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Problems facing the publisher of Spy Books

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WHY do people write, publish and read books about spies? And what are some of the pitfalls to be avoided by current spy publishers?

I should like to take these questions in reverse order. In recent months no less than three books on General Gehlen have come out, all the subject of a big if sometimes rather grim press; two books featuring the British deception called "Double Cross" in the last war. Further books are promised. E. H. Cookridge, who came out first with his Gehlen book, is completing a *magnum opus* on the British Secret Service—Sefton Delmer has a spy book which is not yet through the security/copyright net. Patrick Seale is finishing a major new study of Philby.

In America David Kahn, author of *The Code Breakers*, is working on a huge book on Intelligence in the Second World War, a subject which is also occupying David Irving, Robert Deindorfer is working on three separate books, one on the KGB, one the SIS and one the Israeli Secret Service (currently reported to be the best service). The cold blooded and lethal cold war activities of the CIA are the subject of a very exciting project by Stuart Steven, foreign editor of the *Daily Express*. Meanwhile Ladislas Farago in many ways the father of them all, who played a significant part in getting Masterman's book to see the light of day, is chasing Bormann in South America, proving that Hitler died in Italy in 1946 and directing the studies of several other spy book authors.

These are just a few I know about; there are, I'm sure, countless others. As publishers of one Gehlen book, and of Farago's *The Game of the Foxes* we can speak quite feelingly of the problems. The main one is, how to get the book through the experts to the public?

The author, often a former spy and with access to material whose source cannot be given, is in a strange position. He can assert what he likes and no one can prove him wrong. But he can easily be condemned for other things.

Security Breaches

First of all: security. His book, the authorities say, may involve security breaches which could affect the existing operations and personalities of the SIS. In fact this is sometimes said whether it is true or not. Masterman had to wait 27 years before he was allowed to publish his report on Double Cross. Even then the Crown were able to claim copyright. What might have been regarded as a straight breach of the rules was in the end settled amicably and at a high government level.

Even then it had to be vetted and amended for security and it had to be published by an American press. This is because there is no reciprocal arrangement between the British and American security vetting procedures. Hence what gets past the Americans (who are more casual and mature about the whole thing than the British) can subsequently be published in Britain, since once it is out in English somewhere it is theoretically available anywhere. What happens is that the author is put under some considerable pressure to amend either in Britain or by British security officers in America.

"Sensitive" Material

This is what happened to Farago, whose *The Game of the Foxes* contained, and contains, some "sensitive" material which the author collected both from documents and individuals in the course of his researches. Having provisionally agreed to make certain alterations, his American publisher with proofs already overdue put his foot down and refused to accept some of them. In this he was perfectly within his rights. And what he published is, with minor amendments, what we published, to the embarrassment of some.

Another way of dodging the security rules is if you are an acknowledged spy yourself. Philby's own book has several distinctly embarrassing passages. (It was first published in America.) In the wake of Masterman, others who compiled reports on certain secret activities in the war will certainly hope to get into print. But if security permits, the question of Crown Copyright (if the author was a serving officer) is still to be solved. What is commonly regarded as the most important secret story yet untold is that of "Government Communications" at Bletchley Park (theoretically the very mention of the place is not permitted)—recently described as "the least acknowledged and arguably the most important outfit in wartime Britain . . . its job was to read other people's coded cables and radio communications". Almost all references to Bletchley—which Churchill referred to as his most secret sources—have been pruned before they got into print; Masterman's book is very reticent on the subject. True, Philby gets away with more than he should, but even Farago on this subject maintains, almost if not quite total, discretion.

'The authors are to be congratulated. They have produced a guideline that will be of great benefit to all who teach and coach young players'

PHIL WOOSNAM
formerly of West Ham, Aston Villa and Wales
Now Commissioner, N. American Soccer League

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Bending the Rules

Over security the rules are absolute, but even the authorities themselves admit they are somewhat absurd. Where the continuing needs of national security are concerned, no one is going to break them. But where the operations took place before 1945, where the characters involved are dead, where the *modi operandi* have been superseded—in such cases it is difficult not to try and bend the rules. And the reason for doing so is that many of our secret wartime activities were brilliantly and successfully conducted, and instead of sitting on them and letting other nations or organisations take the credit, the rules should be relaxed, the stories published, the record put straight, all to the benefit of national morale. This argument is going on within the Government at the moment. If security is a number one hurdle, accusations of inaccuracy are another. This is largely where reviewers come in, often former intelligence officers themselves. There is a distinct *de haut en bas* tone about some of the reviews to be expected, which is infuriating but unavoidable. The line normally is "because I can show the author is wrong on such and such a point"—unimportant and conceded—"the rest is probably a pack of lies". Professor M. R. D. Foote has taken this line on spy books twice in the *Guardian* in the last month.

Checking Accuracy

What can the publisher do to check his author's accuracy? Here, curiously, a security vetting helps. If the authorities are at least half on your side, then while trying to stop you publishing some material they will give a genuinely expert vetting for accuracy, will confirm or put you right on the important points. The validation of *The Game of the Foxes* by the security authorities themselves is a much more cogent check than any subsequent public nit-picking in reviews, except that it is done in private and is thus rather difficult to convey to the readers. In general you rely on your authors and they rely on their sources. These sources, if individuals, often have an axe to grind. They may want to prove to the world what great fellows they were after all; they may therefore want to exaggerate the importance of their operations or of their opponents, so that their own role is enhanced.

There is a real pitfall here. Abwehr headquarters reports from German agents round the world only show what was being reported back, not what was true, and *not always what was believed.* Hence the writer has to use his own discrimination and not be seduced by the prospect of revelations into undue praise or blame. But there is a freemasonry amongst spy book authors who have their own code of acceptability and validation. (Incidentally it was this freemasonry which produced for Edward Cookridge a page proof of Gehlen's own book, in German, just in time for him to amend his own text in the light of it, and before any other publishers had had a chance to appraise it.)

Gambits

Yet another pitfall is the dismissal gambit. Spies and spy books are unimportant; they do not affect the major decisions of war and peace. This is often brought into reviews as a *coup de grace.* Obviously it is arguable. Only recently we were told that the Ivanov defection was a major coup and the whole Russian network would fall into our hands and a week later that he was a nobody and knew nothing; the same thing in reverse was said about Lieutenant Bingham. Somebody must be lying. True, some spies are inadequate and untrustworthy human beings; but some demonstrably are not: if you accept their premises, Maclean and Penkovsky for instance, the importance of whose activities no one has seriously questioned.

Or it is said that machines spy better than people. But certainly George Blake did not find this. One of the few interesting bits of his, as yet unpublished, autobiography, is an angry attack on the gadgets of spying and a pat on the back for the men on the ground. Anyone who has any inkling of the individuals involved in interception and code-breaking activities of the last war could hardly agree that such spying activities were unimportant: they were, time and again and in almost every key decision, vital. Of the deception operation there can still be a doubt. While the British are understandably cock-a-hoop about the success of the Double Cross system in the last war, the German survivors, perhaps on the defensive, say that through Double Cross they learnt more *accurate* information (for much of the deception had to be pretty accurate to insure its acceptability) than they would have got through their own means.

Time for Spies

The fourth pitfall seems to me timing. And this gives some explanation of why there are so many spy books now—in a few years ordinary people won't remember or care about the war, which was the last occasion when the spies really had a field day. That is why it is important for the remaining stories of the war to be released by security; before people can say, who cares anyway?

At the moment I believe people do care. People certainly buy spy books; secrets fascinate, secret people manipulating world history are a pleasant change from the memoirs of field marshals, and the spy as an anti-establishment symbol has his own contemporary appeal, across boundaries of ideology and class. Industrial espionage and crime are perhaps taking some of the glamour from old-time spying. But while there are still people who remember the war, and in particular in Britain—the way it produced a brand of donnish, ingenious, brave and inventive mandarins who sank their academic concerns in a common attack on a common enemy to such gratifying effect—the answer to the question I raised earlier—why do people write, publish and read about spies—can be answered, I think, quite simply and cogently.

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