

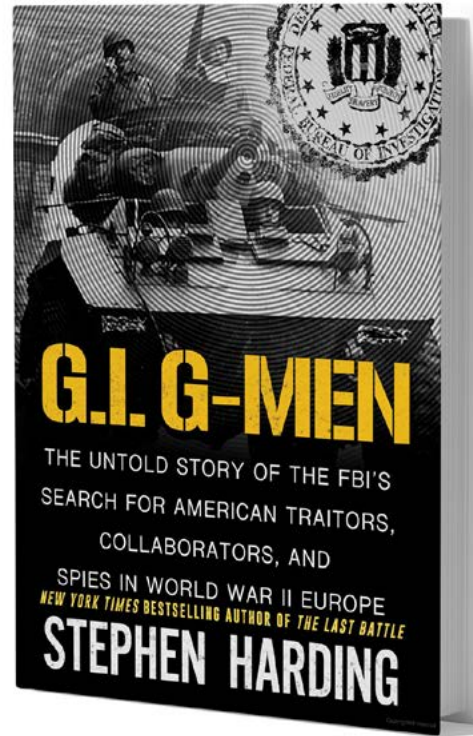
intelligence in public media

G.I. G-Men

The Untold Story of the FBI's Search for American Traitors, Collaborators, and Spies in World War II Europe

Reviewed JR Seeger

Author: Stephen Harding
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Reviewer: JR Seeger is a retired CIA officer and frequent contributor to *Studies*.



The challenge for a writer focused on counterintelligence in World War II is to decide which story to tell and from whose perspective. Both the US and UK security and intelligence communities in the 1940s were filled with personal and professional jealousies. Even during the darkest days of the war in Europe and the Pacific, the seniors in these critically important organizations often worked harder to defeat their bureaucratic competitor than the German, Italian or Japanese forces. Anyone who has an interest in these missions and the diverse units involved must accept the old saying: where you stand on an issue is where you sit.

The best advice for a student of this topic is to explore as many different authors and archival sources as possible. Stephen Harding's recent book, *G.I. G-Men*, offers an

excellent insight into FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's effort to expand the FBI into the pre-eminent, worldwide security and counter-espionage organization. He does that through case studies of 22 FBI special agents sent to Europe to find US traitors.

By 1942, US intelligence and security programs were a blend of civilian and military organizations that rarely collaborated, almost never shared information, and were opaque to the White House and the president. Counterintelligence and counterespionage were regularly defined as the same mission. Professional counterintelligence officers in the military and the FBI focused more on finding and prosecuting US traitors than understanding and disrupting Axis intelligence networks. The counterintelligence officers of the Office of Strategic Services

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(OSS/X2) were trained by their British colleagues to think of counterintelligence as a program designed to disrupt and defeat a foreign adversary.

The FBI had a major advantage. Director Hoover had a professional cadre of special agents that had experience conducting transnational investigations. He also had President Roosevelt's approval to conduct counterespionage in the Western Hemisphere. And, the FBI had a formal relationship with both the British Security Service (aka MI5), the office of the British Security Coordination (BSC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In contrast, the Army and Navy had the counterintelligence charter focusing exclusively on military targets and military personnel.

The youngest organization in the nascent intelligence community was the OSS. By 1943, it had a separate charter to conduct counterintelligence operations in partnership with the UK Secret Intelligence Service (aka MI6) and MI5, both in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) and the China, Burma, India Theatre (CBI).

Stephen Harding's book offers a series of clear case studies of formal treason investigations by FBI agents dispatched in 1944 to the ETO. The book follows a clear outline of three parts:

- Why and how Director Hoover arranged to send special agents into the war zone;
- Specific investigations of the special agents serving in uniform and officially in what the FBI and US Army headquarters called the Army Liaison Unit (ALU); and
- The political wrangling in the ETO and Washington that eventually forced Hoover to pull his men out of the theatre.

Harding is especially good at turning what likely were relatively dry FBI reports into chapters that read like a modern thriller. The special agents' pursuit of some of the American traitors (or *renegades* as Harding describes the individuals) most often started when the Army Criminal Investigative Division or the Army Counterintelligence Corps detained Americans who had been accused by locals of collaboration. These detentions were temporary and the FBI agents had to race to a location, begin their interrogations, and make a recommendation to FBI headquarters and the

Department of Justice whether to charge the individuals with treason. Some cases were relatively simple. The famous US poet Ezra Pound had been directly involved in Fascist broadcasts during the war and fulfilled the predication for a charge of "giving aid and comfort to the enemy."

Other investigations were far less straightforward, and obtaining witness statements and evidence in a war zone were both challenging and high risk operations. In the end, the ALU had 22 agents in the ETO, and Harding provides excellent details on their background, their investigations and their post war careers.

What is missing from the book are detailed discussions of collaboration among the various players in the ETO including CID, CIC, ALU, OSS/X2 as well as OSS/Art Looting Investigative Unit. For example, Harding does not provide any detail about how (or if?) the OSS/X2 files established in the field (both in London and the Army Command headquarters) were passed to the FBI or CIC after OSS was disbanded in 1945 by President Truman.

This book is only about the ALU investigations. It is not a strategic discussion of the FBI counterespionage mission during WWII. For that strategic view, a better choice would be the books of Raymond Batvinis or Leslie Rout and John Bratzel's book, *The Shadow War*. Nor does *GI G-men* even begin to reveal the complex intelligence and counterintelligence operations that were taking place in the ETO among CIC, OSS/X2, and their diverse British allies. Readers looking for a starting point for that discussion should start with Nicholas Reynolds' recent history of US intelligence in World War II.

In sum, one lesson for intelligence professionals from many of these excellent works, including Harding's book, is that US intelligence works best when its various parts cooperate. When the different arms of the community choose not to collaborate against a committed adversary, the chances of success are much lower. ■