

Box. 11 Silence of Surveillance



List of contents:

1. Officer's hat
2. Sandbag with photograph of Ernest Rollings, "the man who ended WW1"
3. Newspaper article about Ernest Rollings, a policeman from Swansea (*The British Newspaper Archive*)
4. Field glasses
5. Camera
6. Photograph of Mata Hari
7. Map of the different front lines: Eastern and Western Fronts.
8. Small key to the box

Key information

- Surveillance during war time is essential in all arenas of war, including the Western and Eastern Fronts. This was to understand the enemy, determine the size of the enemy forces, identify areas weakness and foil any plots of attack.
- At the outbreak of war 50 police and civilians were called up by the War Office to form the first intelligence team known as the Intelligence Corps. It was to gather intelligence from a number of sources. They rode on motorbikes and analysed abandoned battlefields left by the enemy. They placed soldiers behind enemy lines to gather information and worked with special psychological units to extract information from prisoners of war by developing debriefing techniques.
- WW1 deployed a number of new techniques, including the use of camouflage to hide from the enemy, maintaining cover during surveillance, and developed aerial reconnaissance. Aeroplanes and airships were used to give view large areas of territory.
- Technology developed to support surveillance included items such as **field cameras** and **field glasses (included in the box)**.
- People were deployed as spies during WW1 on both sides:
 - Mata Hari (**photograph included in the box**) was a Dutch female spy and entertainer. She was convicted and executed in France for spying for Germany.
 - Edith Carvell, a British nurse, was arrested and tried by German military court for spying. She was executed in Belgium.
 - Arthur Mitchell Ransome, author of the book *Swallows and Amazons*, was considered to have sympathies with Russia.
- In addition to people being accused of being spies, animals also came under scrutiny. Intelligence officers identified three suspicious characters seen near British positions. Orders were given to detain and investigate the three, but these were actually two cats and a dog. Official army documents on this are in the National Archives. The report states:

"Two (2) cats and a dog are under suspicion, as they have been in the habit of crossing our trenches at night; steps are being taken to trap them if possible."
- **Ernest Rollings** 'the man who ended the war' was a policeman from Swansea. He raided a farm house in a French village, where he recovered plans that contained "every machine gun

Box 11. Silence of Surveillance

post, trench mortar battery and fortified position” of Germany’s impregnable Hindenburg defensive line. He stuffed them all into a sandbag during the raid, which is why in this box the information on him is **‘stuffed into a sandbag’**. The plans he recovered were checked against the aerial maps and proved to be accurate. However, at the time Rollings was oblivious to the significance of his discovery and it was not until 13 years later that he was identified as the man who ended the war. The information he recovered is estimated to have shortened the war by a year and saved 500,000 British lives.

11. Silence of Surveillance: questions



1. Who wore this hat?
What do you think his job was?
2. What can you see sticking out of the box?
3. What do you think is in this box?

4. What objects are in the box? Take them out and carefully lay them side by side.
5. What do you think these field glasses were used for?
6. What do you think the person using these field glasses saw?
7. How do you think it felt to use these field glasses? How do you feel looking through them now?



8. Who do you think used the camera?
9. What photographs did they take?
10. Why do you think this box has a key?
11. Who do you think is the female in the photograph?
Why is she included in this box?

12. What is in the sandbag and why is it in there?
13. What is the name of the “Man who ended the war”
14. What did he do?



Suggested box combinations

- Box 5 Silence of Censorship
- Box 7 Silence of Waiting
- Box 15 Silence of Those Who Contributed in Different Ways
- Box 9 Silence of Animals (particularly with reference to being considered spies)

Suggested activities

- Give each person a small note book: over the next week they must jot down snippets of conversations they hear when out and about in shops, trains, buses, cinemas, museums – just one line each time. No details about the person who has said it. When they have completed this write a poem/ lyric with these phrases in.
- Imagine what it felt like to be an animal during the war. Select the animal you would like to be: cat, dog, horse, elephant, camel, pigeon, canary or rat. Write about their day going between the different trenches - German, British, French. Write about things they notice and how your chosen animal feels about the war.

Caring for the box after use

- Please place the newspaper report and photograph of Ernest Rollings back in the sandbag.
- Carefully place everything back in the box.