

Military Intelligence Behind Enemy Lines

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The history of intelligence activities during World War II includes many chapters on adventures and accomplishments in the German-occupied countries, but nothing to equal in scale and in organization the systematic intelligence collection effort carried out in Poland under the direction of the Home Army's Intelligence Division. Before describing this effort let us recall the circumstances in which Poland then found herself and the conditions under which the intelligence service was organized.

On 1 September 1939, without declaration of war, Hitler fell upon Poland and from the first day, even the first hour, carried out a ruthless bombing of the whole country, destroying cities and railway stations and even villages and the columns of refugees on the roads. On the seventeenth day of this campaign the Red Army invaded, seizing almost one-third of Poland. German-Russian cooperation was established by the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 23 September 1939. After the defeat inflicted by these two great neighboring powers with which she had firm non-aggression pacts, Poland lay stunned and despairing; in the course of her thousand-year history she had survived defeats and partitions, but never on the scale of these in 1939. Yet on the other hand her people were now stronger in number, more conscious of themselves as a nation, and impassioned in their love of country.

What had happened to their fatherland they felt above all as a terrible

betrayal, and it is not strange that hatred for the aggressors, particularly the Germans, swelled high in the hearts of all Poles. As early as the fall of 1939 it was apparent that both occupying powers intended to use ruthless measures aimed at the destruction of Poland as a nation. Their first victims were the scientists, university professors, writers, engineers, and political and social leaders. From the Soviet zone Polish residents were deported in mass, under miserable conditions.

The remaining population, including those who escaped from imprisonment, began to organize themselves into an army, primarily for purposes of self-defense. The new organization developed rapidly in central Poland, more slowly on the peripheries. A central command was created, and then regional and lower commands, including a complement of personnel for collecting information and for maintaining contact among commands, the rudiments of an intelligence and liaison service.

This Polish service, like all such organizations everywhere, was a child of necessity: one had to know where the enemy was and in what strength, what he was doing and intending to do, whether his forces were increasing or diminishing, what dispositions he was making of his men. Since the enemy was in almost every big city, the need for gathering information about him automatically embraced the whole country. This information was utilized immediately by the local secret military authorities and was then transmitted to the highest echelons of command.

The emigre Polish government, located at first in France, moved after the fall of France in the summer of 1940 to London, where it remained to the end of the war, joining forces with the rest of the free world in its struggle with the totalitarian powers. When the home organization crystallized, the emigre government was able to assign it tasks of importance not only for Poland but for the whole allied camp, and its work got briskly under way, with even the lowliest of those employed in gathering information about the enemy aware of the value of their activity.

Positive Intelligence

Intelligence work has a long tradition, and its organization is no less an art than the art of strategy. But it was not after the pattern of classical models that this work was improvised in Poland. The circumstances were altogether exceptional, both extraordinarily hazardous and

extraordinarily advantageous. The opportunities were clearly demonstrated when the Germans began to prepare their offensive against the USSR; this was evident to the Home Army intelligence service more than half a year before the attack which came on 22 June 1941. There are few cases in the history of warfare where an intelligence service directed against the enemy has been able to work from inside his military positions, at the very front, behind the front, and far to the rear deep in his homeland.

The Polish service was able to report daily to London on such German preparations as the building of airfields, the gradual concentration of commands and divisions, and finally their mass movement forward. Before the attack on the USSR occurred, London had ready at hand a plan of the German order of battle, comprising over 100 divisions on the San, Bug and Narew rivers, whereon was marked the position not only of each division but even of the minor units of the huge concentration of forces which was to demolish the Soviet armies in the course of a few weeks' campaign. Never before had a military intelligence service spied out the enemy with tens of thousands of inspired agents, unpaid but devoted patriots, conscious of the purpose of their work.

Organizationally, the Polish service dispensed with the customary distinction between command organs and executive components. The Intelligence Division, constituting one element of the staff of the High Command, functioned less as directing organ for the country-wide network than as the center for correlation and evaluation of reports, transmission of information to London, and receipt of instructions from abroad. It had the following components:

- Chief, with secretariat and communications unit;
- Deputy;

- Area intelligence units, such as for the German Reich, the eastern front, the seacoast and Baltic ports, and a mobile team for special missions;

- Reports Center, subdivided into two sections, the Bureau for Military, Air and Naval Problems, and the Bureau for Economic Problems;

- A Technical and Documentary Services Section;

- A Finance Section, with a unit for the care of arrested personnel

and the families of those killed.

For research on complex economic problems the service availed itself of scientists and experts in the various branches of industry who were loosely affiliated with the Bureau for Economic Problems. Such research was done to develop estimates on coal extraction, petroleum yields, synthetic gasoline production, progress in the construction and testing of the new secret weapons (V-1 and V-2), and similar intelligence problems.

Within the German Reich the mission of the service was not defined by geographical area, but concentrated on certain seaport and industrial objectives designated by higher authority. For this purpose several dozen specialists in naval and air problems were sent from London. Poles were employed in the most variegated positions in many German establishments, ranging from railroads to business houses, and so had widespread opportunities for making observations. Reports often reached the intelligence center from several different sources at the same time, facilitating evaluation of the reliability of incoming material.

The required penetration of the North Sea ports met with a great deal of difficulty on account of the severe screening process the Germans used in taking on workers there and the alert activity of German counterintelligence. In this sector the work of the intelligence service was subject to frequent interruption. The Baltic ports, on the other hand, remained under uninterrupted control.

The rear areas of the eastern front were unevenly controlled. Only the Ukrainian sector was kept thoroughly in hand. In the whole stretch south from Polesia there was a regular agent network. Intelligence teams advanced in the wake of the German armies, reaching as far as the Volga and the Caucasus. The intelligence reports from this sector were complete and gave a clear picture of the state of the German ground and air forces and of their economic exploitation of occupied territory.

The Reports Center organized and correlated the information received, checked its validity by various methods, and prepared ad hoc and weekly reports. These reports sent abroad presented a synthesis of the current situation, particularly on the eastern front. Another important product of the intelligence activity were studies of the German tables of organization and equipment; these constituted a useful training aid for

the Home Army.

After diplomatic relations were established between the Polish emigre government and the USSR and a Polish military mission had arrived in Moscow in 1941, the Soviet authorities proposed collaboration with the Polish intelligence services. The proposal envisioned direct transmission of information reports from Poland to the Soviet staff through the establishment of radio and air courier communications between Warsaw and the Soviet intelligence center. The Poles accepted only the proposed radio link. A Polish liaison post was thus actually established near Moscow on 2 April 1942, but for various reasons it continued to function only until July 1942. This was the period when the Polish divisions which had been forming in the USSR were evacuated to Iran. One of the reasons why the collaboration was broken off was that the Russians did not give the Poles the certifications which they had promised.

Communications between Warsaw and London were maintained by radio and by courier. The most urgent reports on military, air, naval and economic subjects were transmitted coded by direct radio. The number of such reports reached 300 per month. Less urgent reports were forwarded, also enciphered, to the base in Budapest and relayed to bases in Switzerland and Sweden, whence they were transmitted by radio to London. Reports by courier were made once a month beginning in 1941; these were compendious, comprising the entirety of the elaborated information organized according to London's instructions. To each section were attached the pertinent original documents, such as construction blueprints or plans of industrial installations and airfields. These reports, amounting generally to some 200 typewritten pages with 100 pages of attachments, were microfilmed and packed in safe containers.

Certain Polish achievements had special significance for the general war effort. In the spring of 1943, for example, the home intelligence service received information that the Germans were carrying out tests of some new secret weapon at their experimental station in Peenemünde. London ordered the service to get a detailed plan of the station, and one was obtained within a couple of weeks. With this plan for guidance, the Royal Air Force was able to carry out on the night of 17-18 August 1943 a raid in which part of the station was destroyed and the Chief of Staff of the Luftwaffe, General Jeschonek, was killed along with several members of the experimental team. As a result the "V" rockets which were being tested at Peenemünde were several months late getting into

operation.

In the spring of 1944 the Germans transferred their experimental activity to Polish soil. Rockets shot from launching ramps at the SS training camp in Blizna-Pustków near Mielec would at first hit widely scattered points over a range of several hundred kilometers. As the experiments progressed, however, the hits became concentrated in the neighborhood of Sarnaka on the Bug, north of Wyszaków. A special agent network established by the Polish service for that purpose kept each shot under observation, recording meteorological and ballistic data and other details of the operation. Other teams collected fragments and component parts of the rockets after they fell, getting there ahead of the German motorized patrols sent out to find the pieces. A commission of engineers, assembled in Warsaw for this sole purpose, undertook research on the characteristics of the new weapon. Its characteristics were reported immediately to London as they were identified; and later, after assembly of all the most important components of a rocket, when photographs and technical drawings of the fragments had been made, the whole thing was forwarded by air to London, together with the results of the commission's research.

The intelligence collection operations were conducted on Polish territory by the regional commands. The organization of the intelligence components of regional staffs was modeled on that given above for the Intelligence Division of the High Command. The agent networks, employing thousands of people in each region, were responsible to the regional commanders. The regional commands utilized the resulting information in formulating their own security and war plans in addition to forwarding it to the High Command for study of the enemy dispositions as a whole. The tasks of the service were to develop and report information on: a) the German garrisons, army and police, airfields, military stores, repair shops, army transport, equipment and material, with special attention to fuel supplies, along all communication routes to and from the front; b) the transfer of units, changes in their billeting, and the smallest particulars of their conduct; c) the operations of industry in every detail.

Agents of the service reported every observed change not only in the disposition of the German units but also in their daily life. The service took full advantage of the help of the civilian population unconnected with the military organization. In time, as resistance became the established attitude in the civilian community, people spontaneously

reported the most minute observations in every sphere of activity. They automatically reinforced the network in areas made particularly important by events and in periods pregnant with military developments like June 1941 and the time of the German retreat through Poland.

The results of the work created a detailed and frequently colorful picture of the situation; in particular, information on industry, more difficult to obtain than purely military information, was imposing in its breadth and precision. New orders and the time of starting new production led to inferences about the plans of the occupying power. The effects of each bombing on the production of the industrial establishment were reported, and the selection of future targets was made on the basis of these reports rather than on the evidence of air photographs at the time of bombardment, which told only a part of the story.

Counterintelligence Activities

If the organization of positive intelligence activities was a departure from classical forms, counterintelligence was even more exclusively based on its own ingenuity and the adaptation of its organization and work to local needs. It was never directed centrally from the top; initial attempts to form a country-wide organization modeled after the unit in the High Command turned out rather badly, and day-to-day practical activity demanded complete autonomy for regional counterintelligence units. There was mutual sharing of information only on Polish collaborators with the Gestapo.

This part of the work is more difficult than intelligence proper. It requires the employment of outstandingly intelligent people and the application of more highly perfected techniques; it requires individual enterprise and excellent internal liaison. In an enemy-occupied country counterintelligence can operate only when the whole mechanism of conspiratorial activity begins to operate flawlessly; and the construction and operation of such a mechanism cannot be treated in this article.

The effectiveness of the Polish counterintelligence can be measured by the security of the secret high political and military authorities in Warsaw, their capital. The Germans never succeeded in developing information on the Polish military organization, as witness Von dem Bach's testimony at the Nuremberg trials. Bach was the German commander during the two-month Battle of Warsaw, whose mission it was to destroy the Polish units in the uprising. Before he took over the

Warsaw command he had had access to the files of the German intelligence service. Yet he testified in 1945 that there was no single commander on the Polish side who could be considered his own opposite number. Thus he was in error not only at the time of the battle but even a year afterward; he had no idea whatever of the organization and deployment of the Polish forces. That is proof that the Polish counterintelligence effort against enemy penetration was above normal standards. The fact that the Germans were better acquainted with the command structure of the Home Army than with its Warsaw regional command, which prepared and directed the uprising, is a function of special circumstances.

The Germans likewise never succeeded, in the course of this battle or at any other time during their entire occupation of Polish soil, in getting the key to the Polish cipher. That is the only way they could have got information about the military organization and its functioning. Today, when the cards are long since all on the table, any assertion to the contrary would be invalid.

The mission of counterintelligence is simple to define; it is charged with learning in advance what measures are planned against the secret organization by the adversary, in this case the German secret police, security police, and military and administrative authorities. It often happened that this kind of information was derived from the questions the Germans put to persons arrested and imprisoned in the local jails; it could be obtained immediately after the prisoner was taken to his cell, and in the early period was the principal source of guidance for the Polish dispositions.

It must be emphasized in this connection that the secret organization was threatened not only by the danger of compromising its command structure, its leading personalities, its communications or the operations of its secret press, but by every shift and resettlement of area populations, which often ruptured its organizational links and threw to the winds the exertions of many months' work.

The regional counterintelligence organizations were made up of the following elements:

- Directing organ, subordinate to the regional command;
- Several observation groups working independently of each other;

A headquarters operation to correlate and evaluate the material sent in by the observation groups, to do research on German penetration techniques, and to supply material to the director of the Special Court;

Collaborators in the prisons;

A liaison unit;

An administrative unit; and

Groups for the liquidation of traitors.

The counterintelligence organization never effectively extended its work into the concentration camps and never got its people into the German secret police organs; it didn't have the financial resources to effect such penetrations. That does not mean, however, that it didn't get information, and valuable information, from these sources without the employment of regular agents there.

Next after the interrogation of arrested persons, the best source of counterintelligence information was developed in the off-duty hangouts of the Germans, their restaurants, coffee shops and private homes. The Germans were permitted to visit only the public places reserved "*Nur für Deutsche*," and the Polish service had to introduce its own people into these places. It became customary there for the Germans to grow garrulous, certain that they were among their own people whom they could trust, and to talk openly about all kinds of things. Thus information was obtained about whom they might suspect under what pseudonym, whether and when they were planning "grabs,"¹ resettlements, or round-ups for work in the Reich, which public houses, districts and dwellings were under observation, and the like.

The Polish commanders also got from their counterintelligence workers data on the behavior of their own service personnel, on whether they were observing in every respect the carefully worked-out principles of conspiratorial activity. Violations such as garrulousness, frequenting public places, and group excursions of young people out of town were censured at hearings, and those so censured were demoted to the lowest ranks of the organization. Considering, however, that organization personnel were selected for their high patriotism and trustworthiness, counterintelligence had little work in this field; there was no question of

continuing investigation or uncertainty about their moral caliber.

One sensitive segment of the Home Army's work required special precautions--the production of weapons like hand grenades, incendiary flares, automatic pistols, etc. Those who worked constantly in this sector usually began after a time to disregard security considerations, and it was necessary to put these places under counterintelligence protection in addition to the regular security guards assigned to all places where production or secret printing was going on.

In extreme cases of danger to the secret organization, when there was no other way to avoid losses, the commander would order an attack on the German units. Such attacks were carried out by combat units of the so-called diversionary forces held in constant readiness, well armed and thirsting for revenge.

If one may draw morals from this Polish story, there are three of them here. One, that it is possible to accomplish a great deal without money and under difficult conditions, if only some high purpose inspires those at work. Two, that collaboration with allies gives one the necessary confidence that he is contributing to a broad effective effort. Three, that resistance and intelligence activity take on significance proportionate to the sensitivity of their locale with respect to the enemy's military positions: Poland was more important than France in World War II in relation to German communications, the rear areas of the front, and staging for strategic action.

1 The Germans staged mass raids in the larger cities and on the railroads; since other methods were unsuccessful they calculated that in these mass grabs some individuals active in the secret organizations would by the laws of probability fall into their hands. After each grab there was a cursory interrogation followed by a detailed one. Often individuals were released immediately.

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