

A real life 'Q'

"See Q for any equipment you need" (*Casino Royale*, Ian Fleming, chapter 3)

In the James Bond books (and more especially the films) there is a fictional Q branch which supplies ingenious gadgets and weapons to assist the spy.

Part of Ian Fleming's inspiration for Q branch may have come from MI9, a War Office department that was set up in 1939 to help British prisoners of war escape from enemy prison camps.

An officer of MI9 is buried in the 1956 section of Ashburton graveyard (website ref P001.CCI1): Major William Christopher Clayton Hutton



Memorial to Major Clayton Hutton

The memorial reads: 'Christopher William Clayton Hutton Major MI9 1939-45 whose escape devices aided so many prisoners of war. Died 3rd September 1965 aged 71.'

On 9th May 1917, 23 year old Christopher Clayton Hutton, a Captain in the R F C, gained a certificate in flying from the Military School, Birmingham. He was flying a Maurice Farman Biplane. Although the certificate states that he was born on the 16th November 1894, it probably should have read 1893 - his birth was registered earlier that year.* This birth date also appears on documents connected with an application he made for employment in 1944.

In his autobiography Clayton Hutton describes how he was rejected by the RAF at the start of World War II, but after badgering the Army was eventually interviewed by the Intelligence section. He was accepted after talking about his fascination with magic, illusionists and escapologists, and in particular about a challenge that he had once issued to Houdini.

Official Secret, Clayton Hutton, Crown Publishers Inc., New York 1961, pp 1-4.

He was given the task of devising escape aids for personnel finding themselves over enemy lines: items such as saws, wire cutters, maps and compasses. He had no previous plans or records to work from, but there were books written by people involved in previous conflicts.

After bumping into a schoolboy, he had the idea of getting sixth-formers to do the research for him - a co-operative headmaster set pupils the task of making a précis of all passages concerning escape.

ibid pp 9-14

Hutton's first task was to find and design maps that could be used by military personnel in enemy territory. He discovered that silk was the best material to use, because it was durable, could be concealed in small objects and did not rustle. But he had a problem with the ink running. Eventually he found that by adding pectin to the ink the problem was solved.

ibid pp 22-24

In 1942 he put together a 79-page top secret catalogue of devices, 'Per Ardua Libertas' - Liberty Through Adversity. The catalogue was for the use of American intelligence officers, and included coat buttons and gold teeth with hidden compasses and cameras disguised as cigarette lighters. In January 2013 a copy of the catalogue was sold for £5250 at Bonhams Gentleman's Library sale. <http://uk.news.yahoo.com> 25 January 2013. Accessed 5-10-2013

In 1944 there was some question of his being employed in the Special Operations Executive - a secret organization set up in 1940 to send spies and saboteurs behind enemy lines.

A note on his records by the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police states that although '18490' had 'nothing detrimental recorded', they had been informed in 1940 by MI5 that he was employed by MI9. On 11th February 1944 his vetting forms were stamped: *Not to be employed*. MI5 was advised to contact Lt Col Rawlinson 'concerning the above named', and there is reference to a telephone conversation. On the 15th February there is the additional note: *Not employed - Owing to traces*.

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/special-operations-executive> Accessed 31-10-2013

National Archives ref HS9/7714 CS79725

When he died in 1965, he was living at 5 Foales Court, Stapledon Lane, Ashburton

[Document researched and written by Anne Bligh with assistance from Sue Coney, 2013]