

A GENIUS AT MAKE-BELIEVE

“Maskelyne was a genius at make-believe. During an early visit to the camp by Hoover, the FBI director was astonished to see what appeared to be several warships on Lake Ontario. He was standing in a hut, and Maskelyne had rigged mirrors to produce a magnified effect with toy German battle cruisers ... Maskelyne flew from Camp X to all corners of the world, creating non-existent armies, dummy cannon, trick air bases, false fleets.”

From ‘A Man Called Intrepid’

These claims are not true.

Fisher recycled these false aspects of the Maskelyne myth in his epilogue: *“In Canada he (Maskelyne) established Station M—the ‘M’ standing for ‘Magic’—where he created top-secret illusions to be used around the world. While serving at Station M he recreated the illusion he had used in Farnham to convince Lord Gort that the battleship Admiral Graf Spee was sailing down the Thames, this time making FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover believe German cruisers were at work on Lake Ontario.”*

Myth begets myth. The battleship illusion never existed in the first place.

Further confusion has arisen because the author, William Stevenson, a journalist, was writing about William Stephenson (Intrepid). The two men coincidentally have similar names.

John Booth failed to make this important distinction. He misattributed the quotation, *“Maskelyne was a genius at make-believe”* to the *“master intelligence brain”* himself. He then compounded this mistake by asserting that Maskelyne’s three (brief and dubious) mentions in *A Man Called Intrepid* somehow confirmed that *“Maskelyne was, indeed, a ‘genius’ whose products impressed the innermost circles.”*

Booth’s misguided and convoluted testimony is of no value.

Alistair Maskelyne in his first letter emphatically denied that his father ever met with Hoover: *“My father never was in either the U.S.A. or in Canada at any time of his life. Any mention of his demonstrating camouflage deceptions to Edgar Hoover is false.”*

YANKEE PANKY

Spurred on by this strong denial, I checked out the real story. Canadian historian David Stafford wrote *Camp X: Myth and Reality* in 1986. He examined the Camp X records and interviewed surviving participants. *“The reality of Camp X is startlingly different from the myth ... most of the exploits allegedly planned and prepared at Camp X had nothing whatsoever to do with it.”*

Jasper Maskelyne is not mentioned in this book.

Stafford writes: *“According to official BSC documents, ‘Station M,’ a centre for the art of ‘manufacturing’ documents was established in Canada in August 1941—just four months before Camp X.”*

So the letter ‘M’ refers to the manufacture of forged documents and not to Maskelyne’s Magic illusions.

Camp X formally opened in December 1941 when Maskelyne was busy preparing magic shows in Egypt for the British Army. There is no evidence that Maskelyne was involved in the establishment and operation of a top-secret training camp in Canada.

Furthermore, Hoover was suspicious of any training ground on the American continent which lay beyond his jurisdiction. On protocol grounds alone, it is unlikely that Hoover would have visited the place. According to Stafford, this territorial dispute was diplomatically smoothed over by having representatives of Camp X visit Hoover in Washington, D.C., and not the other way round.

Stafford notes that Stephenson (Intrepid) did meet with Hoover sometime in March 1942. One of Hoover’s underlings was eventually invited to Camp X and several FBI agents received supplementary training from the new outfit, but there is no record of FBI Director Hoover ever travelling across the border to Camp X, let alone meeting with Maskelyne.

Stafford’s well-researched book provides strong support to Alistair Maskelyne’s assertion that the Canadian episode in his father’s career is fictitious.

Finally, Maskelyne’s recently released service record gives the dates of his transfers to different theatres of war. There is no record of any journey to either Canada or America.