

Special Operations Executive

The Second World War saw a need for lots of different types of people to help with the war effort in lots of different ways.

One way was to become a Special Operations Executive or SOE, which meant helping to win the war whilst behind enemy lines.

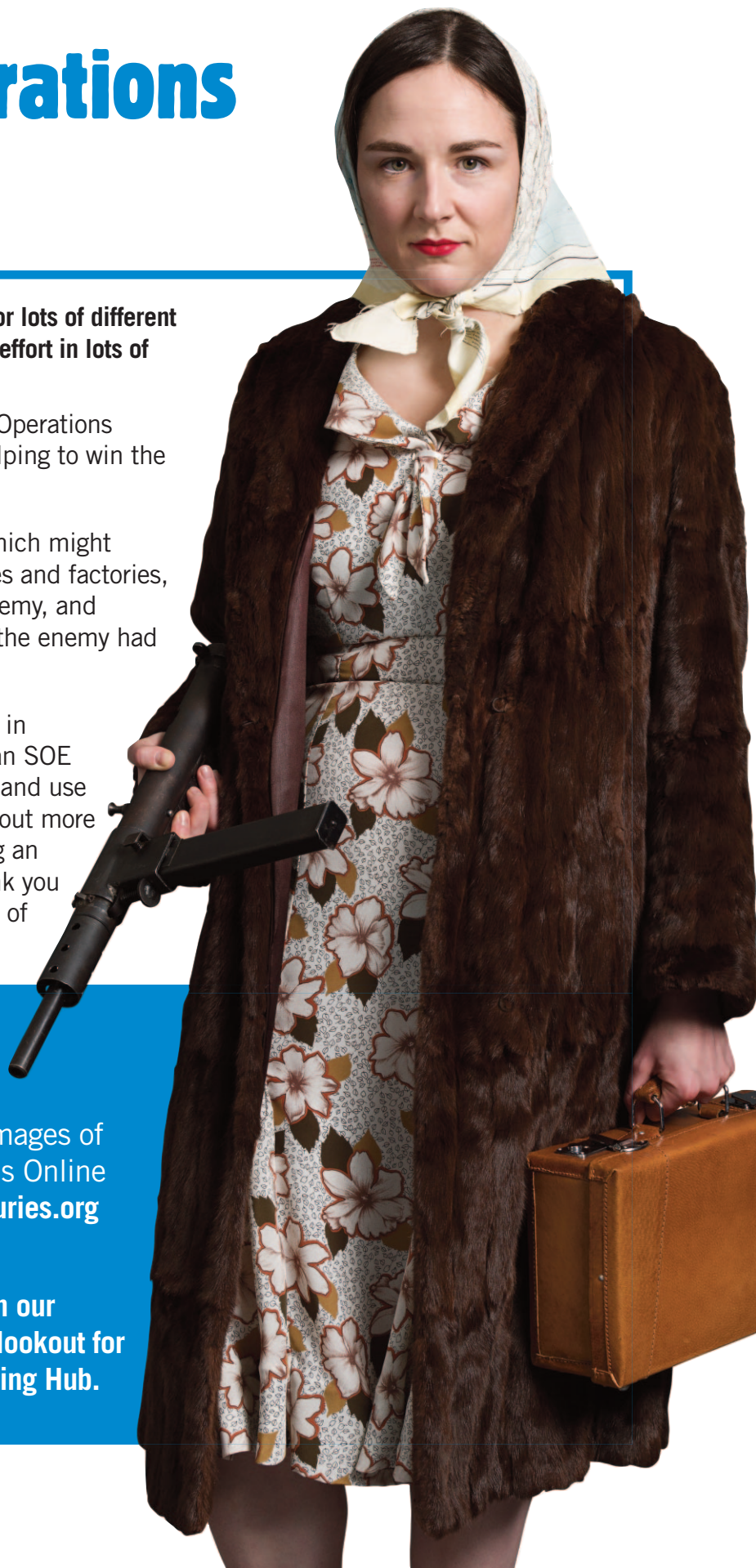
SOE agents had many missions, which might include destroying enemy train lines and factories, gathering information about the enemy, and helping people to fight back when the enemy had taken over where they lived.

There was a lot of training involved in becoming an agent. Especially as an SOE agent needed to know how to fight and use weapons. Continue reading to find out more about the weapons and the training an SOE would go through. Do you think you would have what it takes to be part of Winston Churchill's secret army?

Additional resources

You can see lots of close-up images of the weapons on our Collections Online website: collections.royalarmouries.org

Watch a video all about SOEs on our YouTube channel. Also, keep a lookout for more videos on our Home Learning Hub.



Weapons and Training

Sten Submachine Gun MK III

The Sten Submachine Gun was one of the best guns for SOE agents as it is easy to take apart and put back together, therefore it can be hidden away from the enemy very easily. It is easy to fire but it is also very dangerous. Many people who used the gun trapped their fingers and skin in the mechanism while using it. Ouch!



Fairburn and Sykes Knife



SOE agents would need to learn how to fight in hand-to-hand combat, should they find themselves in any sticky situations. The knife you can see was designed especially to be used for this purpose...gruesome stuff! They would also have to learn other skills such as martial arts, lock-picking and creating disguises.

Brain power

However an agent's most effective weapon was their brain. Agents needed to be very clever and skilled to carry out their missions successfully, whilst staying under cover at all times. SOEs were usually sent on missions in other countries. In order to blend in they needed to be able to speak the language and be aware of that country's local customs. They also needed to know how to read maps so they could move around a country easily.

International Morse Code

Agents would also need to know Morse Code so they could send and receive messages quickly. Morse Code uses 'dots' and 'dashes' instead of letters and numbers... that is a lot of dots and dashes to learn! Go to page 4 and see if you can crack the code.

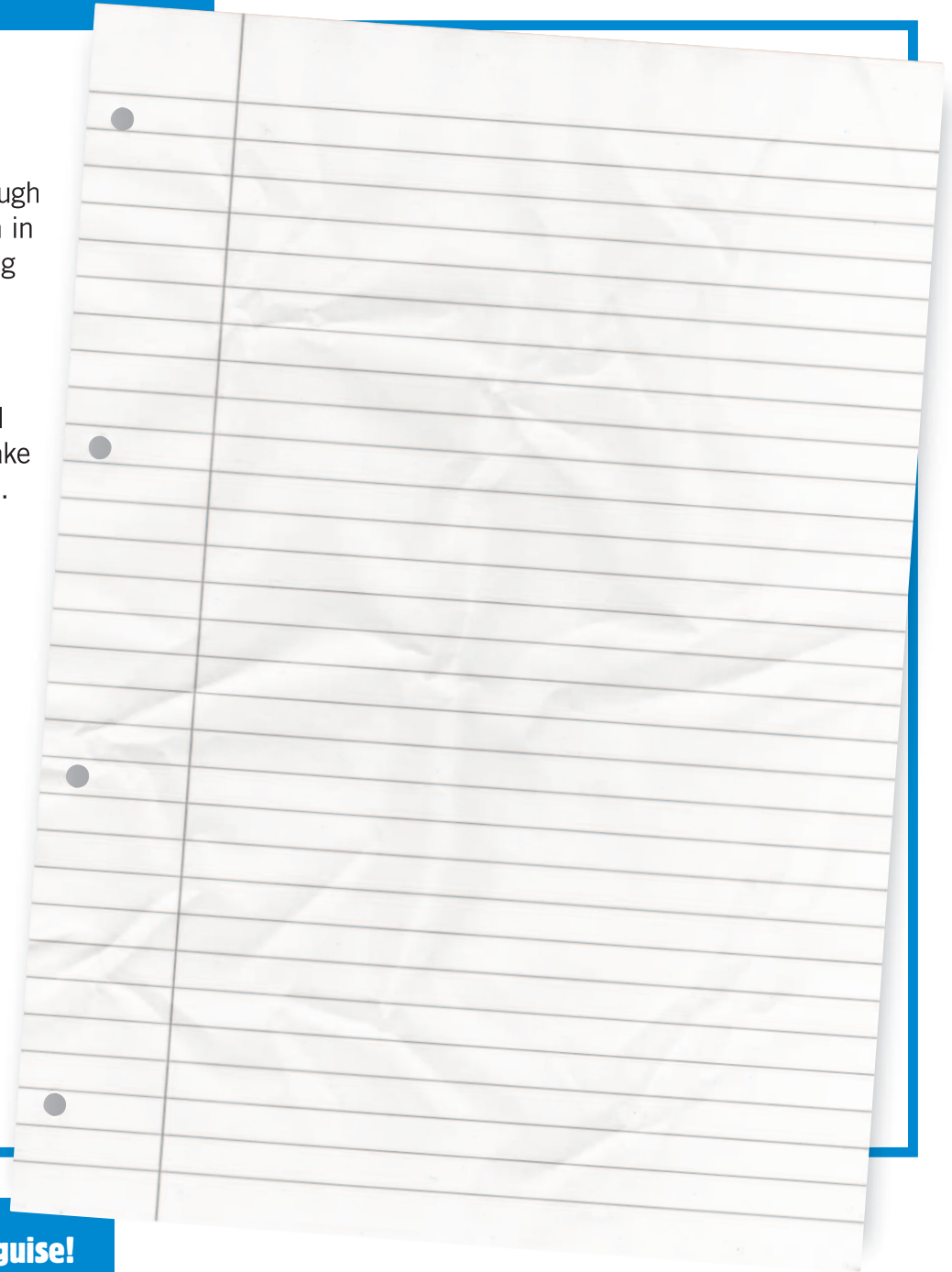
Activities page

Apply to be an SOE Agent

Do you think you have what it takes to be an SOE?

Write a letter to Hugh Dalton, the person in charge of recruiting SOEs.

Don't forget to describe your amazing skills and why you would make such a good agent.



Change your disguise!

Use your imagination and skills to change how you look!

Challenge everyone in your house to change their appearance and put a time limit on it... you might only have a few minutes if you were on a mission!

Can you crack the code?

Below is Morse Code for the English language, and a message for you to decipher. See how quickly you can decode the message.

A	•—	N	—•
B	—•••	O	— — —
C	—•—•	P	•— — •
D	—••	Q	— — • —
E	•	R	• — •
F	•• — •	S	•••
G	— — •	T	—
H	••••	U	•• —
I	••	V	••• —
J	• — — —	W	• — —
K	— • —	X	— •• —
L	• — ••	Y	— • — —
M	— —	Z	— — ••

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Why not have a go at setting your own messages in code.

Answer: Keep calm and carry on

Keep in touch

We would love to read your application letter.
Please email them to educate.leeds@armouries.org.uk