

Kyrle Probus Club. 21 January 2016

A fascinating insight into the historical use of deception in warfare – a ‘bodyguard of lies’ – was presented by former GCHQ worker Robert Skelt to Kyrle Probus Club members on Thursday (January 21st).



Deception is considered in some quarters to be ‘very ungentlemanly,’ Robert said. ‘But various ways of deceiving the enemy have had a good outcome.’ It was Prime Minister Winston Churchill himself who said that in warfare, truth is so precious that it should always be accompanied by a ‘bodyguard of lies.’

An early example of deception was used thousands of years ago when the Ancient Greeks planted their Trojan Horse to trick their way to victory. But probably the most important wartime deception of all was carried out by the Allies to convince the opposing Germans that that D-Day invasion in 1944 would be at Calais and not Normandy.

Other contemporary ‘dirty tricks’ included the pretence by elderly Q-ships to look like merchant vessels hiding weaponry behind their false superstructure to surprise the lurking U-boats.

Camouflage became ‘something of an art’: cardboard aircraft; inflatable tanks which gave the appearance of a genuine Sherman tanks from the air, and the skilful use of mirrors to create illusions during the North African desert war of 1941-43.

Members heard the now-famous story about ‘Monty’s Double’ – the General Montgomery look-alike employed (on full General’s wages) to leak misinformation in Gibraltar, then a hive of spying activities.

Australian Sefton Delmer set up a ‘black propaganda station’ masquerading as a genuine news outlet, while one of the most ambitious tales of deception was the false warning that ‘man-eating

sharks' were loose in the English Channel, ready to attack downed German airmen. Dozens of enemy spies were captured thanks to Bletchley Park reading the German codes and many turned into double agents.

And James Bond author Ian Fleming came up with an idea called 'Operation Mincemeat' which fooled the Axis into thinking the Allies would invade Sardinia or Greece rather than the obvious target of Sicily in 1943. Thousands of German troops were rushed to the wrong place, a crucial triumph for the art of deception.