Spying for Wellington: British Military Intelligence in the Peninsular War
Huw J. Davies (University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 328 pages, notes, illustrations, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by George P. Lewis

Intelligence aided the British military victory over France in the Iberian Peninsula during the Napoleonic Wars, argues Huw Davies in *Spying for Wellington*. Based heavily on primary sources, Davies's book shows how the Duke of Wellington, his military subordinates, and his civilian counterparts built an informal but sophisticated network of intelligence collection and analysis during the Peninsular War. In fact, Wellington's ability to use intelligence was one of several characteristics that made him such a successful general.

Davies does not limit himself to one type of intelligence in this study; instead, he focuses on numerous forms of intelligence, including human intelligence, open-source intelligence, intelligence gathered from Royal Navy operations, reconnaissance, and topographical intelligence. Surprisingly, he spends little time discussing the most famous aspect of Peninsular War intelligence—George Scovell's breaking of the Paris Grand Cipher, arguing that, while useful, it was not as significant as some historians have claimed. Beyond the substance of Davies's study itself, readers will also appreciate that he did not overly romanticize intelligence work but rather described it as involving much drudgery, even as valuable as it was.

British intelligence during the Napoleonic Wars offers a fascinating juxtaposition to modern intelligence. Britain had no single clearinghouse for intelligence. Instead, disparate entities including, but not limited to, the Foreign Office, the War Office, the admiralty, and military commanders in the field were responsible for their own intelligence collection and analysis. Thus, British intelligence success during the Peninsular War was enabled by the informal partnerships formed between Wellington, the Royal Navy, British diplomats, and their liaison relationships with both the Spanish and Portuguese governments and the Spanish guerrilla bands.

All the intelligence collection that this informal network produced still had no centralized body of analysts to study it. Instead, the British relied on collectors, agents, intelligence officers, diplomats, commanders, and ultimately sometimes even Wellington himself to do the analysis, a system which was largely successful.

Exploiting the chokepoints of the Pyrenees—the mountains separating France from Spain—British agents were able to record most French troop movements in and out of the Iberian Peninsula. This informal network of analysts then evaluated the reliability of these reports and developed a comprehensive and remarkably accurate assessment of how many troops the French had committed to the Peninsular War at any given time.

Much of the last three chapters of *Spying for Wellington* are focused on describing the maneuvers, sieges, and battles of the Peninsular War, but Davies does highlight points at which intelligence played key roles, and two episodes are particularly fascinating. As Wellington prepared for his 1813 campaign, he dispatched numerous intelligence officers to collect topographical intelligence (a predecessor of geospatial intelligence) on the rugged and poorly mapped parts of the peninsula where he planned to campaign. This intelligence, along with outstanding operational security and deceptions, allowed him to exploit the terrain to catch the French by surprise, ultimately resulting in his victory at the Battle of Vitoria.

Nonetheless, Wellington also experienced intelligence failures. Earlier in the war, he had the army of French Marshal Auguste Marmont under continuous surveillance. However, Wellington lacked intelligence on Marmont's intent, allowing the marshal to use rapid maneuvers to deceive Wellington into thinking his army was crossing the Duoro River at a different point than he actually was. Had Wellington questioned his assumptions about the intelligence provided by his surveillance, he might have been able to intercept Marmont at the river crossing, though thanks to his skilled generalship he overcame this intelligence failure and beat Marmont at the Battle of Salamanca.

Huw Davies has written a well-researched and thorough account of Wellington's use of intelligence during the Peninsular War. The book provides insight into a different era of human intelligence, open-source intelligence, topographical intelligence, reconnaissance, and intelligence analysis. Readers with both prior knowledge of the Napoleonic Wars and an interest in intelligence will find *Spying for Wellington* a useful study.

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The reviewer: George P. Lewis is the pen name of an officer in CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology.