

## Intelligence in Public Media

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### **The Secret War: Spies, Codes and Guerillas, 1939–1945**

Max Hastings (HarperCollins, 2015), 612 pp., end-of-chapter notes, bibliography, photos, index.

#### **Reviewed by Nigel West**

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Max Hastings is a distinguished journalist who made his reputation reporting during the Falklands campaign in 1982 and went on to edit the *Daily Telegraph* for a decade. His position regarding intelligence generally is highly skeptical, and his views on the literature are robust. He rightly considers much of the material published on the French resistance as “romantic twaddle” (xxvi); he condemns Anthony Cave Brown’s *Bodyguard of Lies* as “largely a work of fiction”; and he sees William Stevenson’s notorious *A Man Called Intrepid* as “wildly fanciful” (xxv). M.R.D. Foot’s histories of Special Operations Executive are “tendentious” and most intelligence operations are “inherently wasteful.” (xix) For good measure, he is also justifiably dismissive of the recent movie *The Imitation Game*, which has a “negligible relationship to fact” (xxv) and purports to tell the story of Alan Turing.<sup>a</sup>

The author’s previous books are remarkable for the absence of any consideration of an intelligence dimension. This is especially true in his reporting on the Falklands and, perhaps more surprising, his much-praised *Overlord*, an account of the D-Day landings and the battle of Normandy in which strategic deception might be said to have played a pivotal role. Without any background in intelligence, and demonstrating a definite disdain for the discipline, the author recalls that in 1974 he declined to review Fred Winterbotham’s *The Ultra Secret* because the whole concept of Bletchley Park’s contribution to the Allied victory sounded improbable. Quite simply, he had never heard of what the codebreakers had accomplished, and had therefore failed to recognize the significance of a book that we now acknowledge as a significant milestone in the history of intelligence and, indeed, the 20th century.

Hastings has taken an ambitious, “big picture” approach to secret intelligence and clandestine operations conducted during the Second World War and seeks to offer a broad canvas illustrated by concentrating on a selection of individuals and events. Superficially, this is an attractive solution to the considerable challenge of

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a. See also David Hatch, “Two Cryptological Nights at the Cinema” in *Studies in Intelligence* 59, No. 2 (June 2015).

covering so much terrain without falling into the trap of regurgitating very familiar material. On the other hand, adopting such a tactic requires a careful choice of representative characters and incidents and addressing the question of whether to include new research. At first blush, it would appear that the author has avoided polemics and has sought to produce his evidence objectively, but the devil, of course, is in the details.

Some of these issues create a problem for the reader because, consciously or otherwise, Hastings has gone much further than conventional historians, and made some surprising assertions requiring close scrutiny. Some are plainly erroneous, such as the muddle between two celebrated double agents, TRICYCLE and GARBO. It was the former, the Yugoslav playboy Dusko Popov, who traveled to the United States in 1941 and endured chronic mishandling by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. However, Hastings mistakenly ascribes this episode to the Spaniard Juan Pujol, claiming that he had spent “some months of 1943 in the United States, and the FBI mismanaged him so grossly that he was almost blown.” (285) Actually, GARBO never visited the United States at any time during the war, and there was no inter-Allied dispute with the FBI over his management.

This vignette may be nothing more than an inconsequential slip, but it raises a troubling doubt that materializes constantly because the book’s source notes are so thin that it is impossible to discern whether the author has made a bold disclosure based on new digging in the archives, or merely tripped himself up over a confusing detail. Take, for example, the unequivocal sentence “Canaris had a mistress in Vienna whose sister was married to Menzies’s brother” (67). Both spymasters act as a thread running through Hastings’ narrative, so this statement is quite important, and requires some explanation. The MI6 Chief Stewart Menzies’s brother Ian, a City insurance broker, was married to an Austrian, Lisel Gärtner, and her sister Friedle, a cabaret artiste, was run as a double agent by MI5, which codenamed her GELATINE. That much is well-documented, but Hastings has added a further layer

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of intrigue by revealing that Friedle had been Canaris's mistress. If true, this is much, much more than a mere "trifling coincidence," but there is absolutely nothing in the footnotes to indicate where the author acquired such a notion. Could it be that he has mixed up Lisel Gärtner with Canaris's known Polish mistress, Halina Symanska, whose incomplete story is also referred to in his text? In any event, there is nothing to clarify the true position.

Nor is this an isolated example where doubts develop. Hastings covers the CICERO case in some detail, but again his version, intentionally or unintentionally, is slightly revisionist in several respects. Firstly, he says that the story was first revealed to the world "by Bazna himself in the 1950s," (463) although the correct chronology is that the former Sicherheitsdienst officer Ludwig Moyzisch let the cat out of the bag with Operation Cicero in 1950. Bazna did not make his belated contribution until 1962 with the release of *I Was Cicero*. Secondly, Hastings says that the existence of a leak from the British embassy in Ankara had been discovered in January 1944 by the Americans, and Churchill had been informed of it by President Roosevelt who had relied on an OSS report from Berne. However, this purported sequence is directly contradicted by Guy Liddell who recorded in his diary on 20 January 1944 that the cryptographic source codenamed ISOS had prompted an investigation into the ambassador's lapses of security. Although Allen Dulles, the OSS representative in Berne, came to believe that his agent, Fritz Kolbe, had first revealed the Ankara leak, he was unaware that MI5 had warned the Foreign Office about problems as far back as October 1941 and then had acquired solid ISOS evidence of unauthorised access to the ambassador's safe in January 1944.

As Hastings records, MI6's Claude Dansey was strongly opposed to Dulles's cultivation of Kolbe, but definitely not because he believed "Kolbe to be a double agent." (309) That assertion is an ancient canard circulated before the secrets of ULTRA had been exposed. In reality, Dansey rightly believed that if Kolbe was caught passing German Foreign Office telegrams to Dulles, the enemy would take the obvious and appropriate countermeasures by changing their cipher systems, with all the implied disastrous consequences. In short, Dansey took the view that Kolbe's product was a dangerous, unnecessary duplication and that the contact should not be encouraged. However, ignorant of ULTRA, Dulles misinterpreted MI6's position, and Hastings, apparently un-

aware of the literature on this topic (in the absence of any relevant source-note) has taken a very mistaken position.

That Hastings relied on the Dulles version is not surprising, but the real heart-stopper is the assertion that the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Bill Cavendish-Bentinck, had "prepared deception documents—supposed war cabinet papers relating to peace feelers from Bulgaria to the Allies—which were placed in Knatchbull-Hugessen's briefcase" although "nobody touched the bait." (468) Once again, is this muddle an invention or a breathtaking discovery? Did Cavendish-Bentinck ever draft false information for exploitation by double agents? Hastings is the first and only author to make this claim, but he does not cite his sources.

Much the same thing happens with the author's treatment of Karl-Heinz Krämer, the Abwehr representative in Stockholm, in support of the proposition that the organization was inept and headed by indecisive incompetents. Ignoring the well-documented cases of Hans Ruser, Otto Mayer, Willi Hamburger, Richard Wurmman, Otto John, and Johannes Jebsen, Hastings incorrectly states that Hans-Berndt Gisevius was "the only Abwehr officer known to have been a source for MI6." (64) He then explains that Krämer's "agent network was the figment of a fertile imagination; his reports to Berlin were founded in fantasy," (468) concluding that the German "had made fools of the British as well as the Abwehr." (468)

This verdict conforms to the author's repeated position that Canaris and his British counterparts were idiots, as well demonstrated by Krämer's bogus source, JOSEPHINE. However, the reality is somewhat different, and Hastings seems unaware that Krämer really did have a productive source, although JOSEPHINE was not in England, as he had reported to Berlin. His agent had been a secretary in the Swedish Foreign Ministry, who had passed him material submitted to Stockholm by the air attaché and the naval attaché at the London embassy. MI5's investigation of the former, Frank Cervell, and the latter, Count Oxenstierna, had led to their withdrawal and a diplomatic rumpus. Far from proving that the Abwehr was run by unimaginative buffoons or that Krämer was a charlatan, the JOSEPHINE case proved that the German had successfully tapped into Sweden's diplomatic reporting, as described by Keith Jeffery in his official history, *MI6*. Oddly, this is the sole source cited by Hastings who, for whatever reason, misrepresents the actualité.

Thus we have four incidents—GELATINE, CICE-RO, GARBO, and JOSEPHINE—where the real story is quite at variance with the Hastings version, and one is left wondering whether the explanation is poor research or prejudice. Nor is it just the British, American, and German intelligence agencies that receive this derision. Particularly informative is Hastings's treatment of a costly Soviet deception campaign, codenamed MONASTERY, which identifies the principal perpetrator, codenamed MAX, as an established NKVD agent, Alexander Demyanov, who was recruited by the Abwehr and run as a double agent. According to Hastings, Demyanov was parachuted into Nazi-occupied territory under the supervision of General Pavel Sudoplatov, and proceeded to peddle a toxic mixture of authentic and bogus information to the gullible Abwehr. Furthermore, Hastings says, the British intercepted the MONASTERY traffic but never realized the entire operation was a Soviet deception. "The British never entirely fathomed 'Monastery,' partly because it was beyond the imagination of their intelligence officers", (235) he says, citing various reports from the Radio Security Service and MI-14. However, the truth is rather different and illustrates eloquently the perils of venturing untutored into this particular minefield.

Actually, the Soviets ran two quite separate deception campaigns on the eastern front, one run by Demyanov and codenamed MONASTERY and the other designated KLATT, headed by an Austrian Jew, Richard Kauder, who was also a fabricator with a highly developed sense of self-preservation operating in tandem with a White Russian, General Anton Turkul. Confusingly, Demyanov was codenamed MAX, and so was one of the KLATT wireless circuits, although they had no other connection. However, Hastings fell into the trap of ascribing various British assessments of the KLATT traffic to Demyanov's network, and just to muddy the waters further he claimed that the main Abwehr dupe was "Dr. Wagner Delius, head of the Abwehr station in Sofia." This is a further confusion, for actually that officer was Otto Wagner, alias Otto Eisentrager, codenamed "Dr. Delius," who had a central role in the KLATT affair but was never involved in MONASTERY. Contrary to Hastings's conclusion that MI6 was baffled by the KLATT traffic, there was a prolonged study of the material which concluded when Kauder and Turkul were arrested in Austria and, under interrogation in Oberursel, admitted their duplicity. Alas, 70 years later, Hastings, relying on the deeply flawed and discredited 1994 Sudoplatov memoirs *Special Tasks*, once again combined two quite

different operations to support his prejudice against career intelligence personnel in preference of talented graduates.

Initially puzzled by KLATT's true loyalties, the British analysts eventually came to a consensus that the entire organization, apparently directed from Sofia and then Budapest, was orchestrated by the Soviets, despite incurring heavy losses. This verdict seemed to be confirmed in October 1943 when Moscow failed to take any action after MI6 had warned the NKVD of the problem. Hastings portrays KLATT as proof of rank incompetence within British Intelligence, whereas any fair assessment would acknowledge that the very people the author indicts came to what turned out to have the right call.

Such episodes serve to undermine *The Secret War's* overall authority, and it may be that these quibbles are not wholly relevant when the book is judged against the sheer scale of the undertaking. His stated objective is to look at outcomes, or the way espionage influenced the war, rather than add to the existing historiography of secret missions and adventurous endeavour. To this extent Hastings accomplishes his goal, even if he leaves plenty of unanswered questions. For instance, one of the great unsolved mysteries of the war is where the GRU's Rote Drei network in Switzerland acquired its accurate information about German military intentions. Hastings devotes considerable space to sketching the organization's many tentacles but leaves the central conundrum unanswered, although he does claim that Sandor Rado "revealed after the war that the sources he and Rössler had guarded so zealously for so long were . . . strips of punched paper." (188) Actually Rado did not make quite the disclosure suggested, but he did contribute a foreword to the 1976 Hungarian edition of *Moscow's Eyes*, a book published three years earlier in Germany by a former Wehrmacht communications officer, Bernd Ruland. Allegedly Ruland had discovered after the war that two anti-Nazi teleprinter operators at the OKW's headquarters at Zossen had been stealing carbon copies of geheimeschreiber messages and having them smuggled to Switzerland, but this cannot be the whole story.

*The Secret War* does not pretend to reveal secrets or offer a new perspective on the successful prosecution of the war against the Axis, and it may be said that probably some of the disclosures detailed above, such as the identity of Canaris's mistress, are unintentional and erroneous, but the author's somewhat jaundiced view of what turned out to be the finest of times for intelligence professionals may not be greeted wholeheartedly by their successor practitioners.

**The Secret War by Max Hastings—Errata**

5	an American mistress	Helen Wilky was Irish, not American
47	Chateau de Vignobles	Chateau de Vignolles
64	the only Abwehr officer	Hans Ruser; Otto John; Richard Wurmman; Johannes Jeb- sen, etc.
67	Canaris had a mistress	Lisel Gaertner was never Canaris’s mistress
68 & 180	Jack Masterman	J.C. Masterman
110	a belief inside the Kremlin	groundless speculation
202	Max	KLATT is mistaken for Demyanov
285	Garbo spent some months	GARBO mistaken for another case
309	Dansey continued to insist	Dansey argued that Kolbe was endangering ULTRA, not that he was a double agent
349	MI6 officer	She was a secretary, never an officer
359	Iberian section of MI6	Iberian subsection of Section V
360	NKVD resident	GRU rezident
365	Paul Vermehren	Erich Vermehren
365	“long list of Catholic . . .”	untrue
367	Blunt handled Purple	He did not.
461	Moyzich	Moyzisch
462	Roosevelt informed Churchill	Entire passage is wrong.
462	prepared deception documents	Doubtful.
463	by Bazna himself in the 1950s	. . . in 1962.
468	was a figment	Krämer did have good sources.
468	by Bentinck	Doubtful.
474	British Bermuda	British Bahamas.
526	immediately reported this approach	waited five months
534	Department 5	No such department
535	Pontecorvo	No evidence
544	fictional	Krämer’s sources were not fictional.
545	senior MI6 officer	senior MI5 officer

