

The Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf

Intelligence in Recent Public Literature

Compiled and reviewed by Jon A. Wiant

This section contains brief reviews of recent books of interest to both the intelligence professional and the student of intelligence.

Spymasters: Ten CIA Officers in Their Own Words. Edited by Ralph E. Weber. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999. 355 pages.

In one of the ten long interviews that make up Ralph Weber's *Spymasters*, distinguished intelligence officer Sam Halpern underscores the importance of knowing what has gone before: "I found a bookmark about the second page of the first chapter [of an after-action review of the failed 1958 Indonesia covert action program]," he remarks. "This indicated to me that no one had read beyond that point, and so we made some of the same mistakes [in the Bay of Pigs] we made in Indonesia. No one is interested in history! They ignore history...so no one learns what happened before." Halpern's lament is reason enough to read this book.

Weber, a professor of history at Marquette University and a former Scholar-In-Residence at the CIA, introduces *Spymasters* with a brief, well-researched history of intelligence in the United States up to the formation of the CIA. The interviews pick up the subsequent story. While they lack the clear narrative line of a history, they offer recollections—some rough,

some polished—that combine the essence of our past with important lessons for the present. Rear Adm. Sidney Souers, the first DCI, wrestles with what powers the DCI ought to have and to what extent the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the Secretary of Defense should control national intelligence resources.

Of special relevance during the current global campaign against terrorism, Richard Bissel, former Deputy Director of Plans, looks back at the Bay of Pigs and ponders whether the CIA should get out of the paramilitary business because it is beyond its competence. William Colby, DCI from 1973-1976, makes the countervailing case that the Agency's contributions in Vietnam and Laos argue for retaining a robust paramilitary capability. Several interviews remind us that the differences between the military intelligence world and the CIA can lead to heated debates—especially over force estimates—that can spill over into both the presidential and congressional arenas. Former DCI Richard Helms talks about the interagency disagreements over Soviet missile strength, and both Colby and former Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) Ray Cline rehash the validity of force estimates in Vietnam and whether there was an intelligence failure surrounding the Tet offensive.

Weber's selection of interviews gives the reader the opportunity to look at politically charged issues from the inside, from assassination plots to bungled clandestine operations. Former DDI Robert Amory recalls his unsuccessful efforts to change the focus of Cuban policy from direct attacks against Castro to a broad political program throughout Latin America to isolate the Cuban leader. He argues that the personalization of the conflict provoked sympathy for Castro rather than weakening him, an admonition to be remembered in our campaign against terrorism. Both Amory and Cline make strong cases for the costs that we have needlessly paid by excluding analysts from critical operational decisions. Relevant to HUMINT today, Bissel argues for recruiting officers who are already well seasoned in the world, rather than hiring career trainees right out of college. Former DCIs Allen Dulles and John McCone and former Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick contribute their own valuable recollections.

Sam Halpern was right: We must understand our history. Ralph Weber's *Spymasters* is well worth the read.

Counterfeit Spies: Genuine or Bogus? An Astonishing Investigation into Secret Agents of the Second World War. By Nigel West. London: St. Ermin's Press, 1999. 308 pages.

As we all know, modest embellishments can transform a piece of history into an engaging spy story. Sin occurs, however, when small literary inventions give way to major fabrications and outright fraud. Nigel West compellingly exposes many examples of the latter in his book *Counterfeit Spies*.

Over the past 55 years, according to West, major US and UK publishing houses have printed at least two dozen well-received books purporting to be true accounts of World War II intelligence operations that are, either in whole or in part, rampant embellishments or complete fabrications. Combining keen analysis with recently declassified records, the author systematically examines these books, sorting out the verifiable historical details from the exaggerations and inventions. He introduces us to a number of true frauds, whose publishers were either duped by con artists or simply unconcerned with high standards of accuracy. We meet "LTC John Cottell, MVO OBE MC," author of *Codenamed Badger*, who describes his life as a British operative from wartime work with the Dutch resistance to his postwar arrest by the KGB and exchange for a Soviet spy. Cottell has given more than 300 lectures around the United States in recent years. No matter that not a single fact of his operational activity—nor even his existence—can be verified. He explains, like many in West's book, that his work was so secret that no records were kept or that archives were destroyed to protect him.

We also meet Josephine Butler, author of *Cyanide in My Shoe*, who made up dozens of missions into occupied territory. She is in good company with Roseanne Pitt, who wrote *The Courage of Fear*, who likewise constructed a riveting tale of her frequent parachuting into occupied France. Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, Director of the Political Warfare Executive, who had no personal knowledge of Pitt's claimed activities, wrote a preface to her book, commenting that "The book bears the stamp of truth on every page." Even a well-respected journalist like Quentin Reynolds (*The Man Who Wouldn't Talk*) and popular historian Leonard Mosley (*The Druid*) were caught up in the world of invented spies. Mosley's work suggests that there was one German spy in Britain who was not under the control of MI-5, but West's careful investigation shows how Mosley was drawn in by questionable archival records and a willingness to suspend disbelief in his own sources.

West believes that exposing false heroics in the accounts of World War II intelligence officers and agents matters. Bogus stories discredit the world of intelligence and dishonor the true officers that died in the war. As West's well-researched inquiry disturbingly illustrates, these stories have contaminated the intelligence history of World War II and some have even made their way into the official record.

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