

Stout, Mark. *World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence*. Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2023. vii + 388. Hardcover, \$44.99.

Dr. Mark Stout, former intelligence officer (State Department and CIA), curator of the International Spy Museum (2010-2013), and current Director of the MA in Global Security Studies for Johns Hopkins University, challenges the widely held "CIA-centric" myths that modern US intelligence structure and ability began during the era of the Second World War. He covers the history of US intelligence in the century before 1917, its dramatic increase during the Great War, and how it survived in the years leading up to 1941. He shows that despite America's late entry into World War I, its ability to spy improved quickly. The myths ignore the fact that organizations like the Military Information Division (MID), Officer of Naval Intelligence (ONI), the State Department, Secret Service, and field military information services predated the 1942 formation of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the National Security Act of 1947; also that many of the people who populated the World War II era structures benefitted from decades of lessons passed down through corporate culture, professional writing, and field experience.

The author draws on a wide variety of pertinent sources. Early chapters cover fledgling American intelligence efforts during the Spanish-American War and the Punitive Expedition to Mexico (1916-17). The work then shifts to a detailed discussion of US engagement in World War One where later chapters cover mobilization, espionage, emerging aerial and radio technologies, counterintelligence, and combat applications. Stout credits US intelligence failures in the Spanish-American War as the wake-up call that made Americans understand "the country would no longer be insular and isolated" (p.48). By the end of the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902), lower level officers began to lead raids of the countryside to gather information, interrogate prisoners, pay informants, and break secret codes in "a vigorous, bottom-up

adaptation” (p.51). Stout credits Secretary of War Elihu Root (1899-1904), for copying German methods in creating an army general staff and service war colleges to educate its members. The US General Staff began to plan ahead by running war games simulating conflict with potential enemies and sending officers abroad on clandestine reconnaissance missions. The war games enraged President Woodrow Wilson, who threatened to fire every officer involved if they continued the exercise. The strategic simulations continued, however, only without the former publicity. Maturing US intelligence practitioners realized that a country must plan ahead; because events move too fast once hostilities begin to play catch-up.

In the years before 1917, the US began to invest huge sums in support of its intelligence capabilities and more as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) prepared to cross the Atlantic. These efforts were aided by the 250,000- strong American Protective League (APL) and organizations like the YMCA, which provided services to US troops while also spying on them. The APL was “the largest of several voluntary associations of patriotic Americans who busily looked for spies, tracked down 'slackers,'" and looked for people who seemed too Germanic (p.107). Stout tells us that espionage had been considered unchivalrous before 1917; doing “morally questionable things” like using “romance and sex against both male and female targets” had been disparaged, but the carnage witnessed after 1914 made Americans reassess (p.120). Modern war that pitted society against society required physical as well as verbal intelligence; to win battles, information was needed about the enemy's bureaucracies, his economy, and social/military morale.

In addition to the use of diplomatic vice-consuls and attachés in Europe, the US employed American businessmen, journalists and scientists to collect information. Spies came to be highly valued for their language skills, trustworthiness and, most of all, their self-control

(p.6). The author points out that the intelligence game is a “competitive activity,” it is not for Boy Scouts, fair play was not part of the deal. Picking the right men was important; many intelligence officers were “not the sort of people who could have made it in the military or diplomatic service previously” Recruiting and running agents, breaking codes, analyzing enemy radio traffic, interpreting aerial photographs, hunting enemy spies at home, probing foreign newspapers and government reports took a special kind of individual. The work required a “profound insight into human nature” from someone who has a “blend of the skills of a detective and a general” (p.9, pgs.13-14).

The willing but less experienced Americans had much to learn from the English and French at first, but proved on par when it came to technical intelligence collection (aerial reconnaissance, code-breaking and cipher work); that fast-moving aspect that requires “each side to both copy and counter what the other was doing” at a frantic pace (p.191). The Central Powers and the Allies learned that gaining information first while denying it to the enemy through counter or “negative intelligence” was key to victory. Stout, however, points out that those successful counterintelligence methods can have what is called a “boomerang effect,” because it taught modern governments how to use propaganda and surveillance systems to manipulate and control their own populations (p.194). To crack down on German subversive efforts in the US, Congress passed the Espionage Act in June of 1917, it “gave the government wide latitude to pursue enemy agents” and punish them along with any Americans not considered patriotic enough in those tense times. The Act “swept vast amounts of speech into its maw,” thus creating an overreaction to the German clandestine threat and thereby inflicting grave damage on American civil liberties.

Stout observes that the US intelligence community learned that it needed to spread out over the world after 1918; it downsized but did not vanish. The world had become a much smaller place, the idea that the US and its allies needed to observe everything, everywhere was born. It soon became apparent that “the communist menace was the most common subject for intelligence sharing.”

Bart Talbert, PhD
Associate Professor of History
Salisbury University
Salisbury, Maryland