

Sir Hardy Amies KCVO, a late friend, was a Savile Row couturier. Despite being a fairly visible gay man, he served his country with honour and bravery during WWII, despite the ban. He was the late Queen's couturier and had been a major in the Intelligence Corps and a lieutenant colonel in the Special Operations Executive (SOE). While working for the SOE, he specialised in training Belgian refugees to act as fifth columnists, parachuting them back into occupied Belgium to harass the Germans. He was also a trained paratrooper, and anyone who has undergone paratrooper training will know just how hard and 'manly' that is. He was also the 'controller' of Margery Booth, an English opera singer and British spy who lived in Germany and had contacts in the upper echelons of the Nazi regime, including Hitler, while working for MI6. For his services to Belgium at the end of WWII, the Belgian government awarded him a painting by the surrealist René Magritte, which he donated to MoMA in New York.



He was managing designer at Lachasse in London's West End when he initially joined the Intelligence Corps at the outbreak of WWII in 1939. With his linguistic abilities, Amies was called to serve in the SOE. Having spent time in France and Germany during his youth, Amies was the perfect choice for the SOE, having learned the languages and familiarised himself with the cultures. He was also demonstrably brilliant, confident and detail-oriented. The SOE was set up by Winston Churchill on 19 July 1940 and had its headquarters in Baker Street in London, on the site now occupied by Marks & Spencer. The organisation was officially established under the Ministry of Economic Warfare, which became known in Whitehall as the 'Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare'. The SOE's main focus was working with resistance groups, and in 1942, it was responsible for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, deputy to Himmler. Hardy was promoted to lieutenant colonel and 'acting head' of the Special Operations Executive for Belgium for much of the war, becoming 'head' of the SOE in Belgium in 1944.

Hardy suspected that the SOE's commander, Major General Colin Gubbins, did not consider a dressmaker to be suitable military material. However, his training report stated:

'This officer is far tougher, both physically and mentally, than his rather delicate appearance suggests. He possesses a keen intellect and an abundance of shrewdness.

His only handicap is his precious appearance and manner, and these are tending to decrease.'

The training notes also state that he possesses a 'keen brain' and 'shrewd sense'. (and also hints that his superiors knew he was gay, but turned a blind eye.)

The image shows two pages of a British Army Military Identity Card (Form B.2606) for Edwin Hardy Amies. The left page features a black and white portrait of a young man in a military uniform, wearing a peaked cap. A purple circular stamp over the portrait reads 'HEADQUARTERS VII CORPS' and '16 AUG 1940'. Below the portrait, there is a line for the signature of the holder, which reads 'Hardy Amies', and a line for the date. The right page contains the following information: 'Army Form B.2606.', 'Military Identity Card No. M 074977', 'Issued to', 'Surname AMIES', 'Other Names EDWIN HARDY (and rank or designation) LIEUT.', 'Unit or occupation HQ 7 Corps', 'Address Home Forces', 'Nationality British', 'Nationality at Birth British', 'Second Nationality, if any', 'Place of Birth London', 'Year of Birth 1909', 'Issued by C. J. [signature] Capt', 'At HQ 7 Corps', 'Date 16/9/40', and a purple ink fingerprint. A purple circular stamp on the right page also reads 'HEADQUARTERS VII CORPS'.

Posted to Belgium, Amies collaborated with various Belgian resistance groups, adapting the names of fashion accessories for use as code words. He also organised sabotage assignments and arranged for agents to be parachuted into the Ardennes with radio equipment. In 1944, Hardy outraged his superiors by engaging the renowned photographer Lee Miller and arranging a Vogue photo shoot in Belgium after D-Day. In 1946, he was knighted in Belgium and became a Named Officer de l'Ordre de la Couronne (of the Order of the Crown).



Hardy Amies on the wet streets of Brussels at the Cinquantenaire Park, 1944. Lee Miller

Amies played a key role in Operation Ratweek, an assassination project devised by the SOE to eliminate double agents and Nazi sympathisers in Belgium. Prosper Dezitter, who had helped the Germans capture Allied agents, was an especially sought-after target, but he proved elusive. The Belgian government in exile refused to sanction Operation Ratweek, preferring a more judicious approach. Amies supplied the resistance and SOE agents with subsonic and untraceable Welrod pistols. Lieutenant André Jaques Wendelen, a steadfast T Section SOE agent, chose to return to Belgium to ensure that Operation Ratweek was carried out. The operation was a great success. Hardy never admitted his part in Operation Ratweek to journalists. When asked about it, he would usually say, 'Sorry old chap, I can't remember a thing about it. I have never heard of it before. I was certainly in the SOE for the whole war, and I was involved in parachuting men behind enemy lines to help the partisans. But I knew nothing of Operation Ratweek.' However, he told me that he had parachuted into Belgium and had personally garrotted two Nazis as part of the operation.

Hardy Amies' association with the SOE is mentioned in his entry in Who's Who, as are his interests in opera, tennis, gardening and needlepoint. He founded his own fashion house in 1946 at 14 Savile Row, having bought the building at a knock-down price due to bomb damage, and renovated it. He gained national fame in 1955 when he became the Queen's couturier.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78FSqg9LRcs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TIZTOuJ0-g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xyd3VXaqKU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TIZTOuJ0-g&t=3s>

AMIES, Edwin Hardy - born 17.7.1909. Special Operations Executive: Personnel Files (PF Series). Edwin Hardy AMIES - born 17.7.1909. Collection: Records of Special Operations Executive. Date range: 01 January 1939 - 31 December 1946. Reference: HS 9/29/2. Subjects: Intelligence. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8945080>