

Intelligence in Public Media

Covert Legions: U.S. Army Intelligence in Germany, 1944–1949

Thomas Boghardt (Center of Military History, 2022), 570 pages, illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Scott A. Moseman, PhD

Popular culture champions CIA as the arbiter of intelligence in postwar Germany. Spy novels and movies depict CIA agents working in the shadows to combat Soviet agents for the hearts and minds of Berliners. But was this agency the most the nascent US Intelligence Community had to offer in the emerging Cold War? After all, the reputations of intelligence organizations other than CIA and its predecessor Office of Strategic Services (OSS) were amateurish at best. Of Army intelligence, General Dwight D. Eisenhower said in his book, *Crusade in Europe*, that at the start of World War II his service's shadow warriors were disorganized, unskilled in classifying enemy capabilities, and useless in operations and planning meetings at the department level.^a

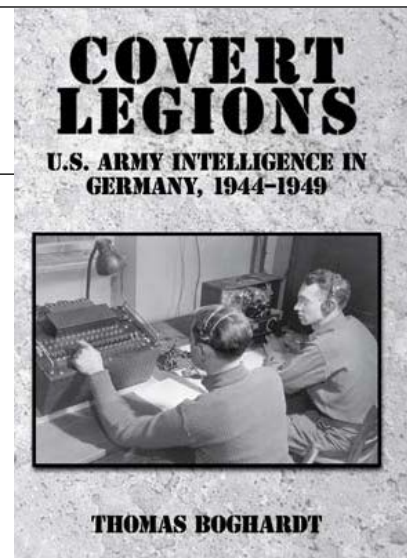
Thomas Boghardt, historian at the US Army Center of Military History (CMI) whose work has appeared in this journal, offers an alternative to the common portrayal of inept Army intelligence outfits in his official history, *Covert Legions: U.S. Army Intelligence in Germany, 1944–1949*. He boldly argues that Army intelligence was an “indispensable agent” in the work of shaping US policy in the Allied occupation of Germany. It served as the “first line of defense” in Central Europe. (11) For the most part, *Covert Legions* succeeds in serving as an official history and in filling gaps in intelligence research.

Boghardt sets out to inform readers that the role of Army intelligence in the occupation of Germany had remained largely untouched by historians. When scholars write about covert operations in Germany, Army intelligence is spoken of on the periphery or touched upon with a few select aspects. (7) Boghardt lists tangential histories such as the US Army's enlistment of Nazi scientists, recruitment of former Gestapo members, and signals intelligence in Germany, citing authors Brian E. Crim, Jens Wegener, and Stephen Budiansky among others. The author excels at presenting CIA and OSS historians as dominating discussions of war and post-war US intelligence systems. He uses the works of researchers such as Michael Warner and R. Harris Smith to show the creation

of the OSS and CIA and their relationship to Germany during 1944–49 but is quick to contend that these organizations had subordinate roles in the postwar intelligence system. (8) Boghardt has indeed cornered a largely unexplored portion of scholarship of postwar intelligence in Germany.

Covert Legions is divided into three parts: intelligence in World War II, intelligence organizations in occupied Germany, and intelligence operations in occupied Germany. The first part covers the intelligence apparatus and operations in 1941–45. It is the shortest section and is the most straightforward. The second section on intelligence organizations in 1945–49 explains in detail all the major players in an intelligence-saturated Germany. The last part explains every operation that Army intelligence participated in during a six-year period to include denazification, Soviet espionage, democratization, operational intelligence on the Red Army, and the Berlin Blockade. The reader is left wondering: Will the writer get to the topic I am interested in? Or the opposite question arises: What comes next? It is harder for the audience to follow the argument in time and space.

Covert Legions showcases Boghardt's deeply detailed and candid assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of Army intelligence. The work's bibliography is more than 25 pages long and shows that Boghardt visited primary research centers all over the United States and Germany. The hundreds of illustrations (pictures and maps) add to the richness of the narrative, putting faces and places to words. Boghardt does not shortchange a subject. For instance, a seemingly in the weeds but



a. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Doubleday, 1948), 32.

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

important tactical–operational organization such as the Berlin Document Center receives a three-page treatment.

Although *Covert Legions* is a CMH publication, Boghardt demonstrates he had the freedom to be frank about how successful Army intelligence was throughout the period. Interspersed with the accolades of the service’s intelligence were Boghardt’s thoughts of what the Army could have done better. For example, he calls insufficient vetting and low-quality personnel in key positions the weakest points of US intelligence agencies in Germany, making them susceptible to Soviet espionage. (328) It is refreshing to read a government historian’s honest take of past army operations.

But Boghardt could have set the conditions more thoroughly so that nonspecialists could understand the full story more clearly. Instead, *Covert Legions* aggressively drives into the narrative, leaving more novice readers of intelligence behind. The book has a list of abbreviations and a glossary in back sections, but flicking back and forth detracts from the reader’s attention. Instead, the book might have provided such material, or notes on terminology, early in the book. Boghardt might then have been able to avoid defining in his text different types of intelligence—such as counterintelligence, signals intelligence, and covert operations to name just a few. In so doing, he might have given readers new to intelligence a better baseline for understanding before he immersed them in the details of his history.

A conscious effort to stratify the levels of intelligence would have helped avoid blurry explanations of organizations and incidents he describes. For example, there are distinct differences between strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.^a In Boghardt’s work, examples of these levels are: Military Intelligence Division (MID G-2), strategic; Intelligence Division, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), operational; and Battalion Intelligence Section (S-2), tactical.

But *Covert Legions* does not lay out their unique features. Line-and-block illustrations of the chains of command for Army intelligence at the end of World War II and in 1947–49 are more confusing than helpful without clear delineations of authorities and a stratification of echelons showing the levels of intelligence. (19, 114)

Covert Legions points to the relationship between Maj. Gen. Clayton L. Bissell (MID G-2), and Brig. Gen. Edwin L. Sibert (director of intelligence, European Command) as an example of the Army’s top military intelligence officer repeatedly curtailing his European counterpart in the collection and analysis of intelligence. (414) Boghardt does not get to the root of the issue: the two generals have different ranks, levels of intelligence focus, missions, masters, and authorities. There was bound to be some friction. Describing the hierarchy of intelligence organizations at the time would have provided a fuller picture of what was happening in intelligence centers in Washington, Berlin, and the German countryside.

Nonetheless, Boghardt accomplishes what he set out to do: convince readers that Army intelligence was instrumental in helping shape the transformative period between World War II and the Cold War in Germany. (489) He shows that there was more to the covert activities in Central Europe than OSS and CIA agents working in the shadows or decrypting intercepts of Soviet communications. *Covert Legions* should be a standard for the intelligence schoolhouses in US civilian and military sectors. Students can glean lessons of correct and incorrect ways to conduct counterintelligence, intelligence analysis, intelligence exploitation, and covert action. Ultimately, Boghardt reminds us through the postwar operations in Germany of Army intelligence, OSS, and CIA (among others) that it is not just one member of intelligence community that can solve wicked problems, but the collaborative efforts of the collective to help accomplish its missions.



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a. For useful definitions of these terms, see Jonathan M. House, *Military Intelligence 1870–1991: A Research Guide* (Greenwood, 1993).