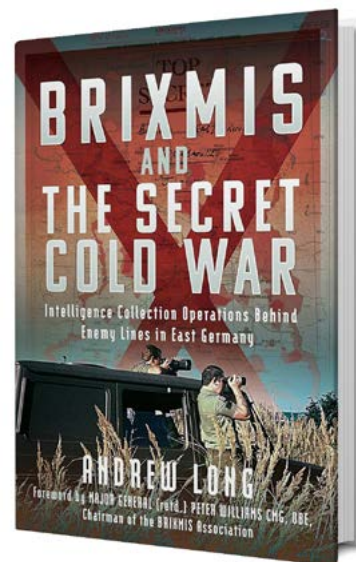


intelligence in public media

BRIXMIS and the Secret Cold War *Intelligence Collection Operations* *Behind Enemy Lines in East Germany*

Reviewed by Graham Alexander

Author: Andrew Long
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Reviewer: Graham Alexander is the pen name of a CIA officer.



Author and Cold War historian Andrew Long has delivered, with *BRIXMIS and the Secret Cold War*, a fascinatingly thorough volume on British efforts to conduct intelligence reconnaissance missions throughout East Germany from 1946 through Germany's 1990 reunification and even beyond. The fulcrum of this effort was the British Commanders'-in-Chief Mission to the Soviet Forces in Germany (BRIXMIS), which operated on the basis on the Robertson-Malinin Agreement. Said accord, concluded among the Allied Powers in September 1946, permitted the reciprocal establishment of military missions in each country's German occupied zone. All four occupying powers exploited the nebulous description of "maintaining liaison" to conduct increasingly sophisticated intelligence-collection operations that continued even past the conclusion of the Cold War.

Long is nothing if not thorough when cataloguing even the most minute details of how BRIXMIS operated. Intrepid British military officers used a variety of automobiles and planes to photograph Warsaw Pact installations, arms, and movements, acting as a vital tripwire in a key Cold War fissure point. Interwoven in the chronicle are intriguing, sometimes hair-raising stories, that make a credible case about the exceptional value that BRIXMIS provided. Simultaneously, Long also shows how BRIXMIS's unorthodox operation, one outside the boundaries of more traditional collection vectors (HUMINT, SIGINT, IMINT), has meant that many analyses of Cold War intelligence have overlooked its contributions.

Long's BRIXMIS history flows forward in sometimes dense prose, but nevertheless rewards the diligent reader.

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BRIXMIS and the Secret Cold War

This is, in part, no fault of the author. One glossary at the front of the book listing acronyms comprises nine whole pages, meaning that some sentences are all but unintelligible to all but the most seasoned historian or military aficionado.

Nonetheless, there are fascinating accounts of how BRIXMIS officers moving through the German Democratic Republic managed to elude surveillance, surreptitiously enter sensitive facilities, and even escape pursuit during high-speed chases. One stomach-wrenching, but still insightful, section details how BRIXMIS personnel collected sensitive notes in rubbish piles outside Soviet military facilities. These notes, as BRIXMIS discovered, performed ancillary duties as toilet paper for often supply-starved Red Army conscripts.

Long also details many of the hard lessons that BRIXMIS personnel learned as they concocted a kind of intelligence collection operation without clear precedent. The early years were clearly the least structured, but BRIXMIS officers gradually learned ways of map making, driving, preparation, and security practices, to name only several, which eventually solidified into an efficiently running machine. Long leaves no detail from the BRIXMIS side untouched. He discusses, for example, the furniture layout in BRIXMIS spaces as well as the specifications for the cameras and automobiles in extraordinary detail. Simultaneously, he makes important digressions into the ways that BRIXMIS intelligence proved its worth as part the Western Allies overall intelligence collec-

tion efforts. One passage details, for example, how one BRIXMIS mission succeeded in catching details on a surface to air missile system that had never been seen before in Germany—an intelligence coup of strategic significance to NATO.

Two elements could have transformed Long's work from worthwhile into essential for interested intelligence professionals. The goes back to Long's organization of the material. *BRIXMIS and the Secret Cold War* is organized in encyclopedic fashion, breaking down the BRIXMIS experience schematically before concluding with details on how it ultimately ceased. This is regrettable inasmuch as organizing events chronologically while treating various aspects of collection, tools, and opposition could have transformed the story into a true-life, page-turning spy thriller.

Separately, Long's impressive dedication to British sources does not apply with respect to East German or Soviet ones. Long makes references throughout to revelations culled from Eastern Bloc archives without ever fully committing to a thorough treatment of their operations, perspectives, and methods in response to BRIXMIS. Unquestionably, this examination would have contained valuable takeaways on the ways that perception and reality color the relationship between intelligence collectors and their counterintelligence adversaries. These critiques aside, *BRIXMIS and the Secret Cold War* remains a valuable source of information on an often overlooked facet of Cold War intelligence operations whose lessons remain applicable in the present. ■