OPERATION MINCEMEAT

THE STUDY GUIDE

PRODUCED BY

tdf

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

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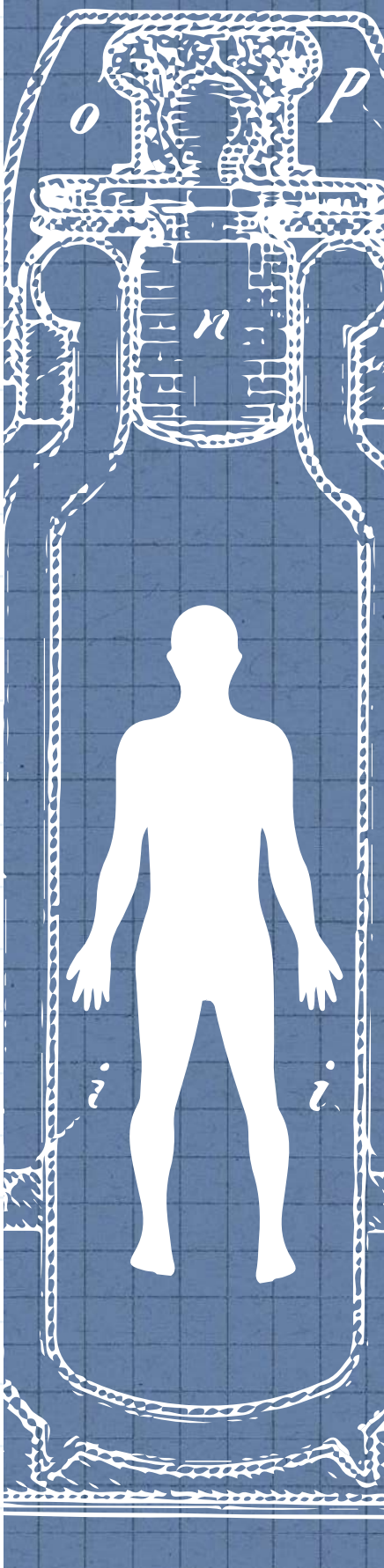


INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING

AKA
BACKGROUND INFO
YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT'S THIS SHOW ALL ABOUT?

***Operation Mincemeat* is a fast-paced, high-energy musical comedy based on a true story from World War II. It follows a small team of British military intelligence (MI5) operatives that comes up with an outlandish plan to trick the Nazis before the Allied invasion of Sicily.**

The musical was conceived, written, and composed by David Cumming, Felix Hagan, Natasha Hodgson, and Zoë Roberts, all members of the London-based musical comedy troupe SpitLip. Cumming, Hodgson, and Roberts star alongside Jak Malone and Claire-Marie Hall, and Robert Hastie directs. This Fringe-style spoof made its way from an 80-seat London theatre to the West End where it won the 2024 Olivier Award for Best New Musical. It transferred to Broadway in 2025 and received four Tony nominations including Best Musical. Malone won a Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Featured Role in a Musical.

Five actors play more than 80 characters using:

- Slapstick and silly humor
- Song and dance
- Cross-dressing and quick costume changes
- Clever wordplay and satire

RIGHT
THE OPERATION
MINCEMEAT CAST

HISTORY LESSON!

By 1943, the Allies were close to being defeated by the Nazis. British intelligence launched a top secret mission called Operation Mincemeat. The goal? To trick Nazi Germany into defending the wrong place. Against all odds, it succeeded!

HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED:

- Two British officers, **Ewen Montagu and Charles Cholmondeley**, came up with a crazy idea.
- They took the body of a dead man, **Glyndwr Michael**, and gave him a fake identity: **Major William Martin**. They planted bogus top secret documents on his corpse.
- **The body washed up on the coast of Spain**, where it was found by Spanish fishermen. The Spanish authorities turned over the documents found on the body to the Germans.
- The papers claimed the Allies planned to **invade Greece and Sardinia, not Sicily**.
- The Germans believed it. **They moved troops away from Sicily**.
- On **July 9, 1943**, the Allies invaded Sicily with little resistance, helping turn the tide of the war.

WHY IT MATTERS:

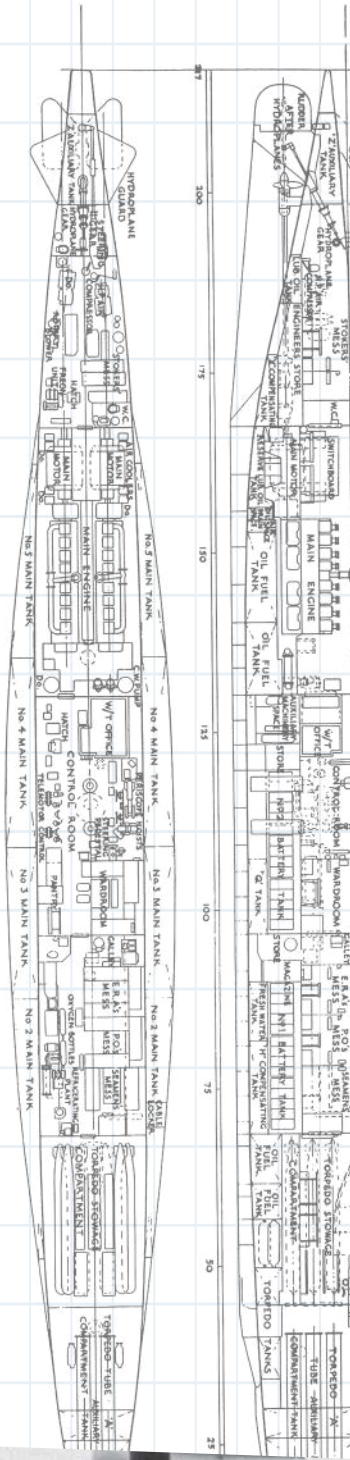
OPERATION MINCEMEAT IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL DECEPTIONS IN MILITARY HISTORY.

LEFT
CHARLES CHOLMONDELEY AND EWEN MONTAGU TRANSPORTING THE BODY OF 'MAJOR WILLIAM MARTIN' TO THE OFFICERS OF THE HMS SERAPH, 17 APRIL 1943

HOW ABOUT A PLOT SUMMARY TO READ BEFORE THE SHOW?

ACT 1

It's **1943** and British intelligence officers **Ewen Montagu** and **Charles Cholmondeley** are assigned to create a deception strategy to mislead Nazi Germany about the **planned Allied invasion of Southern Europe**. They propose planting fake documents on the body of an unidentified dead man that suggest a false invasion target. The team, including MI5 staff members **Hester Leggatt** and **Jean Leslie**, constructs a detailed backstory for the invented persona: **Major William Martin**. They gather personal items, forge letters, and figure out how to deliver the body to **Spain**, where they hope it will be discovered by German agents. The act ends with preparations to transport the body aboard the submarine **HMS Seraph**.



"S" Class Submarine.

ACT 2

The HMS Seraph releases the body **off the coast of Spain**. Spanish authorities recover it and the bogus documents end up being passed to German intelligence. As the team in London waits for confirmation that the plan worked, internal tensions rise and **they reflect on their respective roles in the scheme**. Because of the ruse, German forces ultimately **divert troops away from Sicily** and **the Allied invasion proceeds** with less resistance. **The operation is declared a success**, but the team acknowledges the **personal and ethical implications** of using a real man's body to carry out this deception.

RIGHT
THE CREW OF THE HMS SERAPH

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS?

EWEN MONTAGU

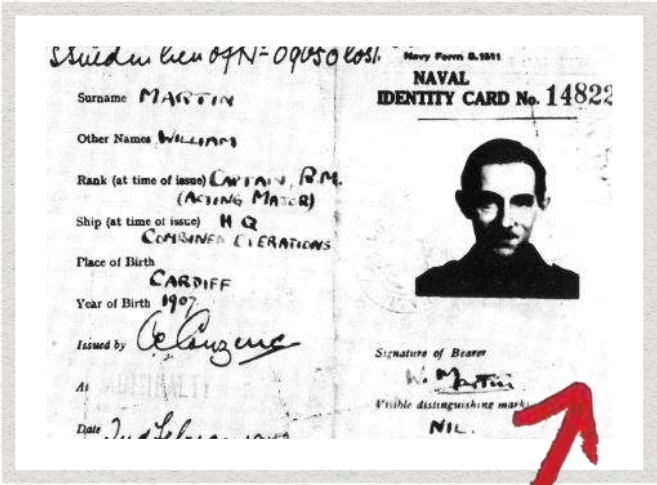
PLAYED BY NATASHA HODGSON

British naval intelligence officer who co-developed Operation Mincemeat.

CHARLES CHOLMONDELEY

PLAYED BY DAVID CUMMING

MI5 officer who co-developed Operation Mincemeat.



IAN FLEMING

British naval intelligence officer who later created the James Bond novels.

MAJOR WILLIAM MARTIN OF THE ROYAL MARINES / GLYNDWR MICHAEL

Fictional persona given to an unidentified body, eventually determined to be **Glyndwr Michael**, an indigent Welshman who died in London.

JOHN "JOHNNY" BEVAN

PLAYED BY
ZOË ROBERTS

Head of the London Controlling Section, responsible for Allied deception operations.

JEAN LESLIE

PLAYED BY
CLAIRE-MARIE HALL

MI5 secretary who provided the photograph used for Major William Martin's fictional fiancée.

HESTER LEGGATT

PLAYED BY
JAK MALONE

MI5 staff member who contributed to building Major William Martin's bogus background.

WILLIE WATKINS

American fighter pilot who crash-landed off the coast of Huelva at the same time that the body of Major Martin was meant to wash up there.

IVOR MONTAGU

Film producer and political activist; brother of Ewen Montagu.

SIR BERNARD SPILSBURY

English forensic pathologist who examined the body used in Operation Mincemeat.

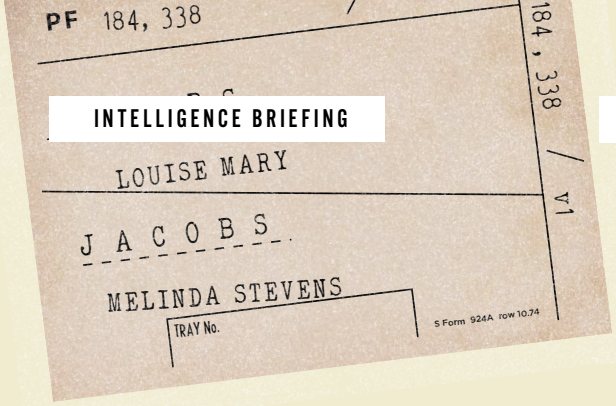
CAPTAIN BILL JEWELL

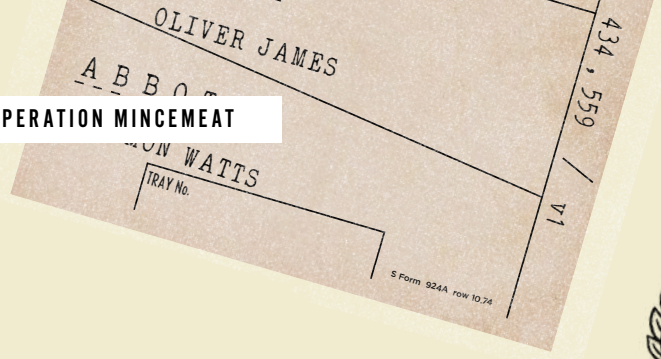
Royal Navy officer who commanded the HMS Seraph, which delivered the body to Spain.

GERIANNE PÉREZ, BRANDON CONTRERAS, AMANDA JILL ROBINSON, SAM HARTLEY, JESSI KIRTLEY

INTERESTING FACT:

The true identity of Major William Martin was kept secret until 1996. Glyndwr Michael's name was uncovered in the Public Record Office by Roger Morgan, an amateur historian. The body of Major William Martin was buried with full military honors in Huelva, Spain. In 1998, an inscription was added to the gravestone that reads: "Glyndwr Michael Served as Major William Martin, RM."





CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The code name Operation Mincemeat was a way to throw off detection as well as a dark joke, suggesting that the body and the false documents would thoroughly chew up the Nazis. British intelligence often gave its missions quirky names to elude its enemies.

In pairs: Discuss—What did you initially think this show would be about based on its title?

Imagine: You are part of a team in charge of naming this mission. Come up with a few other misleading names that could have tricked the Nazis. The sillier or stranger the better! Each pair presents one name to the class.

Class vote: The class picks its favorites.

Reflect: Why would an outrageous name be useful in a real espionage mission? How does naming affect perception?

Go further: Research other military deception missions with code names during World War II.

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION!

Before spy novelist Ian Fleming created the iconic character James Bond, he was a commander in British naval intelligence. He served as the assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral John Henry Godfrey. In 1939, Fleming and Godfrey created the Trout Memo, which likened deceiving the enemy to fly-fishing. The memo contained 54 suggestions for bamboozling the enemy at sea, including planting false papers on a dead body and dropping it somewhere the Germans would find it. Fleming apparently got the idea from a detective novel by Basil Thomson. In 1943, Charles Cholmondeley picked up on the scheme and presented it to his superiors. Thus Operation Mincemeat was born, right out of fiction!

WORLD WAR II & OPERATION MINCEMEAT TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER 13, 1939
Germany invades Poland. World War II begins. Britain and France declare war.

SPRING 1940
Germany invades Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. France surrenders.

FALL 1940
Germany, Italy, and Japan sign the **Tripartite Pact** in Berlin, marking the official creation of the Axis powers.

SUMMER-FALL 1940
The Battle of Britain: Germany leads air attacks on Britain.

JUNE 1941
Germany invades the Soviet Union.

DECEMBER 7, 1941
Japan attacks the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

DECEMBER 8-11, 1941
The US declares war on Japan. Germany and Italy declare war on the US.

1942
The war escalates across Europe, the Pacific, and North Africa. The Allies, a group of countries that signed the Declaration of the United Nations, begin plotting to retake Europe from the Axis powers. The idea for **Operation Mincemeat** takes shape in British intelligence circles.

1943
The Allies make plans to invade Europe through Sicily.

JANUARY 1943
Montagu & Cholmondeley's plan: Two British intelligence officers propose a bold idea—use a corpse carrying fake invasion plans to fool the Nazis.

JANUARY 24, 1943

Glyndwr Michael, a then-unidentified homeless Welshman, dies in London. His body is chosen for the mission due to his anonymity and the condition of his corpse. The invented persona of Major William Martin is created, complete with personal effects (a love letter, theatre tickets, ID, etc.).

APRIL 1943

Operation Mincemeat is executed. The body of Major William Martin is released from the British submarine ***HMS Seraph*** off the coast of **Huelva, Spain**. The body washes up on the shore of Spain.

MAY 1943

Discovery and investigation: Spanish officials find the body. Despite Spain being neutral in the war, Spanish intelligence shares the documents with **Nazi agents**.

MAY 1943

Hitler takes the bait: The falsified documents convince Hitler that the Allies will be invading Greece and Sardinia.

JULY 1943

The Allies invade Sicily and the Germans are surprised.

AUGUST 1943

Sicily secured: The Allies take control of Sicily with far fewer casualties than anticipated.

SEPTEMBER 1943

Italy surrenders. Germany occupies Northern Italy.

JUNE 6, 1944

D-Day: The Allies invade Normandy, France.

MAY 8, 1945

Germany surrenders, marking Victory in Europe Day, aka VE Day.

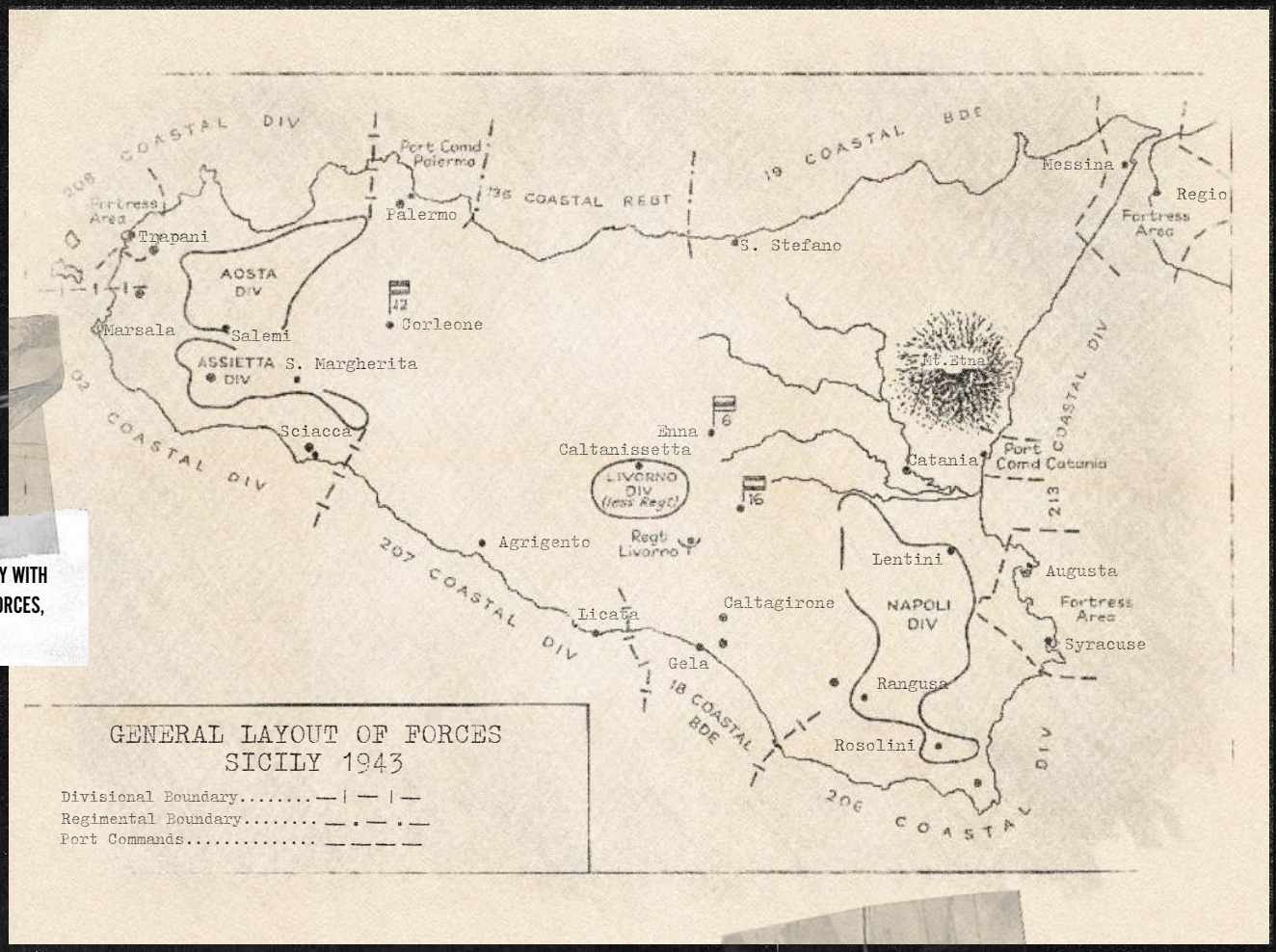
AUGUST 6-9, 1945

The US drops atomic bombs on Japan in **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki**.

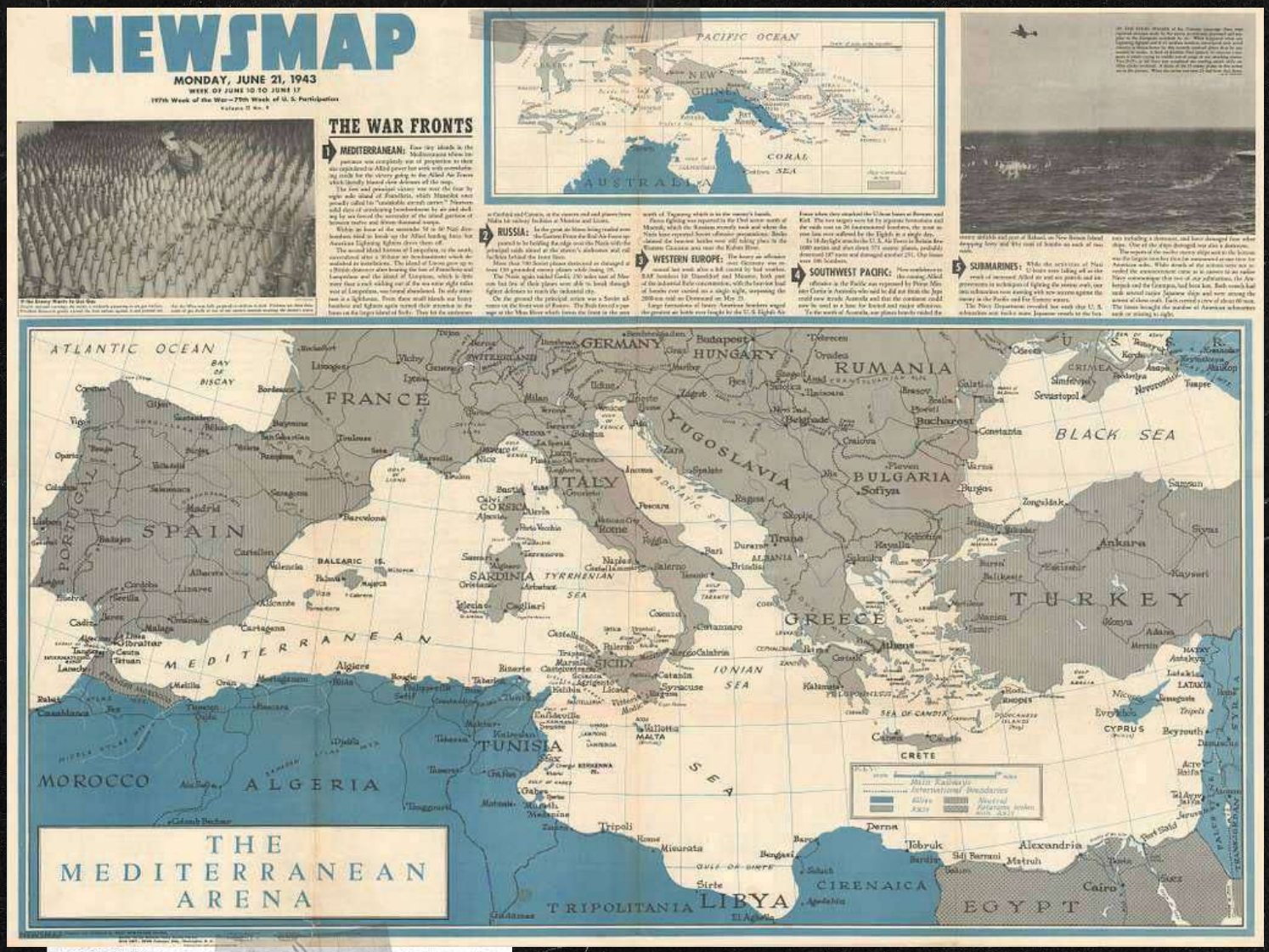
SEPTEMBER 2, 1945

Japan surrenders on August 15 and signs the Instrument of Surrender on September 2. World War II officially ends.

LEFT
MAP OF ITALY, 1760

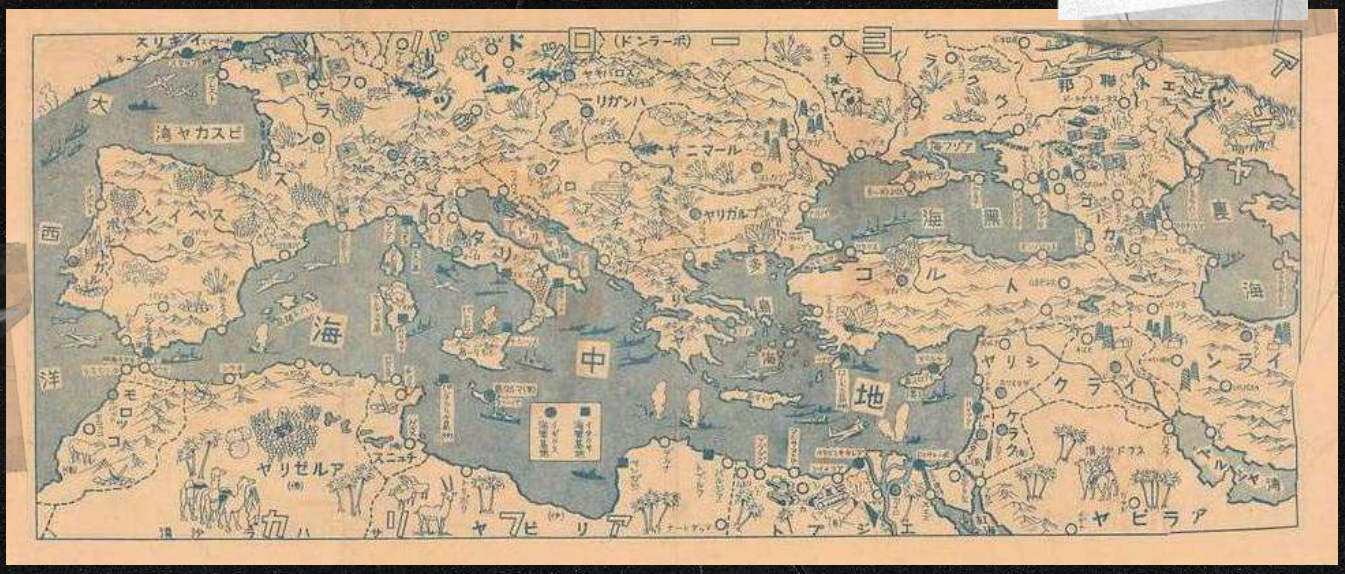


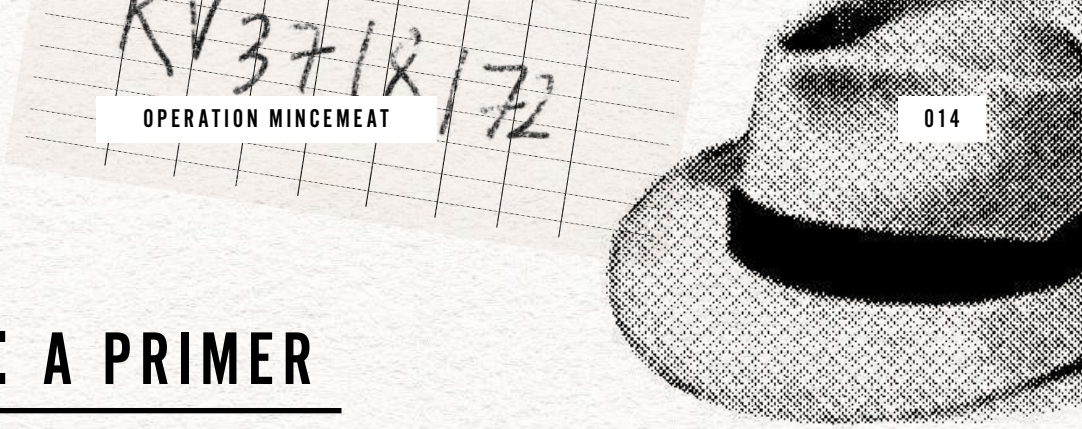
RIGHT
MAP OF SICILY WITH LAYOUT OF FORCES, 1943



TOP
MAP OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, INCLUDING SPAIN, ITALY, GREECE, AND THE ISLANDS OF SARDINIA AND SICILY, 1943

BOTTOM
JAPANESE MAP OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, 1942





ESPIONAGE: A PRIMER ON BRITISH INTELLIGENCE

Espionage played a critical role in World War II. It was used by both Allied and Axis powers to gain military advantage, gather secrets, learn about surprise attacks, and mislead the enemy. Britain became one of the leading players in global espionage. This was a different version of war, one waged in offices, safe houses, and code rooms rather than on the battlefield.

BOND… JAMES BOND, i.e., WHO WERE THE SPIES?!

MI5 (similar to the FBI)

The domestic counterintelligence agency of the United Kingdom, focused on protecting national security, combating espionage, and preventing sabotage.

MI6 (similar to the CIA)

The foreign intelligence service of the United Kingdom, responsible for covert overseas intelligence gathering and analysis. MI6 established networks in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, often under diplomatic cover.

London Controlling Section (LCS)

Formed in 1941, this department planned large-scale deception operations.

Special Operations Executive (SOE)

Formed in 1940, this agency conducted espionage, sabotage, and reconnaissance in German-occupied Europe and provided aid to local resistance movements.

Naval Intelligence Division

This department helped run secret operations.

WHAT IS ESPIONAGE ANYWAY??

Human intelligence

Info gathered from people: spies, informants, or undercover agents.

Signals intelligence

Intercepting and decoding enemy communications, such as radio messages and encrypted codes. A famous example is **British code breakers cracking Germany's Enigma cipher** at Bletchley Park.

Counterintelligence

Detecting and stopping enemy spies or double agents. A famous example is **MI5's Double-Cross System**, which turned captured German spies into double agents working for Britain.

Deception operations

Creating false information to confuse or mislead the enemy about actual intentions. **Operation Mincemeat** is one such operation.

Sabotage

Deliberate destruction of equipment, transportation, or communication systems to disrupt enemy plans.

Covert propaganda

Spreading false or biased information to influence public opinion or enemy morale.

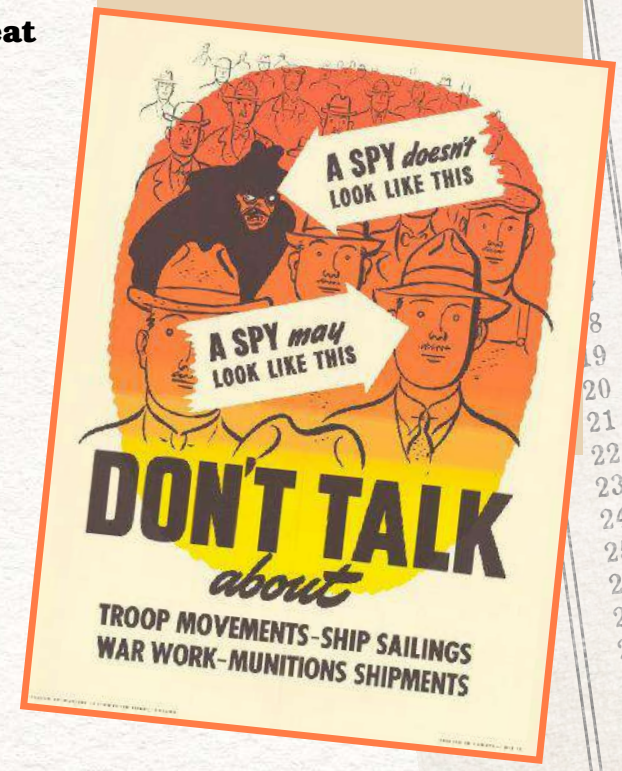
Surveillance

Monitoring enemy activity, such as tracking troop movements, photographing military sites, or eavesdropping on communications.

MANY BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENTS HAD INTERESTING BACKGROUNDS AS:

- Theatre artists, journalists, and writers, including Ian Fleming, who later created James Bond
- Linguists, chess champions, and code breakers
- Women played critical roles as agents, couriers, analysts, and deception planners.

Recruitment often favored those who could lie well, think fast, and stay calm under pressure, regardless of military training.



CODE BREAKING

Bletchley Park was Britain's secret code-breaking center during World War II. Linguists, mathematicians, and intelligence officers worked around the clock to crack enemy codes, most notably the German Enigma cipher. Led by **Alan Turing** (subject of the feature film *The Imitation Game*), the team was quite successful at decoding German military messages, which gave the Allies a major advantage and helped shorten the war. The work done at Bletchley Park was kept secret for decades and is now recognized as one of the most important intelligence efforts of the 20th century.

TOP
ALAN TURING

The **German Enigma cipher** was a machine used by Nazi Germany during World War II to send encrypted messages. It looked like a typewriter but used a series of rotating wheels and electrical circuits to scramble letters into secret codes that changed with each keystroke. The Enigma was considered nearly unbreakable because there were more than 150 quintillion possible combinations for each message.

LEFT
THE ENIGMA CIPHER

TOP
CODE BREAKERS AT BLETCHLEY PARK, 1943

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION: CRACK THE CODE!

Letter = Number Code

A = 1	B = 2	C = 3	D = 4	E = 5	F = 6	G = 7
H = 8	I = 9	J = 10	K = 11	L = 12	M = 13	N = 14
O = 15	P = 16	Q = 17	R = 18	S = 19	T = 20	U = 21
	V = 22	W = 23	X = 24	Y = 25	Z = 26	

- Create an unusual spy name for yourself. Write it using the code above.
- Swap your code with a partner and decode each other's spy names.
- Plant an encoded two-to-four-word message in Major William Martin's briefcase. Ex: "The body is fake!"
- Exchange your code with a partner and decode each other's messages.

Reflect: Would Operation Mincemeat be successful today with modern technology? Why or why not? What kind of deception techniques would need to be implemented in our digital world?

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

YOUR MISSION:

DECEIVE THE ENEMY!

Create a **social media presence** (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, X) for Major William Martin. Working in groups, pick one strategy to focus on:

DISTRACTION CAMPAIGN

What kind of content would Major William Martin post to divert attention away from the real invasion of Sicily? Selfies, snaps, food photos, check-ins at fake locations? Create three to five posts.

FAKE NEWS

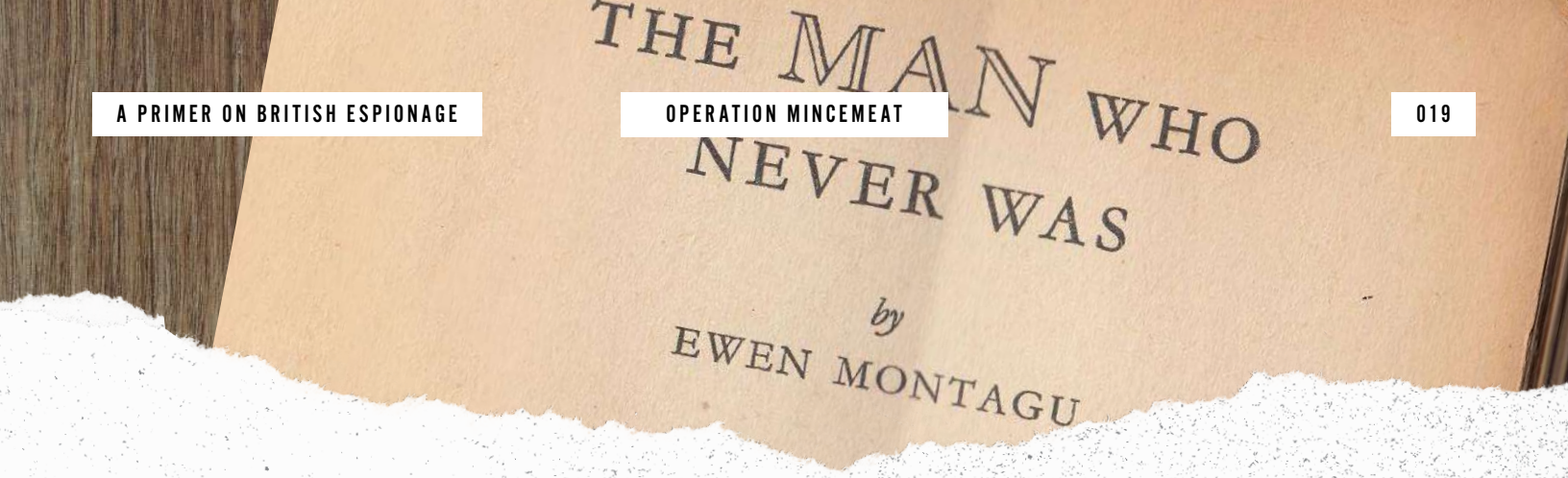
Create a fake news profile that would trick the enemy into believing the false mission is real. Examples could be fake military orders, false headlines, misleading quotes from officials, and AI-enhanced photos. Create a sample feed with three to five examples.

PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION

Design posts or videos that push a specific agenda or stir confusion. Examples could be invented quotes from seemingly reputable news sources, conspiracy theories, fake photos or maps, and emotional testimonies from bystanders. Create a fake bio and/or tagline for Major William Martin's account along with three to five posts.

EACH GROUP PRESENTS ITS SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO THE CLASS.

Reflect: What made your posts feel real or persuasive? How does fake news spread and why is it believable? Why are we so susceptible to what we are told by the media? What are some examples of online deception today? How are they similar to these wartime deception campaigns?



Go further: Recommended films, books, and television series

Film

- ***The Imitation Game*** *(2014)* – Feature film about mathematician Alan Turing and his team at Bletchley Park, tasked with breaking the German Enigma code.
- ***A Call to Spy*** *(2019)* – The stories of three female spies who worked with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in France.
- ***Operation Mincemeat*** *(2021)* – the film version of the story, currently streaming on Netflix.

Television

- ***The Bletchley Circle*** (British TV series, ITV) – A mystery drama series set in 1952-53 about four women who worked as code breakers at Bletchley Park.

Books

- ***The Man Who Never Was*** by Ewen Montagu (1953)
- ***Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory*** by Ben Macintyre (2010)
- ***Catch-22*** by Joseph Heller (1961)

FEMINISM:

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WAR

FIGHT LIKE A GIRL... AND CHANGE LIVES!

HOW WORLD WAR II CHALLENGED GENDER ROLES

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

DON'T BE SCARED! BEING A FEMINIST IS BEING HUMAN.

Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes.

WOMEN WERE THE BACKBONE OF WORLD WAR II—YOU READ THAT RIGHT.

WORLD WAR II HERSTORY

Prior to World War II, women, generally speaking, were expected to get married, be good wives, raise children, and manage the household. During the war, their place in the workforce grew exponentially. As men were deployed, their jobs became vacant. In order for society to continue to function, women stepped in and filled positions previously held by men. To encourage as many women as possible to join the war efforts, the British government launched extensive women in the workforce propaganda campaigns.

Women of color, single women, and single mothers already participated in the workforce prior to the war. The realities of World War II opened up greater workforce opportunities for women, particularly those from marginalized groups. Unfortunately, they also endured sexual harassment, discrimination, and severe social stigmas.

TOP
AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE (ATS) RECRUITS EN ROUTE TO COWSHOT MANOR CAMP, 1941

LEFT
ATS SOLDIER POSING IN FRONT OF A RECRUTING POSTER, 1941

TOP
JEAN LESLIE AKA 'PAM'

SO WHO WAS THIS PAM LADY ANYWAY?

Pam is fictitious but she sure felt real.

Jean Leslie, **portrayed in the musical by Claire-Marie Hall**, was an **18-year-old secretary who became an MI5 British intelligence officer** and played a crucial role in executing Operation Mincemeat. She cleverly helped create the **fictitious fiancée, Pam, for the fictitious Major William Martin, aka the Trojan corpse**. The bathing suit photograph of "Pam," which was actually Leslie, is believed to be one of the main items that convinced Hitler.

Hester Leggatt, portrayed in the musical by Jak Malone, was a **senior secretary at MI5**. In collaboration with Leslie, she helped flesh out Pam. **Leggatt was responsible for writing believable letters from Pam to Bill, aka Major William Martin**. The bathing suit photo and the spectacular love letters led to the success of Operation Mincemeat.

Leggatt's contribution to World War II had been lost until the creators of *Operation Mincemeat* turned to their loyal London fans to help recover her legacy. Miraculously, they did. They discovered that her name had been misspelled for decades as Leggett! Once spelled correctly, MI5 confirmed her identity and the full picture of her life appeared.

The fans even found Freya Leggatt, Hester's great-great niece. She had no idea about Hester or her efforts in the war. In 2023, a plaque was put up in Hester Leggatt's honor in London's Fortune Theatre, where *Operation Mincemeat* performs. The musical's devoted fans made all this happen. Did you just get chills? We ABSOLUTELY did!

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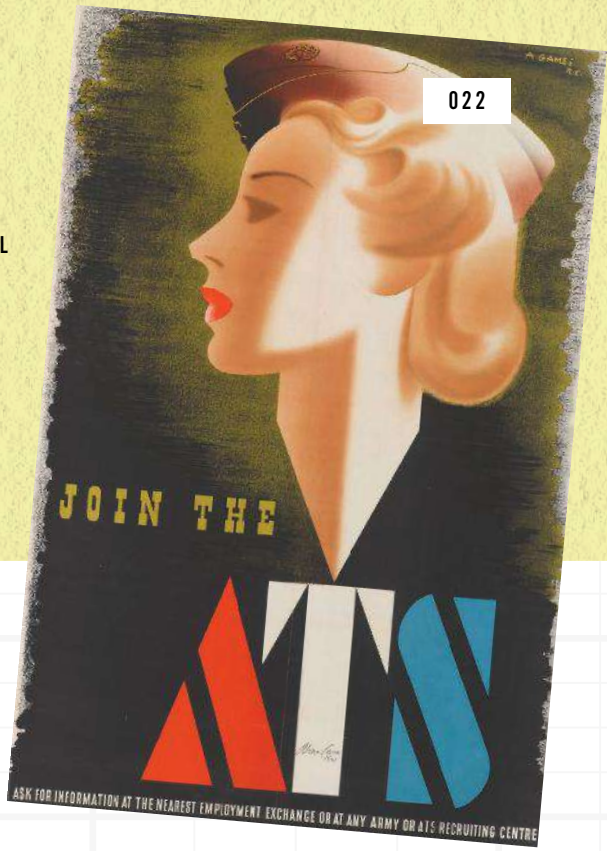
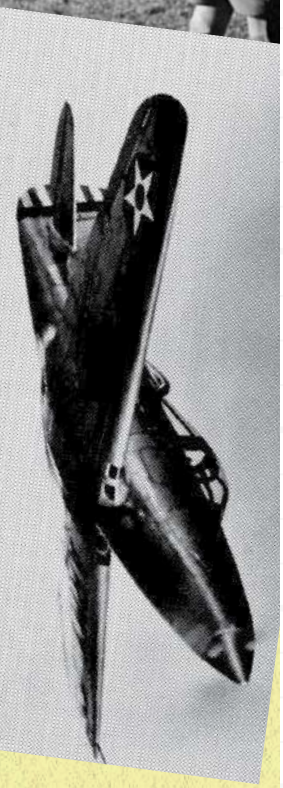
LEFT
ATS PERSONNEL OPERATING A SEARCHLIGHT, 1939-1945





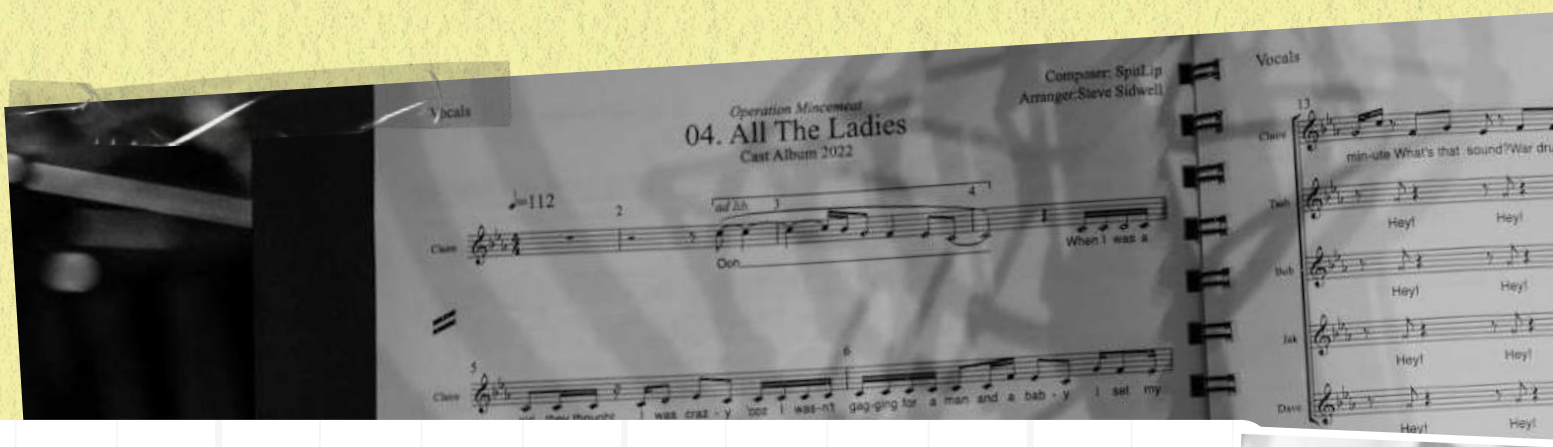
BACK TO WORLD WAR II HERSTORY

As demands in the workforce increased, women took on active military roles; for example, many joined the anti-aircraft defense. **The 93rd Searchlight Regiment, Royal Artillery, was the first all-female British air defense unit in World War II**. They provided airspace security from enemy aircraft.

"It is part of the nature of being British, that at times of stress and hardship the best way of handling these situations seems to be either to joke about it, or write a song about it. This is a song for the Searchlight Girls:
"When the barrage opens out to meet the invading hun
Everybody's thoughts go out to the Girls Behind the Guns
But they are not the only girls in the frontline every night
For suddenly from out of nowhere comes a blinding light
A long accusing finger pointing upwards to the sky
To tell the guns and fighters 'there the raiders lie'
They're the Girls that do a job - A far from easy one
But equally important in keeping off the hun
Unloved, unwanted - fact few people know
That when the beams are out at night the girls are down below
But if they help in some small way to keep the hun at bay
They're satisfied
And don't give two hoots what people say"

— Excerpted from the website A.T.S. Remembered

After the war ended, men stepped back into their previous roles and women were laid off or demoted. Yet women's desire for equality, freedom, and financial independence remained. Women were the backbone of World War II and their actions helped inspire the Women's Rights Movement in the 1960s and '70s.



EEK, THIS IS DARK STUFF. LET'S SING ABOUT IT INSTEAD!

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

SONG ANALYSIS OF "ALL THE LADIES"

- Provide the lyrics on a SmartBoard etc. and on paper to give students different points of entry.
- Play the song in class as the students follow along with the lyrics.
- As the students listen, have them underline at least three lyrics that stick out to them. Once the song finishes, they should share those lyrics.

JEAN
Oooooo.
When I was a girl they thought I was crazy
Cos I wasn't gagging for a man and a baby
I set my sights on joining the navy but...

MERYL/BERYL/CHERYL
"This isn't the right kind of life for a lady"

JEAN
Okay. Guess it's a no-go
Take my double X chromosome and go home
And stagnate. Cook, clean and sweep the grate
And just wait til somebody wants to procreate
But wait a minute. What's that sound?

War drums coming. Getting so loud
And all of the menfolk are like

BERYL
"There's a fight"

MERYL
"what fun!"

CHERYL
"Grab a gun"

BERYL
"kill the hun"

MERYL/BERYL/CHERYL
"there's a war to be won"

JEAN
like that they're overseas
Creating job vacancies

It's plain to see the way to get from A to Z
For us is filling up the factories
And so let's go roll up our sleeves
And show our expertise
No more riding side-saddle
It's time for our battle to start

ALL
Get in the system.

JEAN
Rip it apart.

ALL
All the ladies, on your marks get set
Take this war for all you can get
This conflict's our best

CONTINUED>

opportunity yet
Now the coast is clear and
it's time to move on up!

HESTER
Ladies, what on earth is all
this noise! Just be sensible
for goodness sake. And
JUST PIPE DOWN

MERYL
Pipe down

BERYL
Settle down

CHERYL
Simmer down

JEAN
Only thing that's coming
down is the walls
Cos all the men said
ALL: 'ciao'
so it's our time now
And we're gonna grab life by
the b-

HESTER
Language if you please!!

JEAN
Sorry matron, but I'm sick of
sitting, waiting
So if there's a job going
spare, I'll take it

MERYL/BERYL/CHERYL
Just gotta wait for a guy to
die and vacate it

HESTER
Girls!
CHERYL
Now It's time to crash their
party

HESTER
Girls!

MERYL
We're not gonna back down
now are we?

HESTER
Girls!!

BERYL
Be a spy

JEAN
modern day Mata Hari

ALL
Rise from the bottom to the
top, we're an army

BERYL: Step Up!
CHERYL: Sisters!
JEAN: Come on!

MERYL: Line up!
BERYL: Get up!
CHERYL: Misters!
JEAN: You're done!
MERYL: Time's up!

MERYL: Let's make progress
CHERYL: Get paid
BERYL: Oh yes!

ALL
Bid those boys goodbye!
Keep on 'til we're running
MI5

HESTER
Youth!

ALL
All the ladies, on your marks
get set
Take this war for all you can
get
This conflict's our best
opportunity yet
Now the coast is clear and
it's time to move on
Ladies, on your marks get
set
Take this war for all you can
get
Cos the men aren't here
And that's the all-clear
To kickstart our careers and
it's time to move on up!

Reflect:

- What do the women in the song want?
- How would you describe the genre of the song? Did the genre surprise you? Why or why not?
- Why tell stories through songs and mixed genres?

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION: TED TALK

IN SMALL GROUPS OR AS A CLASS, DISCUSS:

Why do you think feminism is still a controversial topic today?

1. What would a fairer world look like for women?
2. What societal gender roles are women still expected to abide by? Why are these societal norms problematic?
3. How do we unlearn gender expectations that we are indoctrinated into?

Write your TED Talk

Students write and present a TED Talk on what feminism means to them in today's world.
Example: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: "We Should All Be Feminists"

Brainstorm:

- How do you support and uplift the women in your life? If you could change one thing in the world for women, what would it be? Why is that important to you?
- Talk about a personal experience in relation to the TED Talk topic.

Host a classroom TED Talk presentation:

- Students individually write their own TED Talks.
- Students partner up and share their speeches one-on-one. Each listener notes three things that made an impact.
- Together as a class, curate the order of the student TED Talk presentation.
- Select a presentation date.

Reflect:

- Take time to reflect on the TED Talk presentations.
- What resonated with you?
- What surprised you?
- Why is critical thinking important, especially in the era of social media and mass disinformation?
- Were there any overlapping ideas in the TED Talks? What were they?
- Did you experience a change of opinion or point of view after the presentations? If yes, what was it?

PATRIOTISM

Patriotism. Allied cooperation. There was vast support. Soldiers came home heroes.

You've probably seen the **"Keep Calm and Carry On"** poster—it's one of the most popular memes of the last 20 years. But do you know where it originated? The British government first produced and distributed the poster in **1939** to prepare the populace for the inevitable: the nation being **attacked by the Axis powers**.

The attacks came in **1940** and **1941** in the form of the **Blitz, an intense aerial bombing campaign** on Britain carried out by the Nazis. The population responded with what was soon dubbed "Blitz spirit," the decidedly British response of enduring air raids with stoicism and unity. While a nation united in support of a singular political cause may be hard to imagine today, at the time of Operation Mincemeat, **British patriotism was robust**. In fact, the approval rating for Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, never dipped below 78% during World War II and was sometimes as high as 85%!

But the Brits knew they couldn't do it alone. The Nazis were annexing more and more land in Europe and, after invading France in 1940, Britain stood almost entirely alone against Germany. The situation was dire and the fear of a German land invasion was very real. But when the Allied Forces came to Britain's aid, especially the United States and the Soviet Union, British patriotism began to champion internationalism. The arrival of American troops in 1942, for example, was met with fanfare, not resentment. Prime Minister Churchill himself called Britain's alliance with the United States "a special relationship," a term still in use today. This feeling even extended to the support received from the Soviet Union. Although Britain had once been wary of

Soviet communism, patriotism during the war was flexible enough to make room for this new partnership. **Patriotism in 1943 Britain was more about shared values and mission than borders**.

In today's polarized world, many believe nationalism and patriotism rely on separation, that pride in one's own country means shunning international collaboration. But in World War II-era Britain, patriotism was about **survival through solidarity**. Remember, the entire purpose of Operation Mincemeat was to distract the Germans from the invasion of Sicily that the British, Americans, and Russians were conducting together.

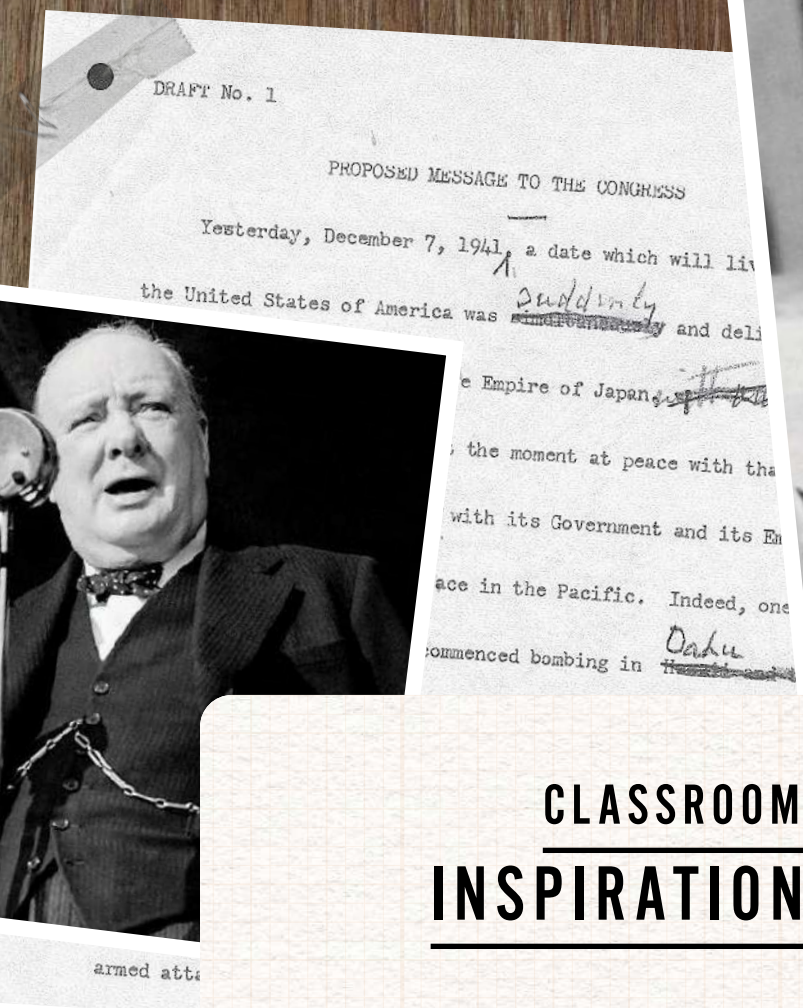
Reflect: What does patriotism mean to you? Do you see it as a positive or negative term?

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

PRE- AND POST-SHOW PATRIOTISM POEMS AND PARAGRAPHS

Pre-show activity: Write a list of **ten words** that come to mind when you hear the term patriotism. Use them to create a **poem or paragraph** that expresses how **patriotism resonates for you today.** Once you finish, draw or collage an image that illustrates what you've written.

Post-show activity: Redo the pre-show activity, but **from the perspective of one of the *Operation Mincemeat* characters in 1943.** How would Hester Leggatt, Ewen Montagu, or any of the others respond to the concept of patriotism?


DRAFT No. 1

PROPOSED MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS

Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will li

the United States of America was suddenly and deli

e Empire of Japan,

the moment at peace with tha

with its Government and its Em

ace in the Pacific. Indeed, one

commenced bombing in Oahu

armed atta

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

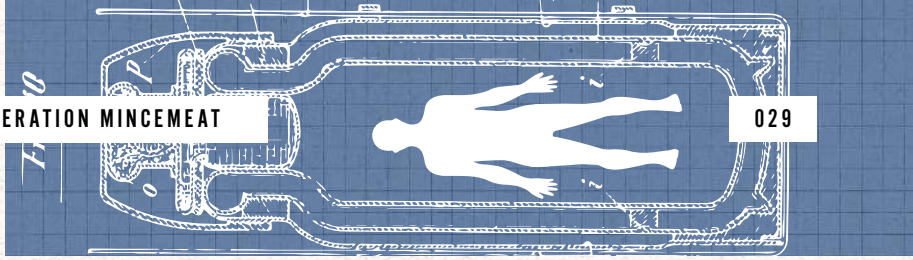
INSPIRATIONAL SPEECHES

Some of the most famous political speeches ever given occurred during World War II around the time of Operation Mincemeat. Powerful examples include Prime Minister Churchill's 1940 "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" speech, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, and President Harry S. Truman's speech announcing the surrender of Germany in 1945. Read one of these speeches as a class.

Writing exercise: Does the speech still inspire us to unite or is it no longer relevant?

Go further: Monologues

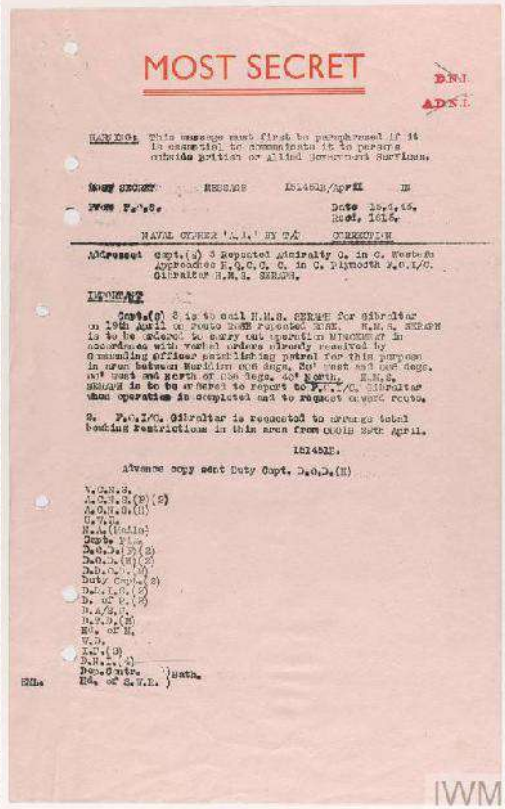
Acting exercise: Without looking at any archival footage of the chosen speech, deliver it as a monologue. Identify its peak—when does it reach its most exciting moment? Build that into your performance.



IDENTITY:

THE TROJAN CORPSE HAD A NAME, YOU KNOW

GLYNDWR MICHAEL, THE REAL MAN BEHIND MAJOR WILLIAM MARTIN OF THE ROYAL MARINES.



MOST SECRET

D.N.I.
A.D.N.I.

CAUTION: This message must first be paraphrased if it is essential to communicate it to persons outside British or Allied Government Services.

MOST SECRET MESSAGE 151452B/April 19

FROM F.O.I.C. Date 15.4.43. Rcd. 1615.

NAVAL CIPHER 'A.A.' BY TA CORRECTION

Addressed Capt.(S) 3 Repeated Admiralty O. in C. Western Approaches F.O.C.C. C. in C. Plymouth F.O.I/C. Gibraltar H.M.S. SERAPH.

IMPORTANT

Capt.(S) 3 is to call H.M.S. SERAPH for Gibraltar on 19th April in Route [illegible] Repeated Adm. H.M.S. SERAPH is to be ready to carry out operation MINCEMEAT in accordance with verbal orders already received by Commanding Officer establishing patrol for this purpose in area between Sardinia and Sicily, 30° West and 10° East and North of 38 Degs. 40' North. H.M.S. SERAPH is to be prepared to report to F.O.I./C. Gibraltar when operation is completed and to request safest route.

2. F.O.I/C. Gibraltar is requested to arrange total boarding restrictions in this area from 0001B 20th April.

151452B.

Advance copy sent Duty Capt. D.O.D.(E)

A.C.N.S.
A.C.N.S.(P)(2)
A.C.N.S.(I)
C.N.O.
N.I.D.(Radio)
Capt. Plot
D.N.I.(P)(2)
D.N.I.(M)(2)
D.N.I.(I)
Duty Capt.(S)
D.N.I.O.(2)
D. of P.(2)
D.A/S.C.
D.F.S.(2)
E. of M.
V.D.
I.S.(3)
D.N.I.(A)
Dep. Dir.
Ed. of S.W.E.
Ed. of S.W.E.

IWM

SIGNAL PAPERS OUTLINING ROLE OF HMS SERAPH IN DELIVERING THE BODY OF GLYNDWR MICHAEL, 1943

Glyndwr Michael, a homeless Welshman, fled to London during the Great Depression hoping for a better life. Unfortunately, in 1943 his body was found in a warehouse and the coroner labeled his death a suicide. Ben Macintyre, author of the book *Operation Mincemeat*, challenges that determination. He believes Michael was so hungry, he consumed bread infected with rat poison, which is incredibly dark. However he died, Michael is a **World War II hero** who will live on forever thanks to his part in Operation Mincemeat.

His body was given the **invented persona of Major William Martin**. British intelligence officers built an entire life within his pockets. His wallet had theatre tickets and restaurant receipts, a letter from his father, love letters and a photo from his fiancée Pam, and a receipt for an engagement ring along with the top secret military plans. They went to incredible lengths to create a fully realized person. When the information found its way to Hitler, he truly believed this man was a British officer transporting top secret military plans. **The document was literally titled "Most Secret,"** underlined and in bold red text. No, that isn't a joke! Cut to Hitler pulling troops out of Sicily and redirecting them to Greece and Sardinia.

Unfortunately, Michael did not initially receive the respect he deserved. **Ewen Montagu even said, "The only worthwhile thing that he ever did, he did after his death."** What right did he have to assess the value of Michael's life?

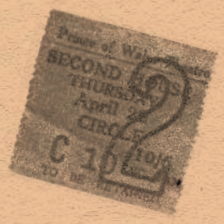
Major William Martin was buried in Huelva, Spain with full military honors; his true identity was uncovered in 1996. Soon after, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission added Michael's name to the gravestone.

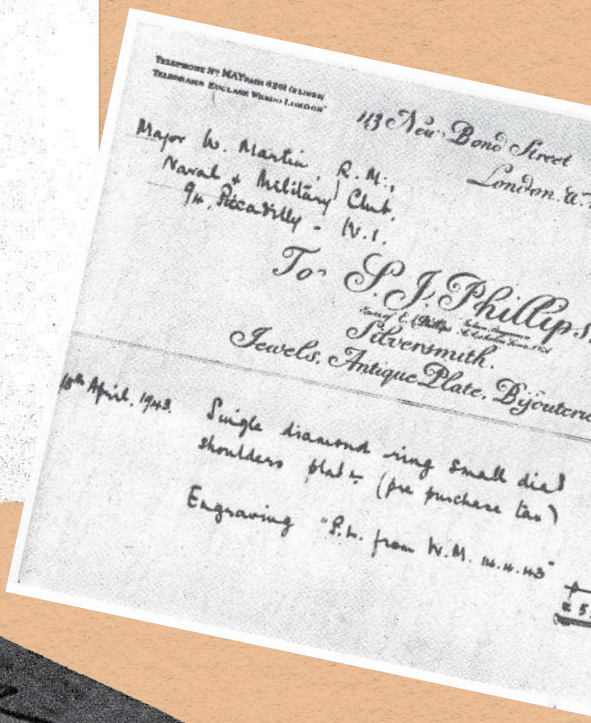
CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

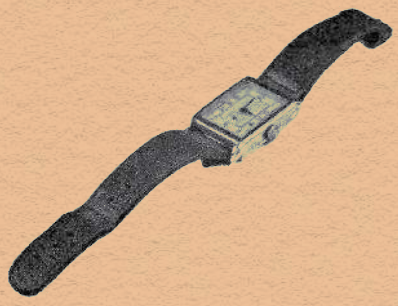
WRITE A MONOLOGUE

Write a monologue as Glyndwr Michael in the afterlife discovering his contribution to World War II. How would he react? How would he feel about his body being used and not recognized until decades later? What would he wish the public knew about him before he died?

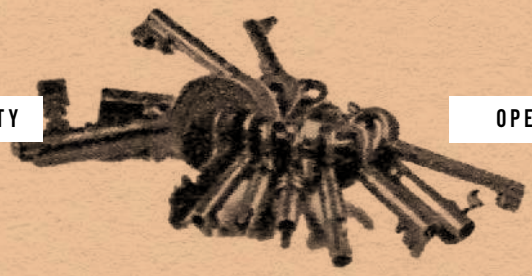
Reflect:
What, if any, moral obligation do we have to one another?







ITEMS PLACED IN THE BRIEFCASE TO CORROBORATE THE IDENTITY OF MAJOR WILLIAM MARTIN



CLASSROOM ACTIVATION: SCENE WRITING

Imagine Glyndwr Michael meets Ewen Montagu and has a chance to share his feelings about how his body was used in Operation Mincemeat. Do you think he would be angry, happy, proud, confused? Write a one-to-three-page scene of their interaction.

Reflect: What does it mean to be remembered after death?

Did you know that F. Scott Fitzgerald, author of *The Great Gatsby*, died penniless? The iconic novel only became popular after he died. **During World War II, the US government shipped books to enlisted soldiers that highlighted the American way of life**. ***The Great Gatsby*** was one of the titles and ***1 million soldiers read it*** during the war. It became so popular that soon after it became a part of the American school curriculum.

Share other examples of people who became famous after death.

Go further: Playwriting

Five-Minute Plays: Guide students in creating a five-minute play about Glyndwr Michael.

Encourage students to incorporate the monologues and scenes they already wrote and to expand on them.

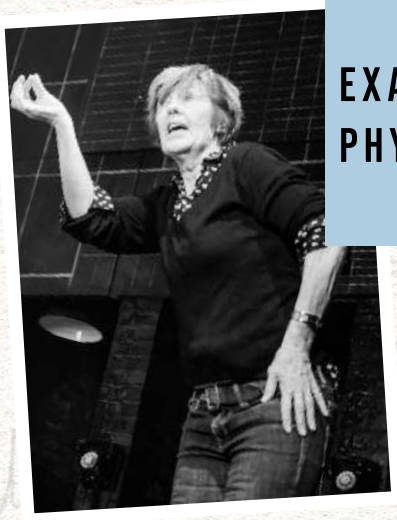
A COMEDY ABOUT WORLD WAR II, REALLY?

If someone said, "I'm seeing a show about a high-risk World War II mission that deceived the Nazis," you'd probably think they were going to a suspenseful thriller or intense drama. Yet *Operation Mincemeat* is a silly musical comedy! While it might seem odd to tell this serious story through comedy, British audiences are used to this approach because of music hall, pantomime, and camp, three very popular genres in the United Kingdom.

ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL BRITISH MUSIC HALL, PANTOMIME, AND CAMP

ACTORS QUICKLY CHANGING CHARACTERS

EXAGGERATED PHYSICALITY



OVER-THE-TOP CROSS-GENDER CASTING

SONG AND DANCE

IRREVERENT HUMOR

AUDIENCE INTERACTION

MUSIC HALL: A BRIEF HISTORY

Music hall was a **working-class entertainment style** that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Britain. It showcased exaggeration, biting wit, and broad archetypes in short songs and comedic sketches. Music hall performers filled huge auditoriums by using flamboyant physical acting and direct audience address, a legacy that remains evident in British sketch comedy today.

PANTOMIME: HOLIDAY CHEER AND SUBVERSIVE GENDER PLAY

Holiday pantomimes, affectionately known as pantos, are a mainstay of British popular culture. **A panto blends familiar fairy tales with slapstick, cross-dressing, sing-alongs, and humor**. Actors, who are often celebrities, talk to the audience and exaggerate every gesture and facial expression.

One of the most notable features of pantomime is its embrace of cross-dressing and gender play. Most pantos include an older female character played by a man sporting an outlandish costume and makeup.

WHAT IS CAMP?

Camp is an aesthetic, a style, and, for some, a way of life! Camp is defined by flamboyance, fabulousness, glitz, and glamour. Camp thrives on performance, play, and contradiction—qualities it inherited from pantomime and music hall. Camp often

CONTINUED>

comes with a wink to the audience, signalling that everyone is in on the joke.

Camp lives vibrantly in both British and American culture. If you've ever watched Disney movies like *Ratatouille* or *The Little Mermaid*, seen an episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, or stayed up late for *Saturday Night Live*, you've experienced camp.

BRITISH ACTING STYLES

Many British actors learn an external style of acting in which character is conveyed through **physicality, gesture, vocal modulation, and timing**. In contrast, American actor training is generally more internal, i.e. the deeply emotional, psychological acting of Timothée Chalamet in *A Complete Unknown* or Viola Davis in *Fences*.

In his Tony Award acceptance speech, Jak Malone, who won for playing Hester Leggatt, among others, described his acting approach in this way: "Eight times a week, I walk out on that stage and tell the audience that I'm a woman. I'm not one, and I only convey it through simple adjustments to posture, voice, and energy."

CASE STUDY: MONTY PYTHON

No discussion of British comedy would be complete without Monty Python, a troupe that synthesized the anarchic spirit of music hall, the absurdism of camp, and the topicality of satire. The troupe's 1969–1974 series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* took sketch comedy to new heights, mocking everything from bureaucracy and religion to class and colonialism. **Monty Python's style includes many of the elements of music hall, pantomime, and camp**: stock characters, direct address, slapstick, comedic songs, and cross-dressing.

The troupe's men famously played female characters, often in wigs and falsetto voices, with little attempt to pass convincingly as women. These portrayals weren't designed to mock women, but were satirizing the gender roles and expectations imposed by British society.

"If you watched our show and found yourself believing in Hester… you might have just bid farewell to cynicism, to outdated ideas, to that rotten old binary, and opened yourself up to a world that's out there in glorious Technicolor and isn't going away anytime soon!"

— Jak Malone, Tony Award acceptance speech

You might be thinking, "Cross-dressing? Really? Do we still say that?"

While it's true that the phrase has sometimes been used to mock queer and trans people, cross-dressing dates back to the 19th century and simply means wearing clothes typically associated with a different gender. In the context of British pantomime and, therefore, *Operation Mincemeat*, cross-dressing is a key part of the style intended by the writers. In this setting, cross-dressing is playful, theatrical, rooted in history, and, in the case of Malone's portrayal of Hester Leggatt, done in a deeply respectful, even reverential way.

Hänsel und Gretel.

CLASSROOM ACTIVATION:

ADAPTING A FAIRY TALE

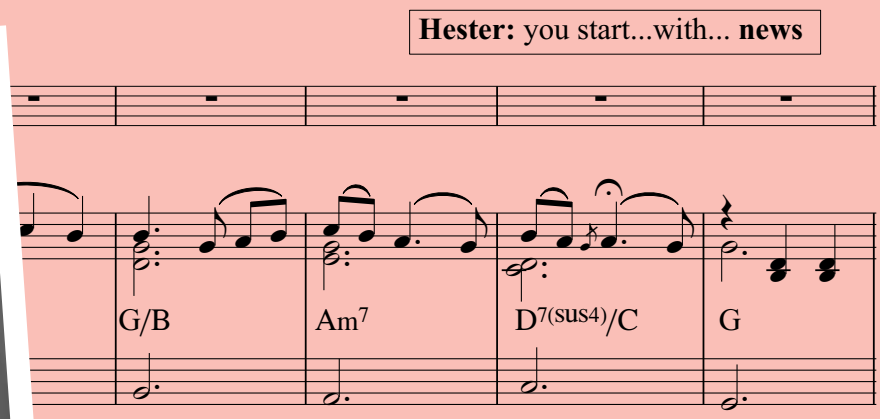
Pick a fairy tale that everybody knows, like *Hansel and Gretel* or *Sleeping Beauty*. Notice how these stories are often very dark. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the children are starving, and Sleeping Beauty almost dies!

Take your chosen fairy tale and make it funny using the styles described above. In small groups, tell the story in two minutes or less using one or more of the following elements:

- Sketch comedy
- Parody lyrics of a popular song
- Gender-bending acting
- Exaggerated costumes
- Audience interaction
- Actors quickly changing characters

Go further: Post-show reflection freewrite

Write about a moment from *Operation Mincemeat* that particularly surprised you. What was surprising about it? Did the surprise come from the story that was being told, the way the actors were telling it, or both?



ANATOMY OF A SONG:

THE TORCH SONG

"They weep for her, they invest in her, they love her for her old romantic heart."

— Jak Malone

WHAT IS A TORCH SONG?

Torch songs depict longing and heartbreak. The term comes from the phrase **"to carry a torch for," meaning unrequited love**. A torch song doesn't further the plot; instead, it reveals a character's vulnerability. A good torch song is both aching and empowering.

Within a musical, the torch song often arrives at a moment of crisis or reflection. The stage will be empty, the action will slow down, the lights will dim, and the character steps forward to sing vulnerably and honestly. "Without You" from *Rent*, "Still Hurting" from *The Last Five Years*, and "Burn" from *Hamilton* are all excellent examples.

Musically, torch songs often employ slower tempos and lush, **emotional melodies**. Minor keys express longing. Vocally, they invite the singer to move from soft, intimate phrasing to belted pain. Lyrically, torch songs use direct, vulnerable language.

"DEAR BILL" — ANATOMY OF A TORCH SONG

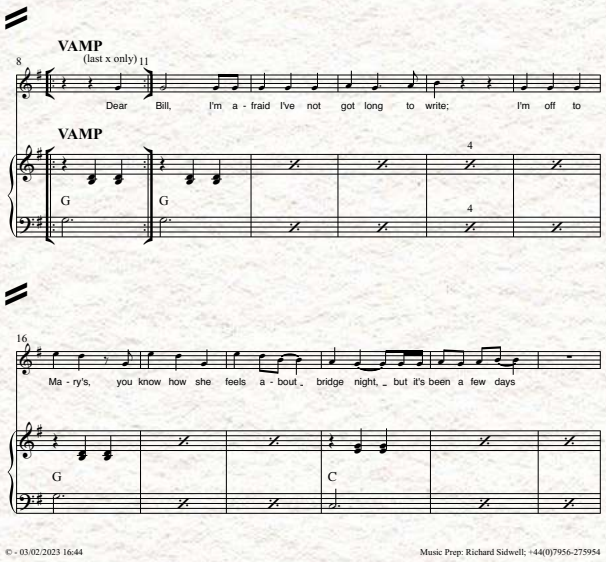
When he received the 2025 Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Featured Role in a Musical, Jak Malone described Hester Leggatt's big number, "Dear Bill," as "the best musical theatre song in recent memory." When it arrives late in Act I, "Dear Bill" initially appears to be a simple ditty. But it evolves into an emotional tearjerker that exemplifies one of musical theatre's most potent weapons: the torch song.

Dear Bill,

I'm afraid I've not got long to write
I'm off to Mary's
You know how she feels about Bridge night
It's been a few days
I thought that I'd send a few lines
Next door's Greyhound came into the garden this morning
I think he likes the roses

They're doing fine
I used some twine to tie them up and rein them in
I hope they'll bloom next spring
But you'll see that for yourself
I'm following the instructions you left in your note
Please devote all your time to their care
And I have done, I swear

Except for the talking
I'm not going to do that
'Cos talking to Roses is mad and you knew that
When you whispered sweet nothings to flowers to make my dad cross
And me laugh
And it did



And why did we meet in the middle of a war?
What a silly thing for anyone to do
Your sister sends her love of course
And your mother is the same as ever
Diana's piano is getting much better
Well, I say better, I really just mean louder but as she tells me

That's pretty much the same
Well it makes a change from all of the noise
And the sirens
And sometimes from all of the silence
With six rounds of jingle bells
And we wish you a Merry Christmas even though it is June
And it's been a long summer
But she wants to be perfect for her older brother

She hopes you'll be home again soon
No
She knows you'll be home again soon
And it's fine
And we're fine
It's nice to watch her get better with time
I suppose they just miss you

I know they just miss you
And I'm not going to argue with that
And why did we meet in the middle of a war?
What a silly thing for anyone to do
And I'm trying my best to write everything down

To fill in the gaps so that when you're around
It'll be like you've never been gone
As if you'd been here all along
'Cause you can't just miss out on the songs
And to tell you the truth Tom
Your roses aren't thriving
Without you they're dull

Don't worry they're surviving

But I've tried all the tricks that you put in your note
And I've watered the soil
'Till it started to float
And no I've not talked to them
I'm not going to talk to them
There's something you have, that I just don't have

And since you're off gallivanting
It's only fair that you know
That your roses quite frankly where the first things to go
And no you're not gallivanting
I don't mean gallivanting
It's just frustrating for you to be right
When I have to do both the sides of this fight

But it's good to hear you
Even just in my head
And the roses just miss you
I know they just miss you
And I'm not going to argue with that
There's so much to do when you come back

And I know that they say that it's all for a cause
Our brave boys out fighting a war to end wars
But it's like they don't see
That when you're far from me
Our roses don't get the conversation they need

Which just seems unfair
I'm stuck here and you're there
I suppose I just miss you
I know I just miss you
Even now I still miss you

And why did we meet in the middle of a war?
What a silly thing for anyone

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

WRITE YOUR OWN TORCH SONG!

Pick a novel, movie, or TV show that you love, and write a torch song for your favorite character. The song should include at least three of the following elements:

- A moment of longing
- A description of heartbreak
- A wish to see someone
- Evocatively described imagery
- Stage directions telling the actor when to stand or sit
- Performance notes to show how the song might be staged

Go further:
Perform, rap, sing, or speak your torch song to the class. Create a cabaret! Add costumes, lighting, café-style seating, and snacks for the audience.

GLOSSARY

ALLIES A coalition of countries fighting against Nazi Germany. The main Allied powers were Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

AXIS POWERS A coalition of countries opposed to the Allied powers during World War II. The main Axis powers were Germany, Italy, and Japan.

COCKNEY A dialect spoken by working-class Londoners. It can also refer to a native of the East End of London.

DECEPTION OPERATION A mission designed to trick the enemy.

ESPIONAGE A broad term that includes most elements of intelligence gathering, like spying, surveillance, and stealing secrets.

ETON A prestigious boarding school for boys aged 13 to 18 in the United Kingdom. Eton has educated generations of British aristocracy, as well as British Prime Ministers, famous actors, politicians, Nobel laureates, and leading figures in the country.

THE FÜHRER A German word meaning "leader," usually used to describe Hitler.

MI5 The British domestic intelligence agency, similar to the FBI in the United States.

M16 The British foreign intelligence service, similar to the CIA in the United States.

NEUTRAL COUNTRY A country not officially taking sides in the war, like Spain.

PATRIOTISM Devotion and support for one's country.

THE REICH A German word meaning "realm" or "empire." The Reich usually refers to Hitler's Third Reich, or the empire he sought to accrue for Nazi Germany.

ÜBERMENSCH A German word meaning "overman" or someone with superhuman powers.

VICTORIA CROSS The highest prize given for service in the British military.

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INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING

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LEARNING STANDARDS

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT: OPERATION MINCEMEAT STUDY GUIDE

This study guide aligns with national and local educational standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), National Core Arts Standards, and the NYC Department of Education's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theatre.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (GRADES 9–12)

English Language Arts

- Reading Informational Text
  - RI.9-10.1 / RI.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis.
  - RI.9-10.7 / RI.11-12.7: Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums.
- Writing
  - W.9-10.2 / W.11-12.2: Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas.
  - W.9-10.3 / W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences.
- Speaking and Listening
  - SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1: Participate in collaborative discussions.
  - SL.9-10.4 / SL.11-12.4: Present information and supporting evidence clearly and persuasively.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS (THEATRE, GRADES 9–12)

- Creating
  - TH:Cr1.1.HSI/HII: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas for a theatrical work.
  - TH:Cr2.1.HSI/HII: Organize and develop artistic ideas.
- Performing
  - TH:Pr4.1.HSI/HII: Analyze and interpret character choices based on context.
  - TH:Pr6.1.HSI/HII: Present drama for a specific audience.
- Responding
  - TH:Re8.1.HSI/HII: Interpret meaning through contextual analysis.
  - TH:Re9.1.HSI/HII: Evaluate drama based on aesthetics, purpose, and impact.

NYC BLUEPRINT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THEATRE (GRADES 9–12)

- Theatre Making
  - Students create and perform original or adapted work through improvisation, scripted scenes, and design projects.
  - Related Activities: Spy identity monologues, deception scenes, timeline performances.
- Developing Theatre Literacy
  - Students analyze dramatic structure, historical context, and performance techniques.
  - Related Activities: Analyzing musical scenes, exploring satire, connecting theatrical choices to WWII history.
- Making Connections
  - Students connect theatre to history, current events, and other content areas.
  - Related Activities: Designing social media campaigns, exploring the ethics of deception, propaganda analysis.
- Working with Community and Cultural Resources
  - Students engage with Broadway productions, museums, and historical archives.
  - Related Activities: Seeing Operation Mincemeat, researching Bletchley Park, studying British intelligence.
- Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning
  - Students learn about roles in theatre and the transferable skills gained through performance and analysis.
  - Related Activities: Ensemble collaboration, research presentations, creating devised works.

Founded in 1968, TDF (Theatre Development Fund) is a not-for-profit service organization dedicated to sharing the power of the performing arts with everyone. TDF's mission is to engage a broad and diverse audience by removing the financial, physical, and invisible barriers to participation in the performing arts. TDF's initiatives include the **TKTS by TDF Discount Booths; TDF Memberships;** the **TDF Costume Collection**; and **TDF Accessibility, Education, and Community Programs**. TDF welcomes NYC's vibrant communities to the theatre because experiencing the performing arts improves mental health and social connections.

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