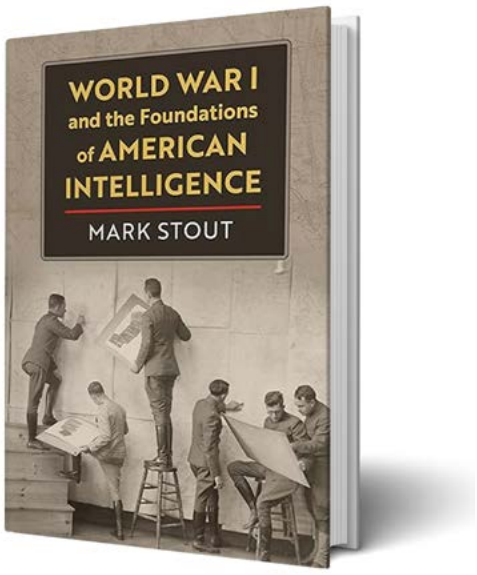
intelligence in public media

World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence

Reviewed by Scott A. Moseman, PhD



Author:	*Mark Stout*
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Reviewer:	The reviewer is an assistant professor in the Department of Military History, Command and General Staff College and author of *Defining the Mission: The Development of Strategic Intelligence up to the Cold War*.

Popular culture and opinion generally place the beginning of the modern US intelligence apparatus to the early stages of the Cold War or as early as World War II. Among the reasons for this erroneous mindset is the enormous success of Gen. William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan's propaganda campaign on the effectiveness of one of WWII's intelligence organizations, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Furthermore, its indirect offspring, CIA, immediately gained popularity as a spy hub in 1947 after its establishment through the National Security Act of that year. But the US intelligence community began much earlier. Scholar Mark Stout offers an alternative portrayal to the narrative that US intelligence had been inept until the 1940s in his book *World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence*. He contends that, in fact, WWI led to the development of most of the major subdisciplines associated with today's craft. The war, he adds, modernized US intelligence, and maturation, reorganization, reinvigoration, and reinvention followed soon after. (1) Stout succeeds in his endeavor—although this was not a hard argument to prove.

Why was it fairly easy to contend that organized US intelligence started in a much earlier era? Because there is a bounty of information about intelligence in that period, but it has been relatively underutilized, as writing about US intelligence in the period between 1880 and the 1940s is somewhat sparse. Stout's work succeeds in filling some gaps in intelligence research as he set out to disprove the "belief that modern American intelligence dates to World War II or to the passage of the National Security Act of 1947." (1) This he does in the first four pages of his introductory chapter. He follows up by showing where his work fits into the scholarship; he mentions the essential

authors to cover especially when discussing military intelligence to include: Michael Warner, James L. Gilbert, Robert Angevine, Jeffrey M. Dorwart, Marc B. Powe, and Wyman H. Packard. All these authors had the freedom to research because earlier US intelligence is not as interesting as Cold War intrigue. Stout demonstrates that US Army and Navy intelligence needs to be discussed together with the rest of the nascent community as they matured from the 1880s onward.[a]

Continuing in his introduction beyond dispelling the myths of when US intelligence started and how ineffective organizations supposedly were, Stout also provides definitions of intelligence and provides a timeline of the profession's growth. He divides his narrative into two parts: intelligence history up to WWI, followed by US intelligence operations during the war. The first part, in five chapters, covers intelligence's birth in 1882—the year the Office of Naval Intelligence was formally established—and its painful growth through the Spanish-American War, Philippines War, Progressive Era, and the Punitive Expedition in Mexico. These chapters demonstrate that US intelligence organizations were operating in fits and starts up through 1917.

The next six chapters detail how the subdisciplines of intelligence—aerial reconnaissance, radio intelligence, counterintelligence, and combat intelligence—grew throughout the war. In my view, Stout should have expanded his treatment of "Combat Intelligence," the 11th and penultimate chapter of the book, to discuss all the campaigns in which US intelligence was involved or have skipped the subject; a sampling simply will not do. The last chapter, "Legacies," explains how lessons learned from conducting intelligence operations in WWI carried through the budget-lean interwar years through to WWII. The book's layout is adequate for the subject, although the author may have devoted too space on theorists like Arthur L. Wagner and William S. Pye; although they are important characters, the time spent on them slows down the narrative. Overall, however, Stout's road map is easy to follow.

The great strengths of *World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence* are the depth of Stout's research and the biographies of the people he introduces. Stout's love of the intelligence subdisciplines is apparent in the chapters detailing US intelligence exploits during the war. Although the subdisciplines fall under a single umbrella, each requires considerably different research approaches. Yet the diverse and great number of endnotes and bibliographic entries show the intensity of his research in each section. Stout's treatment of people is masterful. He traces people through the narrative and ensures the readers note that the historical figure was mentioned before. He highlights names like Joseph Dickman, Ralph G. Van Deman, Dennis Nolan, and Richard Wainwright—usually hinting that the reader will see them again in a later chapter. Overall, Stout is a brilliant researcher.

A conscious effort to stratify the levels of intelligence would have benefited the author in avoiding blurry explanations of organizations and incidents in his storyline. There are distinct differences between strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.[b] It would help the reader understand what certain aspects of US intelligence flourished, and why others did not. For instance, in the discussion of intelligence during the Civil War era, Stout states that after the war "military intelligence vanished without a trace." (15) What type of intelligence? It sure was not strategic intelligence, for Americans

did not start thinking of national-level information until the 1880s. Writing on the Spanish-American War, the author recognizes that the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and Military Information Division accomplished little work in Washington, DC, (49) while attachés brought in large amounts of information. Perhaps distinguishing what levels—strategic, operational, or tactical—they each operated in would clarify why. In addition to calling the War Department's intelligence arm the "central intelligence apparatus" (76), would it not be appropriate to call it a strategic intelligence organization, since it was the highest level of intelligence in the nation of the period? Stout should also call the American Expedi-

a. See this reviewer's *Defining the Mission: The Development of US Strategic Military Intelligence up to the Cold War,* which complements Stout's research on the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Military Intelligence Division.
b. For useful definitions of these terms, see Jonathan M. House, *Military Intelligence: 1870–1991*.

tionary Force's (AEF) G-2 what it was—an operational intelligence organization. That would clear up why it operated so differently from Van Deman's organization in Washington. These examples among others would clarify why US intelligence organizations acted the way they did.

US intelligence did not operate in a vacuum. Social issues such as class conflict affected intelligence's ability to survive and thrive. Citizens' understandings of morality, individual apathy, and national daily rituals affected the gathering of foreign intelligence and counterintelligence. The nation's political mood influenced whether US leaders wished to be outward-facing or inward-looking, and government leaders directed US intelligence in particular directions depending on the national context. Thus, US intelligence echoed broader US trends such as professionalization, progressivism, exceptionalism and imperialism, and government bureaucratization. Stout hints at the larger picture, such as discussing the Progressive Era in passing (93) and the "Progressive dream" (190), but more could be said about the interplay between US intelligence and the greater national environment.

Stout's reason for military intelligence's acceptance of the counterintelligence/counterespionage missions or the broader term "Domestic Security" may be too simplified. He states that "the most obvious reason . . . followed from a well-established understanding that in war knowledge is power." (196) He further observes: "It would have been astonishing if the American military had not undertaken a major counterintelligence effort. It was what modern war demanded." (200) Essentially the argument postulates that the Navy and War Departments were conducting normal warfare, just at home. These points need to be fleshed out. ONI and the Military Intelligence Division (MID) were largely excluded from operational intelligence missions in Europe. The AEF-G-2 and Adm. William S. Sim's staff had this discipline largely covered. There were not many strategic intelligence duties beyond what the attachés had covered abroad. ONI and MID had to justify their existence to Congress and their military masters because that is from where the money flowed. Military intelligence readily accepted these domestic security missions to justify their existence. Besides, the domestic civilian intelligence apparatus was still embryonic in the 1910s. Who else would partake in the duties?

Nonetheless, Stout accomplishes what he set out to do in *World War I and the Foundations of American Intelligence*: convince the reader that the ideas and practices that emerged from WWI informed the US way of intelligence for years to come. (278) This book should be a standard for the intelligence schoolhouses in US civilian and military sectors. Students can glean insight into how the intelligence subdisciplines matured, how intelligence definitions changed over the eras he covers, and the interplay between US intelligence organizations over a century ago, with implications for today. Ultimately, Stout reminds us through the beginnings of intelligence organizations, the long run-up to US involvement in the war, and WWI itself that US intelligence is much older and more complex than scholars have given the community credit for. ■