

Enemy Spies Sighted in Nairn

I was a child during the war and being brought up in the town of Nairn in the north east of Scotland. We were sheltered from the main horrors of war but one incident I can recall with clarity. My father owned a fishmongers business and one day in January or February possibly in 1942 or 1943 two foreign young men came into the shop and bought some salt herring. They had only left the shop when the police arrived and asked my father if he had seen any strangers. He went outside and pointed to the two men going round the corner.

The next day the town was buzzing with the fact that two spies had been caught in the town. The local gossip was that they could not have been very good spies as they had buried either their parachutes or dinghy in a shallow ditch on what was locally called the 'back shore'. The wind had got up and blew the dinghy or parachutes right up on to the harbourmasters doorstep.

Fast forward fifty years or so and I was visiting the Cabinet War rooms in Whitehall where the war had been run from. The tapes included actors playing the parts of the war cabinet including Churchill. At one point Churchill was heard to declare that the Germans were to be made to believe that the second front was to be an invasion of Norway from Scotland. I remember in 1943 the beach at Nairn being used as a landing ground for many military vehicles coming off landing craft. This was continuous day and night for many weeks. The locals believed that this was training for D Day but I believe that this was part of Churchill's subterfuge plot to misinform the Germans, as he believed that spying was being carried out in Northern Scotland.

Last November or December (2002) I was lying in bed one morning listening to the seven o'clock news. It was announced that the Public Record Office had released documents outlining Churchill's plan from 1943. They then stated that two spies - Norwegian boys actually - had been sent by the Germans to Scotland. In actual fact these spies were double agents and were working for the allies. They had committed some minor acts of sabotage including burning some farm buildings - this I vaguely recall - to satisfy their German 'masters'.

Listening to that news bulletin in 2002 everything came flooding back and made sense. As they were double agents they were most likely to be anxious to be picked up and they therefore did not try hard to cover their tracks. They came into a small town in the middle of winter where they stood out and by partially burying their dinghy or parachutes they would be discovered quickly.

My one abiding memory of this incident is mother, who had served the young lads, with tears streaming down her face crying 'These lovely boys will be shot'. Sadly she died before the truth were known for I fully believe that these were the 'spies' spoken off by the Public Record Office.

Iain C Macpherson, Nairn