

# The Intelligence Department

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*Precepts for the nineteenth-century intelligence officer not useless for his counterpart today.*

## **Garnet J. Wolseley**

From the moment that war is declared until peace is made, it is of the utmost importance that we should know what the enemy is doing. A general who has the means of always learning the enemy's movements and intentions is certain to annihilate an adversary to whom his doings are unknown, all other things being equal. Napoleon said that a general operating in an inhabited country who was ignorant of the enemy's doings and intentions was ignorant of his profession; in writing on this subject to his brother in Spain, he said that the single motive of procuring intelligence would be sufficient to authorize detachments of 3,000 or 4,000 men being made to seize local authorities, post offices, etc., etc.

Until the troops are actually in the field, such information must be gleaned by our Intelligence Department in London, and by our Foreign Office people, who should also during the war keep up a system of communication with the enemy's capital, and if possible with his army. The means of starting an intelligence department should, if possible, be taken with you from England, or sent on before you. The purlieus of Leicester Square could supply our armies with spies for every country in Europe.

When war is impending with any country, a number of officers should be

sent to travel through it and collect information, although if our Treasury would pay for it, this could be much better done during peace. Once in the field, a knowledge of the enemy's doings must be obtained by the Commander in the best way he can. It is explained further on how reconnaissances for this purpose should be conducted. The other means of obtaining information are prisoners, deserters, by questioning the inhabitants, by intercepted letters, tapping telegraph wires, and by means of spies.

## The G-2

The general commanding an army appoints an officer as the chief of his intelligence department, working of course under the chief of the staff, and the utmost care should be taken in the selection. If the army is a large one, one or two other officers should be employed in a similar manner at the headquarters of corps or divisions that may be at some distance from headquarters; it is advisable that the employment of these officers in this manner be kept strictly secret from the army, and that they should themselves at all times disown having anything to do with spies, and profess utter ignorance of the enemy's movements. It is easy to make them A.D.C.'s and let them nominally attend to the general's private correspondence, or to notify their appointments in G.O. as posted to the A.G.'s or Q.M.G.'s department. As in some countries proper officers cannot be found for this purpose who can speak the language, English civilians taken from the consular service may be given this work to do, and be attached to the army professedly as interpreters.

Whoever conducts the work should be of middle age, and have a clear insight into human nature, with a logical turn of mind; nothing sanguine about him, but of a generally calm and distrustful disposition. He should be intimately acquainted with the manners and customs of the people of the country. The organisation of the enemy's army should be engraven on his mind, and the names of all officers commanding corps, divisions, etc., etc., should be in his possession. He should be in constant communication with the central office in London, to whom should be communicated at once all reliable information obtained in the field, and from which in a similar manner all information received from other sources should be transmitted to the chief in the field.

# Spies

The management of spies is difficult; out of every ten employed, you are fortunate if one gives you truthful information. It is important that spies should be unknown to one another. Care should be taken to make each believe that he is the only one employed. Some serve from patriotism, others for money, some receive pay from both sides; if such an one can be depended upon, he is invaluable. All should be petted and made a great deal of, being liberally paid and large rewards given them when they supply any really valuable information. A few thousand pounds is of no consequence to a nation, but if well laid out in obtaining information, it may be the indirect means of adding to the victories of one's country.

It is very necessary that all bona fide spies should always have about their persons some means of proving themselves really to be whom they represent: a certain coin of a certain date, a Bible of a certain edition, a Testament with the 3rd or the 7th leaf torn out, etc., etc. These tokens should be changed frequently. A spy who was employed by an officer in a neutral state, making his way to the headquarters of the army in the field, could thus at once make himself known to the Intelligence Department there. In some instances, a pass-sign or word is better, as it is less compromising, such as putting up the right hand to the right ear and then to the left ear, etc., etc.

The more extensive the system, and the greater its ramifications, both as to the numbers employed and the extent of territory from which information is obtained, the better chances you have of obtaining what you require. It is essential that one or more officers should, if possible, be posted in some neutral state as near the theatre of operation as can be done without exciting suspicion, with whom all the spies and secret agents employed there should be in communication; they should select towns or villages from which there is good telegraphic communication with England, so that the information obtained might be quickly transmitted to our headquarters in the field. These officers should be provided with ample means to employ spies, and to pay well all those who supply them with trustworthy information.

It is very necessary that specially prepared paper should be provided for

the use at times of all officers and agents employed in the Intelligence Department, upon which letters can be written in ink that does not become visible until it has been subjected to a certain chemical process. It is necessary that a letter in ordinary ink should invariably be written on the same paper containing the information that it is required to keep secret.

## **Prisoners and Peasants**

All prisoners taken at the outposts should be led direct to headquarters without being questioned elsewhere: the chief intelligence officers there will examine each separately, taking care that no one is present. It is much better that the enemy's movements should not be known to the army generally: if they are, they will be canvassed by a host of newspaper correspondents, and in the end the enemy will learn that his doings are known, which will make him more watchful; whereas it is a great matter to lull him into the pleasing notion that we are a stupid people, without wit or energy enough to find out what he is doing or intending to do, and that we have no spies in his camp.

As a nation we are bred up to feel it a disgrace even to succeed by falsehood; the word spy conveys something as repulsive as slave; we will keep hammering along with the conviction that 'honesty is the best policy,' and that truth always wins in the long run. These pretty little sentences do well for a child's copy-book, but the man who acts upon them in war had better sheathe his sword for ever. Spies are to be found in every class of society, and gold, that mighty lever of men, is powerful enough to unlock secrets that would otherwise remain unknown at the moment. An English general must make up his mind to obtain information as he can, leaving no stone unturned in order to do so.

Much will depend on the disposition of the inhabitants; if they are friendly, as the Spaniards were during the Peninsular war, it is easy to organise a good intelligence department, for the great difficulty of conveying news from one army to the other is got over; with good spies in the enemy's camps, they can send their information by a trusty peasant, who of course can pass without suspicion. The letter sent should be written on a strip of very thin paper, which, if rolled up tightly,

can be put into a quill 11/2 in. long, the ends being sealed up; this can easily be concealed in the hair, beard, or in a hollow made in the end of a walking-stick. It is a good plan to write secret correspondence in lemon-juice across a newspaper or the pages of a book, which, like a Testament, if found on the person of a peasant, would excite no suspicion. Such writing leaves no mark, but if at any subsequent time it is held to the fire, or a hot iron is passed over it, every letter becomes legible.

In the article on Reconnaissances will be found lists of questions to be put to prisoners, and lists of the ordinary indications of movements on the part of an enemy; but it is only by studying his manners and customs that one can understand what he means.

## **Deception**

In all the wars of this and future ages, the electric telegraph will be greatly used. It must be remembered that a telegraph operator can, with a small pocket instrument, tap the wires anywhere, and learn the messages passing along them. A few such men living concealed within the enemy's territory could obtain more news than dozens of ordinary spies. Immediately before or during an action an enemy may be deceived to any extent by means of such men: messages can be sent ordering him to concentrate upon wrong points, or by giving him false information you may induce him to move as you wish. The telegraph was used in all these ways during the American war between North and South.

Spies can be made useful in spreading false news of your movements; indeed a general commanding should so keep his council that his army, and even the staff round him, should be not only in ignorance of his real intentions but convinced that he aims at totally different objects from what are his true ones. Without saying so directly, you can lead your army to believe anything; and as a rule, in all civilised nations, what is believed by the army, will very soon be credited by the enemy, having reached him by means of spies or through the medium of those newly-invented curses to armies—I mean newspaper correspondents.

# Collation

The intelligence officer should every morning report in writing to his chief the information he has obtained from the officers employed under him and other sources. All suspicious circumstances observed by the outposts to be reported daily through the general on duty to the Q.M.G., who will at once inform the chief intelligence officer. It is a great object that a system should be established by which all information, whether gleaned from individual officers out amusing themselves or from the outposts or from any other source, should be placed at the disposal of the man to whom the Commander looks for information. All officers should learn, accordingly, that it is their duty to report anything they may discover to the nearest staff officer, who must remember that he must lose no time in informing the Q.M.G. Although trifling events in themselves can tell but little, yet when they are collated in numbers and compared with the information derived from spies and reconnaissances, each small piece of news becomes, perhaps, an important link in the chain of information.

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1 Chapter reproduced from *The Soldier's Pocketbook for Field Service*, by Major General Sir Garnet T. Wolseley, Inspector General of Auxiliary Forces (London: Macmillan and Company, 1874).

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