

## Monthly Meeting November Report – Eddie Chapman

Bernard Hope was the speaker at the November meeting and his topic was 'Eddie Chapman, WW2 spy and double agent'. Eddie was born in Burnopfield in 1914. Although he was bright, he did not do particularly well at school and he joined the Coldstream Guards aged 17. After nine months he went AWOL, was arrested, and after serving time in the glasshouse, given a dishonourable discharge.

He stayed in London where he became involved in various criminal activities and learned to use gelignite. He served time in Wormwood Scrubs and was later arrested in Scotland for blowing up the safe in the Edinburgh Coop. Whilst on bail he fled to the Channel Islands where he was imprisoned again.

Eddie then turned the German invasion of the Islands to his advantage. With help he drafted a letter to the German authorities offering himself as a spy. He was transferred to the Abwehr (German Intelligence) in France where he underwent training and was flown to the UK with the task of blowing up the de Havilland aircraft factory in Hatfield. Following a parachute landing he surrendered to the British and offered his services to MI5. In January 1943, together with other MI5 Officers, Eddie faked the sabotage of the factory and for this 'sabotage' the Germans awarded Eddie the Iron Cross.

Still working for the Germans Eddie was later parachuted into Cambridgeshire before transferring to London where over a period he sent disinformation to the Germans including the effect of the bombing on London and troop movements.

Not content with his spying activities Eddie became involved again in criminal activities including the doping of greyhounds. In November 1944 he was dismissed from MI5 albeit with a payment of £6000. In addition, he was pardoned for his prewar time activities. Perhaps appropriately his British codename was Zig Zag.

Following his retirement Eddie maintained his connections with the criminal fraternity and apparently his 'good references' from MI5 were called in on more than one occasion. He also mixed with 'London Society' and was often seen in the company of beautiful women. His wartime life was the subject of films, TV and radio programmes. In later life Eddie set up a health farm with his wife Betty and he remained on friendly terms with his German handler Baron Stephan Von Gröning. Eddie died in St Albans in December 1997. An MI5 Officer wrote of Eddie Chapman loved himself, loved adventure and loved his country, probably in that order'.

This was a fascinating story, well researched and richly illustrated with images and sound. The vote of thanks was given by Julia Wright. The next meeting will be on Thursday 24th January when Felix Davies will speak on 'To the Costa da Morte on Foot'. For further information contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304.

Ian Reid