

ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE

When Maskelyne first arrived in Egypt, he was not sent on a magical mission to duel with an Imam in Damascus! On the contrary, he was immediately put to work as a camouflage officer. Barkas placed Maskelyne in charge of a small camouflage section. A secret report on Middle East Camouflage in the National Archives (Kew) provides solid names, dates and details:

CAMOUFLAGE EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

The first Unit of this kind to be formed in Middle East was "CAMOUFLAGE EXPERIMENTAL SECTION RE ME" which was formed on 11 Mar 41 and installed in two huts at WINGATE BARRACKS, ABBASSIA, under the Command of Capt. J. MASKELYNE, RE.

The Camouflage Experimental Section did good work but had a short life as it was disbanded and the personnel absorbed into the DEVELOPMENT WING of Camouflage Training and Development Centre."

WORK OF CAMOUFLAGE EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

SUNSHIELDS

Quick release canopy for making AFVs look like ordinary wheeled transport. Worked out from an original suggestion by General Sir Archibald WAVELL.

STATIC DUMMY TANK

A collapsible Dummy Tank made of canvas on a M.S. rod framework. It can be carried nine to the 3-ton lorry, and can be lifted by two men; replacing the old wooden type of Tank which scarcely stowed three to the vehicle and required about 12 men to lift.

FIRE RESISTING CREAM

A by-product of experiments in search of a fire-proofing compound for garnish and fabrics. This is a paste of soap, flour or asbestos shred, and water. It is remarkably effective, in some respects superior to standard fire-fighting suits. Above all it provides at negligible cost an emergency means of dealing with fires in places where full fire fighting apparatus is not available."

This last entry is a reference to Maskelyne's fireproof paste. Rare photographs of Maskelyne's fire experiments, taken from his wartime album, are reproduced in the PHOTOS section of this website.

The official document also includes an important list of thirty camouflage officers who were trained in England in 1940 and sent to the Middle East Force in 1941. Lt. Colonel Barkas, Major Ayrton, Proud and Sykes, and Captain J. Codner all appear. Halfway down, at number 16, is Captain J Maskelyne, RE (Royal Engineers). It confirms his arrival date was March 10th 1941. In brackets it says, "*now transferred to Welfare.*" This almost certainly means Maskelyne was transferred to entertainment duties. (The date is not specified. However, Maskelyne was performing large-scale shows for army personnel by late 1941. A cartoon in *The Sphinx*, January 1942, refers to Captain Jasper Maskelyne compering a successful revue at the Opera House, Cairo. Newspaper clippings confirm that Jasper Maskelyne starred in a musical show at the Opera House from December 26th to January 3rd. Ambassador Miles Lampson also refers to Maskelyne giving a magic performance at the British Embassy on Christmas Eve, 1941.)

Another significant name is Captain R. J. Morrison. As we shall see, this overlooked officer may be the key to the Alexandrian decoy mystery.

Francis Knox does not appear on this list. This significant omission surely confirms my theory that Fisher invented him.

The next list gives names of 22 officers who joined the camouflage unit from other units in the Middle East and includes Lieutenant B. Robb.

Finally, there is a longer list of the lower ranks attached to Camouflage. This includes sergeants, clerks, draughtsmen, drivers and female secretaries.