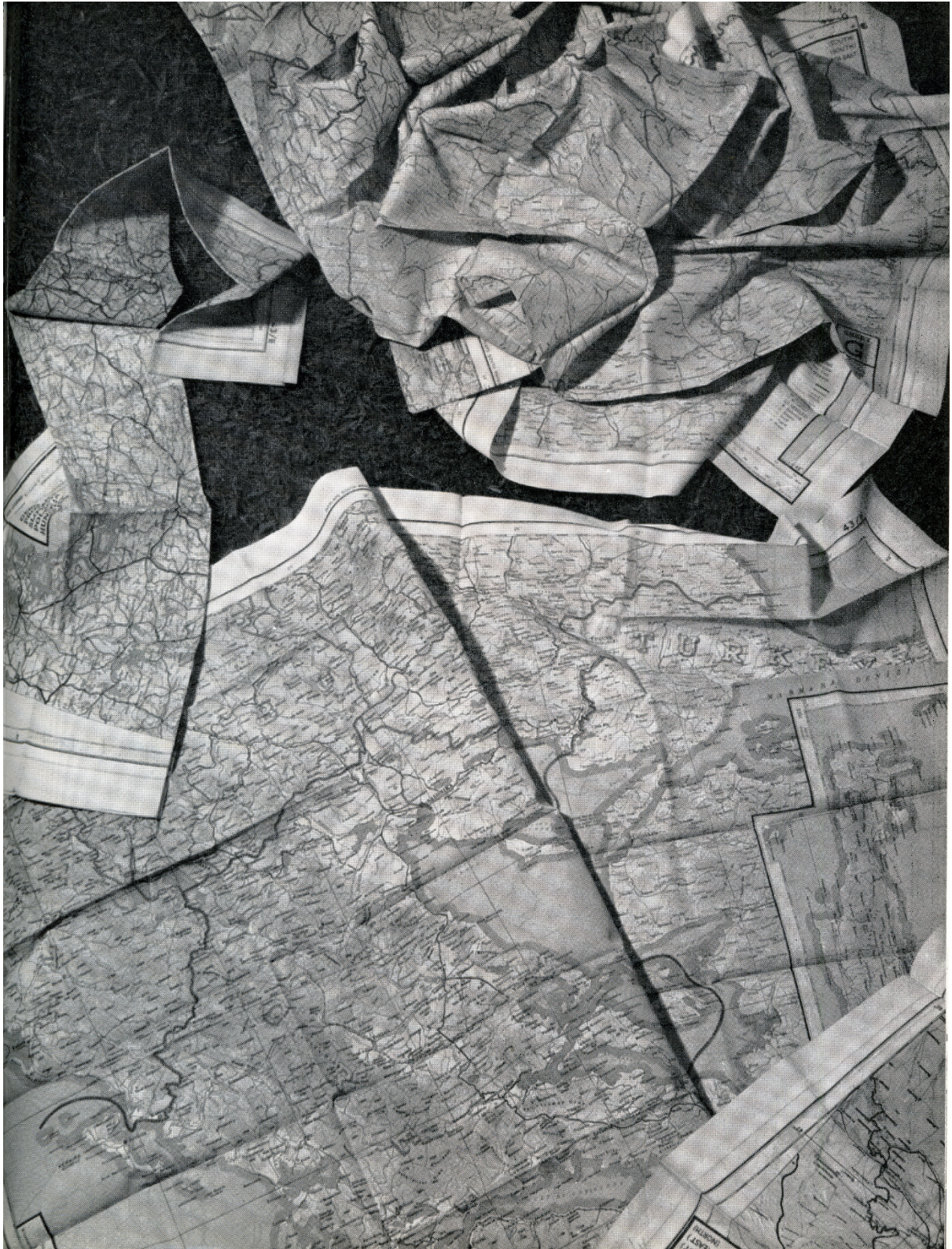
It is well-known that we printed vast quantities of maps on silk. Other printers had tried and failed. Perhaps the reason for our success was the careful way in which we obtained the correct silk with the right amount of 'filling'. It was Bemberg silk and came from Doncaster. Printing on silk was not new to us. We had printed theatre programmes on silk for the Command Performances, twelve copies each year for the Royal Box.

We printed thousands of maps of Germany, Austria, Italy and France. We did not find out until long afterwards that many of these maps were put inside the linings of air force uniforms.

One singular thing about all this work was that nothing was ever put in writing.

Mr. A. would bring the maps or I would collect them in London at the Ministry of Supply in Whitehall.

*Opposite: Examples of silk maps printed by Waddingtons.*



The map job was by reason of its size the most important, and at one period an armed guard round 40, Wakefield Road was being considered, but it was felt that such a move would bring too much attention to the factory and would also make some of the girls working therein a little uneasy, so fortunately this never came about.

Apart from the maps we were asked to make up many intricate games and playing cards which would, if properly used, give help to prisoners of war. We made up several sets of Monopoly. In one side of the board was inserted a map, printed on linen, showing the escape routes from the particular prison to which this game was sent. In the other side were cut out slots in the cardboard to take a small compass and several fine quality files. The Monopoly money was replaced by actual money of the country to which the set was being sent, either German, Austrian or Italian.

It was extremely interesting, particularly towards the end of the war when we were printing maps for seven points on which the great landing might take place.

Eventually it turned out to be Normandy but Mr. Douglas Cameron and I often pondered where the landings would take place.

From memory the landing maps were of Heligoland, Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Normandy, the West coast of France, Southern France (near Marseilles) and Northern Italy. All these maps were most beautifully reproduced and every care was taken to make sure that the materials on which they were printed did not stretch or alter their shape.

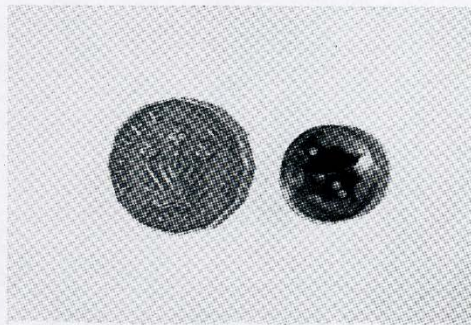
It is worth recording that at the Normandy landing, where as the Americans and the British used delightfully accurate maps printed at Wakefield Road going far into France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, the German officers had to rely on the school maps which they picked up in French classrooms.

The work itself was not only interesting but at certain times was dangerous.

We instigated the making of a paper made from pure gun cotton. On this paper were printed escape routes and instructions for escaping.

The point of printing them on pure gun cotton was this. If the prisoner was caught with this paper in his possession he had only to touch it with his lighted cigarette end and the paper exploded and disappeared so completely that no ash was left.

Naturally these sheets had to be cut to size and



*Above: Escape compass photographed alongside three-penny piece.*

when such occasions did happen and a guillotine was being used for this purpose, Mr. Douglas Cameron was always present with two or three men standing by with foam fire extinguishers in case of a minor explosion.

We made playing cards of triplex material. One sheet of paper, one sheet of fine linen, and a second sheet of paper, and a pack of fifty-two cards held a full map of Northern Italy where many of our prisoners of war were held.

We manufactured numerous other articles and games, such as cribbage boards, bridge pencils, bridge scoring blocks, all made with the object of helping prisoners of war to escape.

Towards the end of the war we carried out what could be considered to be the most interesting assignment but we never found out if it was ever used. On pure Irish linen we printed an escape route in invisible ink. These were made up into pure white handkerchiefs and only when the prisoner urinated on the handkerchief did the plan make its appearance. Washed in cold water the print disappeared again.

Whilst all these activities were taking place at the Wakefield Road factory, shells, flares and cartridges were also being made there, unknown to M.I.5. This was a secret that even the Secret Service did not find out.

On one of my visits to London I was told that in the next three or four weeks an attempt would be made to get inside the factory at Wakefield Road and find out certain information regarding the products. The object of this exercise was to keep Waddingtons on their toes.

A man came. He did what he came to do, but how he did it is another story.

Norman V. Watson