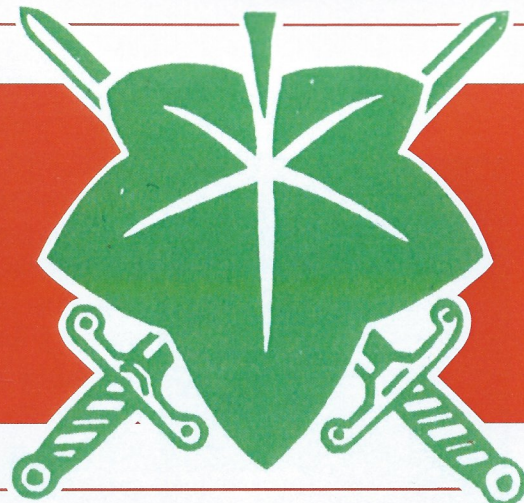


THE FORMATION SIGN

JOURNAL OF THE MILITARY HERALDRY SOCIETY



When Shall We Three Meet Again...

With the New Year just begun may Madam Treasurer and I start by wishing all members a Happy New Year. We had a good Christmas and like everyone, hope that 2022 gets better as it goes along.

Every year those buying me Christmas presents have a difficult job finding something appropriate and the end result is usually several – much appreciated - book tokens. Shortly after receiving this year's batch I took myself to Waterstone's and came away with a new book simply entitled *MI9* written by Second World War historian Helen Fry which now sits alongside volumes on my shelves covering MI5 and MI6 as well as the book *MI9 Escape & Evasion 1939-1945* written in the 1970s by MRD Foot and JM Langley, both of whom held senior positions in MI9. Whilst admitting I found the earlier book more readable the new volume benefits greatly from material not available in the 1970s, particularly that on IS9.

The new Military Intelligence department known as MI9 was created in December 1940 to 'facilitate escapes of prisoners of war', assist their return to the United Kingdom and collect and distribute any information they had obtained during their escape. Known as Intelligence School 9, its north London training centre which briefed service intelligence staff on escape and evasion techniques became so well recognised in the services that IS9 became the cover designation for MI9 field units serving in the Middle East and Italy.



Formed on 14th January 1944, IS9 (Western European Area), a joint Anglo-American unit with a staff of fourteen British officers and 26 ORs, was tasked with ensuring the continuation of escape and evasion activities and establishing centres to collect and disseminate intelligence collected from successful escapers. Its operations continued until disbanded on 31st July 1945, its last task asking returning prisoners to complete forms describing their experiences in captivity. Its work in Europe after D-Day produced one of the rarest cloth badges of the period - the three witches shown here. The only picture so far discovered of the badge

worn – see the next page - shows it in 1946 on the service dress of Royal Canadian Artillery Officer Captain George Swan, a pilot who had served with 664 Air Observation Post Squadron, RCAF which had carried Dutch officers over the front lines in April 1945 using short range radios to contact Dutch resistance members.

When questioned by our former member Len Whittaker in the late 1970s, Colonel Langley could not recall the sign worn on uniform, but a June 1945 letter signed by Major Airey Neave confirms its use.

Unit Badges of I.S.9(W.E.A.)

- 1) *The Unit known as I.S.9.(W.E.A.) has now been disbanded and the three witches badge which was worn on uniform and painted on cars is no longer recognized by the military authorities.*
- 2) *It will therefore be removed forthwith from all cars and uniforms.*
- 3) *The Military Police have been informed of the above.*

Further information from Helen Fry's book and other sources shows that the three witches appeared in a number of guises...