Extracts from the SOE descriptive catalogue of special devices

Manual explaining the sleeve gun

Catalogue ref: HS 7/28

SLEEVE GUN

Catalogue No. N 254.

DESCRIPTION. Like the Sleeve Gun Mk. I the Mk. II is a short length, silent, murder weapon, firing 0·32 inch ammunition. It is a single shot weapon designed for carriage in the sleeve with the trigger near the muzzle to aid unobtrusive firing when the gun is slid from the sleeve into the hand. The gun is intended for use in contact with the target, but may be used at ranges up to about three yards; the silencing element cannot be removed for replacement since the gun is not intended for prolonged use.

The gun is fitted at the rear end with a ring to which the carrying lanyard can be attached.

In appearance the main difference between the Sleeve Gun Mks. I and II, is in the cocking tube of the Mk. I, which runs parallel to the main cylinder of the gun for its whole length; the depth of the weapon is thus near to its maximum value of 1¾ inches throughout the length of the gun. The Mk. II has no cocking tube and the only considerable protuberance from the main cylinder is the trigger; except for the foremost inch of the gun, the depth is therefore little more than the cylinder diameter of 1¼ inches. As a result, the Mk. II is a slimmer weapon than the Mk. I and much neater in appearance.

METHOD OF USE. The gun is carried up the sleeve until required, it is then slid into the hand and the muzzle pressed against the victim, at the same time operating the trigger with the thumb. After use, the gun returns to its position up the sleeve and all evidence such as the empty case is retained in the gun.

DIMENSIONS. Overall length 8¾". Diam. 1¼". **WEIGHT.** 26 ozs.

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?

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.