

## **Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf—June 2024**

*Compiled and reviewed by Hayden Peake and other contributors*

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## General

**A** *New Vision of Spycraft: Or Necessary Notations on Espionage*, by Daniele-Hadi Irandoost (Manticore Press, 2023), 184 pages, endnotes, bibliography, no index.

In his preface to this book, British poet and essayist David William Parry notes, after some muddled irrelevant commentary, that “Spycraft and the world of espionage have always been very far from me.” But this doesn’t stop him from “heartily recommending” *A New Vision of Spycraft* to anyone interested in the mechanics of espionage including its institutional links to the “deepest and darkest type of occultism.” (11)

Aberystwyth University historian, Daniele-Hadi Irandoost does state that a connection between intelligence and occultism—oracles—is affirmable in ancient societies, though he doesn’t suggest any contemporary relevance. But he does add semantically confusing comment on the notion that spying is the second oldest profession: “in reality, what a strain of astonishment and terror, a concerted hypocrisy and conspiracy, an ambition of intrigue and secret influence, and a series of servility and cabal, does this scene present to the present state of modern times!” This assessment leads to the equally ambiguous statement that the “civilizing of intelligence opens a door to the revisal of our intelligence community.” (14)

His semantic difficulties continue when he turns to what he terms the mechanics of espionage. After outlining the traditional basic functions of intelligence, he concludes that “mass of practical inferences that flow from it in moral and political calculation, and the method I adopt is to clear the ground, more rigorously than ever, penetrated by the genial dew of the soil in which socio-political-cultural melioration is found to germinate.” (25)

With similar clarity, the balance of the narrative discusses the ethics of intelligence, as exemplified by the ticking bomb scenario, the “deontology of torture,” Irandoost’s version of the “Just Intelligence Theory,” the legal weaknesses of cyberspace, and intelligence oversight in a democratic society.

Throughout, his views on espionage remain well concealed and the precise parameters of his new vision of spycraft are never articulated. His afterword strengthens these assessments. *Caveat Lector!*

## Memoir

**CLASSIFIED!:** *The Adventures of a Molehunter*, by Nigel West (Biteback Publishing, 2024), 362 pages, endnotes, photos, index.

Before he had any thought of becoming Nigel West, Rupert Allason, in his early teens, became aware of the British intelligence services—MI5 and MI6—during the Profumo Affair. That scandal contributed to the fall of the Macmillan government in 1963 and the disgrace of John Profumo, secretary of state for war, after he lied to Parliament about his affair with 19 year old Christine Keeler who was also seeing a GRU officer.

Allason’s interest followed naturally from two facts of the case. The first was that Profumo’s personal private secretary was young Allason’s father, also an MP. The second fact was that the Profumos and Allasons were close family friends. By 1964 public attention in the

Profumo case had diminished, but young Rupert’s interest in intelligence matters was permanently established.

*Classified!* tells the story of how his interests developed at school, thanks in part to a teacher, Henry Coombe-Tennant, a former Benedictine monk and MI6 officer who also served OSS as a Jedburgh during the war. Coombe-Tennant’s best friend from MI6 was David Cornwell (aka: John le Carré), who had retired in 1965 and occasionally spoke to the class. Seeking further information, a trip to the library revealed a single volume on intelligence: *The Venlo Incident* (1951), by former MI6 officer, Sigismund Payne Best.

This was a defining moment for Allason in several respects. First it led to a job as researcher for espionage author Richard Deacon. Second, the Best book was engulfed in controversy and efforts to sort things out, including Allason's finding and interviewing the reclusive Best himself, established part of his research methodology. Third, on Deacon's recommendation, he became an adviser on a six-part BBC film series and then wrote the book version *SPY!* by Richard Deacon and Nigel West (1980). This was the first appearance of that pen name. West would write more than 30 more books over the next 44 years.

The broad scope of West's work includes intelligence service histories, molehunts, World War II double agents, defectors, cryptography, published fabricated accounts, biographies, military intelligence, and the occasional teaser. For example, West shows how he confirmed that Admiral Canaris' mistress, Halina Szymańska, served as his link to MI6. (147) Whatever the topic, he includes related cases, books and legal battles, thus providing valuable ancillary and bibliographic data.

West's first independent book, *MI5: British Security Service Operations 1909–1945* (1981) set several precedents. First, its subject did not officially exist. Second, its very interesting case studies were not sourced. Third, ironically, scholars cited the book anyway. *Classified!* finally identifies the sources, many of them senior officers, and explains how he gained their confidence, why he couldn't mention them earlier, and how they assisted in later books.

While doing his research, West observed that many books about WWII intelligence operations excluded interviews with the agents involved—they were hard to find. He worked to fill the gap and tells how he found and debriefed 40 WWII sources, including Anthony Blunt, John Cairncross, and George Blake. The most difficult case concerned GARBO, the Doublecross agent who made a difference in the success of D-Day. GARBO was long thought to be dead, but West tells how he found and presented GARBO to Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace and later co-authored the story with GARBO.

Not all topics in *Classified!* deal directly with espionage agents. West recounts interesting contacts with Sir Dick White—the only officer to head both MI5 and MI6—CIA Director Bill Casey, KGB officer Oleg Tsarev, and

Geoffrey Elliott to name a few. One that he came to know well, in a sense—though never met—was Guy Liddell, who became MI5 deputy-director general. Liddell kept diaries of his MI5 duties—often involving US agencies—for the last 14 years of his service. After MI5 released them, West edited and published those covering the war years in two volumes.

West's account of the Tsarev connection is interesting and informative in its origins and execution. Two extraordinary, co-authored books, both published by Yale University Press and based on KGB documents—translations included—were the result. *The Crown Jewels* (1999) revealed the existence of an Oxford spy ring analogous to the Cambridge Five, but provided no names. It also explained the recruiting roles of the illegal residents Alexander Orlov, Arnold Deutsch (Philby's case officer), and other KGB agents. *Triplex: Secrets From the Cambridge Spies* (2009) exposed Blunt's role among others, in the MI5–MI6 Triplex project, which routinely opened the diplomatic pouches of foreign missions in London during the war.

When New York banker Geoffrey Elliott wrote West in 1996 requesting information on Elliott's father, who had served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE), neither man could have anticipated that they would create St. Ermin's Press and publish a number of important intelligence books.

*Classified!* mentions them all, and West's comments about one, *The Private Life of Kim Philby: The Moscow Years*, by Rufina Philby with Mikhail Lyubimov and Hayden Peake (1999), require clarification. West explains that we took Rufina to dinner in Moscow to encourage her to accept me as a co-author of the English edition and St. Ermin's as the publisher. He then explains that she agreed after learning we shared the same birthday and year. (319) That discovery was indeed a factor in her decision she later told me, but the conversation occurred at the Philby flat the following day, not at the restaurant.

*Classified!*—that title is not explained—tells too little about the most prolific contemporary intelligence historian, a great deal about his writings, and much about his sources and related books, some not well known. A unique and valuable contribution to intelligence literature.

## History

***Alfred Dreyfus: The Man at the Center of the Affair***, by Maurice Samuels (Yale University Press, 2024), 224 pages, notes, acknowledgments, index. Reviewed by John Ehrman.

Few of the dozens of books on the Dreyfus Affair pay much attention to the man at the core of the political convulsion that engulfed France at the end of the nineteenth century. After all, as the drama unfolded, Alfred Dreyfus—the Jewish French army captain wrongly accused of espionage and then railroaded in a rigged trial—was thousands of miles offstage, rotting in a small hut on Devil's Island off the coast of French Guiana. Some 130 years later the Dreyfus Affair continues to affect French politics, but Alfred Dreyfus himself remains little understood.

This is why Maurice Samuels's short biography of Dreyfus, part of Yale University Press's Jewish Lives series, is so welcome. At about 170 pages of text, it is admirably concise but still packed with detail and insights about Dreyfus who, though in many respects ordinary

to the point of blandness, had an enormous impact on his times and the decades that followed. Samuels brings Dreyfus to life and does a masterful job of explaining him in his various contexts—as a Frenchman, an Alsatian, an army officer, and a French Jew—as well as the object of hope and hatred.

Samuels assumes a familiarity with the Affair, so *Alfred Dreyfus* is not for readers new to Dreyfus. But for anyone seeking to learn more about the life and times of an important figure in counterintelligence history, it is well worth reading.

*The reviewer:* John Ehrman is a retired CIA intelligence analyst and frequent contributor to *Studies*.

***The Red Hotel: Moscow 1941, the Metropol Hotel, and the Untold Story of Stalin's Propaganda War***, by Alan Philps (Pegasus Books, 2023), 451 pages, footnotes, photos, index.

In the summer of 1998, retired DIA senior intelligence executive Jack Dziak and I had lunch at the Metropol Hotel in Moscow with the former case officer of the Cambridge Five, retired KGB Colonel Yuri Modin. Although the announced reason for the meeting was to discuss Kim Philby and his colleagues, Modin's initial comments were about the Metropol which he had last visited in the Stalin era. Somewhat in awe, he said it was now refurbished though it retained many of its signature features, especially the fountain in the dining room with its glass dome. As the conversation shifted to Modin's relations with the Cambridge Five, thoughts about the Metropol in Stalin's time faded. In *The Red Hotel*, British journalist Alan Philps tells the story we missed.

Opened in 1905, the Metropol became the playground of wealthy Tsarist era merchants and high society. After the Bolshevik revolution it served as a home for the "girls of the Metropol." (48) By the time Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, it had seen much better days, although it was still the best hotel in town.

As the Wehrmacht advanced, Prime Minister Winston Churchill persuaded Stalin to allow some journalists to be based in Moscow and to visit the battlefield to document the heroic Soviet resistance. Few will argue with Philps that Stalin's concurrence was not a tribute to the principle of a free press but given to keep the flow of British, and eventually American, aid coming. The journalists were one of three groups working in and from the Metropol.

The second group consisted of translators, usually multilingual women. Each journalist was assigned one, who became their eyes and ears. Some, at huge personal risk revealed the truth about life under Stalin to their journalist. Philps writes that their story is told here for the first time. (3) The third group, NKVD security officers, monitored the first two in the hotel and in the field.

To the surprise of all the journalists—British and American, communist and non-communist—who had struggled to be assigned to Moscow, not a one ever saw the Red Army in action. Every word they wrote was censored to meet Stalin's propaganda objectives. Philps shows they were treated well and went on many field

trips, but reporting on the war was not permitted. The most outspoken and dedicated communist of the group on arrival, Charlotte Haldane, eventually returned to England frustrated and disillusioned with communism. George Bernard Shaw saw things differently and dined with Stalin, though he didn't stay long. One British correspondent and Moscow friend of Guy Burgess, Ralph Parker, was apparently converted from a trustworthy MI6 informant to a Kremlin asset. (149, 195)

The translators were in a precarious situation. Some had served the NKVD and GRU for years. All had valuable language skills. GRU agents Alex and Nadya (aka: Ulanovsky), worked with Richard Sorge in China and later recruited Whittaker Chambers in America. (198) Nadya's quiet opposition to Stalin is impressive and she

survived the war. Tanya's story follows a different path and depended at first on her English language skills. She would marry her correspondent in the hotel and despite her anti-communist views, survive. Philips makes her an important character in the story.

*The Red Hotel* conveys a detailed view of Stalin's Soviet Union as it dealt with the press at the working level. It will come as no surprise that Philips finds many parallels with contemporary Russia. The Metropole has been refurbished but, Philips concludes, the Russian government has not.

Well written, well documented, and a valuable and unusual contribution.

***Women In Intelligence: The Hidden History of Two World Wars***, by Helen Fry (Yale University Press, 2023), 435 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

While researching British intelligence operations prior to WWI, historian Helen Fry became convinced that for intelligence leaders the idea of "employing women in intelligence ... was absolutely unthinkable." (5) Of necessity, this view would change forever during WWI, though in many cases the details of their contributions, and those of their successors in WWII, received relatively little attention. Based on interviews with participants and recently released official documents, *Women In Intelligence* tells stories of previously unknown contributions by women and adds operational detail to some formerly reported. The case of the British nurse is an example of the latter.

Google "Edith Cavell," and one discovers she was a British nurse who operated a medical clinic and nursing school in Brussels at the start of the war in August 1914. But as some historians have noted, she was also probably a spy, and that is the reason she was killed by the Germans. Fry uses recently released archival material to document her espionage and names her sub-agents for the first time.

The WWII account of Lesley Wyle's unusual recruitment and her secret recording, transcription, and translation of Nazi communications finally places her in the public record. Fry notes that she is just one of many who performed similar tasks.

But these accounts are exceptions. The presumptive entry level position for women was as a secretary. Fry describes many cases of "well educated, highly efficient and feisty characters," overcoming this potential limitation and successfully running agent networks, serving as analysts, field radio operators, codebreakers, debriefing defectors, and photo-interpreters. (88ff) An outstanding example is Jane Archer, who became one of the first MI5 staff officers and also served in MI6. (103)

With two exceptions, Mata Hari and Virginia Hall, Fry's subjects are British. Mata Hari is included to contrast the popular misconceptions of the spy-seductress with the realities of cases Fry presents. Virginia Hall, although American, is included because of her distinguished service in Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) before she joined OSS.

*Women In Intelligence* contains a most curious and unexplained factual error: Fry's observation that "France remained neutral and unoccupied" during WWI. (10)

A principal conclusion of *Women In Intelligence* is that the contributions of women to the secret world of intelligence, too long obscured by official secrecy, are now known to history. A valuable contribution to the literature.

***World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence***, by Mark Stout (University Press of Kansas, 2023), 388 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

Former CIA analyst and lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, Mark Stout, has written an interesting and provocative account reconsidering the origins of “American intelligence.” The use of quotes here is intended to emphasize the importance of the term to Stout’s thesis, which he articulates first in his introduction.

On page one Stout writes: “Ask an American intelligence officer to tell you when the country started doing modern intelligence, and you will probably hear something about the Office of Strategic Services in World War II or the National Security Act of 1947 and the formation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).” (1)

Stout attributes this view to the general acceptance of two “CIA-centric” myths about modern American intelligence that originated more than 25 years after World War I. “According to the first, the United States neglected intelligence for far too long, and it really took World War II to change things ... little of importance happened before the establishment in 1941 of the Office of the Coordinator of Information, which was reorganized as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).” (2) Stout quotes several intelligence officers who have expressed related views including former director Allen Dulles, who wrote “in each of our crises, up to Pearl Harbor, workers in intelligence have had to start in all over again.” (264) Also cited: “a glossy publication from the CIA’s History Staff—which should know better—is titled *The Office of Strategic Services: America’s First Intelligence Agency*.”

The second myth focuses on the Intelligence Community and the National Security Act of 1947. “This myth says that a necessary component of modern American intelligence is the existence of a community of agencies that somehow exhibits centralization, a function of how intelligence agencies interact rather than what goes on inside them.” (3) Since these organizations did not exist until

after WWII, that is when modern American intelligence began.

Stout doesn’t accept either view and *World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence* presents a chronology of the sometimes bumpy growth of intelligence in the United States from the Civil War to WWII that he argues supports his position. The development of new military intelligence organizations such as the Office of Naval Intelligence “some fifty-eight years before the OSS was created,” and the War Department’s Military Intelligence Division shortly thereafter (13) are principal examples, though the State and Justice Department had intelligence units. And when necessary, ad hoc groups were created to assist the president.

In this thoroughly documented account, Stout discusses the principal intelligence concepts and functions, the foreign liaison relationships developed, the players involved, and how the units were employed in all the wars and threats before WWII. He concludes that by the end of World War I, almost all the ideas that define modern American intelligence, including the moral necessity of espionage, were commonplace among intelligence personnel and that “World War I laid the foundations for the establishment of a self-conscious profession of intelligence.” (14)

The one question not addressed concerns the need for a central source of national intelligence for the president as recognized by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. WWI intelligence certainly helped, as Stout makes clear, but at the outbreak of WWII the military intelligence organizations were still independent and competing. Donovan’s Central Intelligence Group was the first step toward that goal and one reason modern American intelligence is reckoned from that event. In short, the answer depends on whether one views “American intelligence” as a reference to national or subordinate unit control.

### **Fiction**

*Ilium*, by Lea Carpenter (Alfred A. Knopf, 2024), 220 pages. Reviewed by John Ehrman.

Lea Carpenter's *Ilium* at first glance appears to be a straightforward novel of espionage, love, and revenge. It is all those things, but also an ambitious novel, with much to say. It doesn't work quite as well as Carpenter must have hoped, but before we get to that, here's something to keep in mind: *Ilium* is the Latin name for Troy, the setting of Homer's epic poem.

Carpenter's story revolves around an unnamed woman narrator who relates events from two decades ago, when she was 21. Already orphaned by then, she had grown up in London, where her mother had been a housekeeper for a wealthy widow but tried to elevate her status by claiming to be a "personal assistant." Thus, our narrator explains, she learned early in life how to pretend to be someone she wasn't, and that "pretending is freedom." Later, too, she's told that "espionage loves an orphan," and especially one who is naïve, poor, and still lacking in self-awareness. In other words, she was born for espionage.

Espionage, and love, come in the form of Marcus. He's a mysterious man, some 30 years older than our narrator, whom she meets at a party in London. Marcus sweeps her off her feet and they quickly marry, seeming to be destined to live happily ever after in Paris.

Of course, it's not that simple. Before our narrator can live her dream, Marcus's equally mysterious Lebanese friend Raja asks her to do a small favor for them—visit some friends at their family compound at Cap Ferret, on the Atlantic coast of France, and report back on the comings and goings of the father of the family, a mysterious Russian named Edouard. We want to know everything you can learn about him," Raja tells her. Naturally, there's also a cover story and a legend for her new identity.

Now realizing that Marcus has recruited her into espionage, our heroine slips into her role and performs perfectly. On her return from Cap Ferret, she reports to Raja and he, in turn, begins to let her in on the secret behind her mission. Unfortunately, however, Marcus is man with health problems and he dies almost immediately after the Cap Ferret assignment, leaving our narrator pregnant and

in the hands of Raja—"the one person on whom I had, in an instant, become entirely dependent."

Most of the remaining two-thirds of the book is a complex story of personalities and relationships. Edouard is an artist and lover of the classics who instructs his visitor on the finer points of Homer and the *Iliad*; she, in turn, becomes ever closer to Edouard's wife, her daughter and, especially, Felix, Edouard's young soccer-obsessed son from a previous relationship.

Eventually Raja lets her in on the rest of the secret, which we need not go into here, and our narrator, in turn, embraces her new world and self. "Espionage is simply human interaction performed under exceptional circumstances...at its essence, [it is] observation, seduction, patience...you have to be willing to forget who you are in order to inhabit someone else." Indeed, it turns out that almost everyone else in *Ilium* also has transformed their identity at some point and has a secret past. The gradual revelation of who has done what to whom and what motivates them makes this a very human tale.

But it's also a very complicated story, especially with Carpenter's thoughts about the nature of espionage and the fluidity of identity running through the narrative. "Most people take a lifetime to find themselves," our heroine says, even as she admits that Marcus "was handing me an identity I had been looking for without knowing it." Shifting identities is not a new theme in spy novels but, perhaps in a reflection of today's concerns, these musings about its fluidity sometimes go on a bit too long. You'll mostly forgive this, however, as Carpenter is a writer of great skill and subtlety. Her prose is elegant and she never lets things get bogged down. Indeed, the story moves along, the tension builds and, at under 250 pages in the print edition, it is concise by today's standards. The climax of the book is what you expect, though the end contains some interesting surprises.

But then there is the part doesn't quite work. Carpenter says in her author's note that *Ilium* is about "war's essential subjectivity, how a hero to one side is an assassin to another." For Carpenter, the Trojan War and the *Iliad* are templates for using the worlds of intelligence and

espionage to make this point. Edouard recounts the story of the rage of Achilles after Hector kills his close friend, Patroclus. Achilles kills Hector in revenge, and Hector's father, Priam, sneaks into Achilles tent to confront him and convince him to return the body. "Priam knew he and Achilles shared in the slaughter, in different ways," says Edouard. Carpenter agrees and, ultimately, comes to see it all as pointless. If only the spies in *Ilium* had "been able to sit, and talk, like Piraam and Achilles, they might have discovered the things they shared, like loss. They might have wept and seen at once the joy and futility in their work, that the reckoning they sought was the real chimeric." Carpenter lays it on a bit thick, and I suspect that few readers of *Studies* will find this convincing.

Carpenter isn't above playing a few more literary games. With all the talk of Greeks, love, war, and revenge, why

not just give her protagonist a name—Helen would do nicely—and be done with it? And what's with introducing a character, late in the story, a CIA officer called Tracy Barnes, the name of the man who oversaw the Bay of Pigs invasion? Is this a less-than-subtle hint that all intelligence operations tend toward disaster? If so, I'm pretty sure it's lost on almost all of Carpenter's readers, few of whom are likely to know the reference.

*Ilium* isn't for everyone. Those looking for realism or thriller-style action had best go elsewhere. If your taste runs toward psychological or literary approaches—think Graham Greene—you'll enjoy this, despite its flaws. But if you want something Homeric, stick with the original.

*The reviewer:* John Ehrman is a retired CIA analyst and frequent contributor to *Studies*.

