

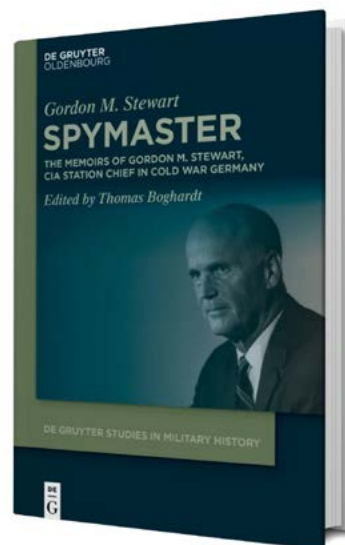
# intelligence in public media

## Spymaster

### *The Memoirs of Gordon M. Stewart, CIA Station Chief in Cold War Germany*

Reviewed by Duncan P. Bare

**Editor:** Thomas Boghardt  
**Published By:** De Gruyter Oldenbourg (Military History Series, 2024)  
**Print Pages:** 212  
**Reviewer:** The reviewer is a NARA archives technician who has written on intelligence during the period described in this memoir.



The publication of Gordon M. Stewart’s memoir, *Spymaster*, edited by US Army military historian Thomas Boghardt, must be welcomed owing to the glimpses it provides into Stewart’s experiences from the Second World War up to 1971, first with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), then OSS’s short-lived successors, the Strategic Services Unit (SSU) and the Central Intelligence Group, Office of Special Operations (CIG/OSO), and ultimately CIA.

While Stewart’s memoir comprises the bulk of *Spymaster* (pages 55–187), their greater relevance to intelligence history is contextualized in a 44-page introduction by Boghardt.<sup>a</sup> Apart from elaborating upon some of the areas that Stewart discusses, Boghardt uses his contribution

to provide more detail for those periods and topics that Stewart either mentions only briefly or ignores.

More than 50 pages of Stewart’s memoir is dedicated to his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This diverges from the more business-centric autobiographies or memoirs of his contemporaries, such as Richard M. Helms, Peer de Silva, Ray S. Cline, and Harry Rositzke. As such, the closest comparison to Stewart’s memoir is that of his fellow OSS and SSU Germany alumnus, Peter M. F. Sichel.<sup>b</sup> Whereas Sichel’s memoir balances his “lives,” Stewart’s is choppy: He does not begin to discuss the Second World War until page 108 and ultimately dedicates less than 80 pages to his experiences in the US Army, OSS, SSU, CIG/OSO, and CIA between 1944 and 1953.

a. Dr. Thomas Boghardt is a senior historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History and is the author of *Covert Legions: U.S. Army Intelligence in Germany, 1944–1949*, the official history of Army Intelligence operations in postwar Germany.

b. *The Secrets of My Life: Vintner, Prisoner, Soldier, Spy* (Archway Publishing, 2016).

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

## *Spymaster*

A brief epilogue (181–87) does cover the period beyond (1953–94), briefly touching on the bulk of Stewart’s career with CIA (1953–71).<sup>a</sup> Mentioned are a tour in Asia after Germany, his work in technical intelligence, the Office of Personnel, as chief of the Eastern Europe Division and return to Germany, the Board of National Estimates (which he describes as “boring”), and finally a tenure as inspector general. Throughout this brief section are one-line comments on various luminaries such as Jim Angleton, Frank Wisner, Bill Colby, Ronald MacMillan, Thomas Karamessines, and Dick Helms.

As much of Stewart’s writing is based on his personal experiences and reflections, there is little to contest or dispute. Generally, and to his credit, Boghardt adopted a hands-off approach, maintaining much of Stewart’s memoir as written, and refraining from overloading the text with footnotes that contradict or unnecessarily elaborate. Though, in my view, he might have been a bit more aggressive in correcting Stewart’s errors or adding clarifications.

With respect to Boghardt’s introduction, it will be informative and helpful to newcomers to intelligence history, but it offers little new to US intelligence history of the period. The archivist that I am, leads me to add that Boghardt’s use of archival documentation is commendable (primarily relating to OSS and SSU), but those wishing to retrace his research will find many of his citations deficient because they provide only record group and series numbers—for example, Entry 108B, is a 320-container series within RG 226 that Boghardt frequently cites. Without box numbers, location of the referenced documents is unnecessarily difficult. Conceivably this the publisher’s editorial choice.

In addition to citing holdings in the US National Archives, Boghardt cites a good mix of secondary literature and documentation available electronically in the CIA’s FOIA Electronic Reading Room (ERR). Informed readers will likely have a feeling that more information could have been mined from the ERR, particularly for the 1953–71 period.

I found a number of contextual issues in the introduction that negatively frame the memoir. The most

pressing, in my view, is that Boghardt casts US intelligence in Germany as the clearinghouse for penetration of Central and Eastern Europe from the end of the War in Europe through the 1950s, stating in the third line of his preface how “Germany was the principal staging ground for intelligence operations behind the Iron Curtain ....” Perhaps Boghardt was led to that conclusion by Stewart’s singular focus on his service in Germany: Stewart rose to Chief of Secret Intelligence (SI) and its successor, Foreign Reports Board (FRB) at SSU Germany and would work primarily in that country during the period he focuses on his memoir. Boghardt leverages this to assert that it “put ... him in charge of all SSU espionage operations in Central Europe.” (10) Stewart’s role in the Cold War is, therefore, significantly inflated.

However, Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” extended farther, from “Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic,” and the activities of SSU’s and later CIG/OSO’s two other main outfits on the continent, Austria and Italy, aptly reflected that. At least until the late 1940s, SSU, CIG/OSO, and CIA missions in Austria and Italy played equal, if not more important, albeit less widely known, roles in Central and Southeastern Europe, launching their own operations and gathering valuable intelligence wholly independent of Stewart and their organizational compatriots in Germany. The characterization of Stewart’s importance misses the cumulative nature of precentralized US intelligence’s experience in Europe, and the “fiefdoms” which had arisen among the various field-based SSU and CIG/OSO missions that would persist well into the 1950s and likely beyond.

All in all, Boghardt has added substance to a memoir that, at times, is disappointingly short of detail. He also deserves recognition for shepherding Stewart’s work to publication, and although he is not as informative or insightful as some of his contemporaries were, he does add insight into a period almost always overlooked and frequently misunderstood. Stewart’s role in formalizing and professionalizing the postwar US intelligence setup in Germany is unmistakable. *Spymaster* is a valuable addition to the shelves of intelligence historians and scholars. ■

a. Stewart explains this brevity by saying, “The story of the German station can, I think, be told. The other should not. For that reason, the memoir ends with a description of my departure from Germany in early summer 1953.”