

The Mare's Nest by David Irving. Book review by Edwin R. Walker

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL
18 SEPT 95

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Modern intelligence has to do with the painstaking collection and analysis of fact, the exercise of judgment, and clear and quick presentation. It is not simply what serious journalists would always produce if they had time: it is something more rigorous, continuous, and above all operational-that is to say, related to something that somebody wants to do or may be forced to do.

-The Economist of London, commenting on the retirement of Sir Kenneth Strong (1 Oct. '66, p. 20).

THE MARE'S NEST. By David Irving. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965. 320 pp. \$6.95.)

THE BATTLE OF THE V-WEAPONS, 1944-1945. By Basil Collier. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964. New York: William Morrow. 1965. 192 pp. \$5.)

Confronted by a really good book and an outstandingly bad one, a reviewer has the clear duty to warn against the latter. Let me begin, therefore, by advising you that *The Battle of the V-Weapons* is to be avoided as the plague. It is a shoddy, ill-conceived, inadequately researched, badly written piece of journalistic rubbish which is as near to being a non-book as anything to be found in a cloth binding. *The Mare's Nest*, on the other hand, has everything but sex: a great plot

(World War II); an unbeatable cast of characters (Churchill, Hitler, Himmler, Von Braun, et al.) ; human interest (Lord Cherwell's vendetta against Duncan Sandys) ; fascinating side trips (e.g., the aluminized explosives scandal) ; and, above everything, suspense (*Will British Intelligence unmask the Diabolical Schemes of German Science in time to save London?*). Best of all, it abounds in lessons for the intelligence community.

Indeed, Irving's book might have been written for use as a text on the problems of technical intelligence. It traces in painstaking detail the development and deployment of the German secret weapons and the British intelligence appreciation of that effort. (And the interplay of developments on both sides is handled in a masterly fashion.) The British were fortunate in having in Dr. R. V. Jones—the hero, in so far as the book has one—a competent scientist who came to understand the intelligence problem. When after five years the intelligence controversy over Germany's secret weapons was finally stilled, Dr. Jones was able to step back and ruminate upon his experience.¹ Those of us who are condemned for our sins to labor in the tangled vineyards of military and technical intelligence could do worse than commit his conclusions to memory.

Four situations can arise with any one technical development: (i) neither side makes it work; this presents no Intelligence problem; (ii) both sides succeed; this is the normal Intelligence problem ... ; (iii) our experts succeed, the Germans fail; this is an Intelligence worry, for proving the negative case is one of the most difficult of Intelligence exercises; (iv) our experts fail, or do not try; the Germans succeed. This is the most interesting Intelligence case, but it is difficult to overcome the prejudice that as we have not done something, it is impossible or foolish.

It was, of course, the last of these situations that British intelligence faced in the V-weapons programs. In the spring of 1939 the RAF, recognizing its ignorance of new German weapons, set up a scientific and technical intelligence section under Dr. Jones. Later in the year, after the fall of Poland, Hitler called on Britain to sue for peace, boasting that "the moment might very quickly come for us to use a weapon with which we ourselves could not be attacked." Responding to a query from the Prime Minister, Dr. Jones reported intelligence references to a number of

new weapons, including pilotless aircraft and long-range guns and rockets (all then under development by the Germans) and concluded that some of these "must be considered seriously." What was the response of British intelligence to this recognition of the secret-weapons threat? By today's standards, it must be accounted almost criminally slow.

Hard on the heels of Dr. Jones' assessment came the "Oslo Report," an anonymous letter to the British naval attaché in Norway which told of several new weapons under development at Peenemünde, among them long-range rockets. Subsequent developments proved the Oslo Report to be pure gold, but British intelligence did not take the rocket (the ultimate V-2) seriously until March 1943 when one captured German general mentioned it to another in a well-bugged room. At long last, the British made German long-range rocket development the subject of a special investigation headed by Duncan Sandys, who promptly ordered a photo-recce of Peenemünde. Still the existence of the threat was not finally accepted by British intelligence, and Churchill so informed, until mid-1944, about two months before the first V-2 hit London.

In the case of the pilotless ramjet "buzz-bomb" (the V-1), performance was somewhat better. By late September 1943 Dr. Jones had concluded that "the German Air Force has been developing a pilotless aircraft for long-range bombardment," and this conclusion was communicated to Churchill by the end of the year, about six months before the first V-1 fell on English soil.

The intelligence record is worse again on a third German V-weapon, which the Allies only discovered when invading; their troops overran its firing site at Mimoyecques, France. This was the so-called "high-pressure pump," an unorthodox long-range gun which fortunately never became operational but could theoretically have put several thousand shells per month on London. The development of this weapon involved no radically new technology and, moreover, was not begun until May 1943; the intelligence lapse is therefore understandable.

But German development of the long-range rocket and the flying bomb began in the early thirties. In 1936 high-priority development of both weapons was under way at Peenemünde, probably the largest and most elaborate military research establishment in the world. How to account for such a failure on the part of the vaunted British intelligence organization?

The basic cause was that British intelligence, despite the technological surprises of World War I, was simply not geared to collect and assess scientific and technical intelligence. (The British, of course, were not alone in neglecting this vital field; all of the major participants in World War II suffered technological surprise.) With recognition of the problem came a response that was almost too late and was certainly too little. The British never made a concerted approach to scientific and technical intelligence that would have brought together all the information and expertise at the disposal of the government. Dr. Jones, working in the Air Ministry, lacked authority and frequently found himself at odds with War Ministry intelligence; Duncan Sandys, who had the necessary authority for about a year, was limited in jurisdiction to the long-range rocket threat. And organizational difficulties were compounded by the free-wheeling tactics of highly placed persons outside the intelligence community who nonetheless had great influence on intelligence judgments.

One of these was Lord Cherwell, the Prime Minister's personal scientific adviser, who probably deserves a paragraph for having given the book its title. "Lord Cherwell still felt," reads a Defense Committee report of October 1943, "that at the end of the war when we knew the full story, we should find that the rocket was a mare's nest." Cherwell had been led to this view, as the book makes amply clear, by his personal jealousy of Duncan Sandys. As soon as Sandys began to investigate the long-range rocket, Cherwell began to disparage it and to emphasize instead the importance of the flying bomb. It reflects no credit on him that the flying bomb proved to be the more serious threat. But even in opposing Sandys, Cherwell probably earned his keep by uncovering the fact, long known to British defense scientists, that German explosive, thanks to the simple addition of small quantities of aluminum powder, was 80 percent more powerful than the standard British variety—this in October 1943, after Bomber Command had carried some 200,000 tons of the weaker stuff to Axis targets. The fact remains, however, that for personal reasons he hindered the assessment of the long-range rocket. It cannot be argued that any form of organization can eliminate personal rivalry, but Cherwell would surely have had less success in challenging the voice of a single intelligence organization.

The chief intelligence problem posed by the German secret weapon programs was that of assessing a new, unfamiliar technology. Those of us who have worried over each new Soviet missile system for the past 10 or 12 years can feel only sympathy for the British photo interpreter

confronted for the first time with a "ski site" launching ramp for the V-1 (all the more when one reflects that the ski sites were never used). Indeed, some of the arguments that raged through the British intelligence community have a strangely familiar ring, e.g., the question of solid vs. liquid propellants for the V-2. But the problem was further complicated by irrational elements in the German decision-making process. Even when most of the returns were in, the British found it difficult to believe that the Germans would undertake the development and production of such an expensive and complicated weapon as the V-2 simply to deliver a ton of explosive with indifferent accuracy.

Today, with the additional perspective of 20 years, it still seems incredible that the Germans in the face of defeat should have given first priority to untried weapons which in any event promised no decisive result; these programs consumed precious resources—manpower, materials, and productive capacity—that could have provided jets for the Luftwaffe, *Wasserfall* missiles for air defense, and concrete and steel for the Atlantic Wall. It is too much to say, as does the author, that rockets cost Germany the war, but it cannot be doubted that the drain of the V-weapon programs shortened it considerably. In his last report on the rocket threat, Dr. Jones recalled how British intelligence had been forced to enter a German fantasy world where romance had replaced economy. This is, perhaps, not the least valuable lesson to be found in this work.

It is difficult to do a workmanlike job of demolition on Collier's book, *The Battle of the V-Weapons*, in the small space which it deserves; I shall attempt to do so by addressing only one of its more outrageous aspects. The book is padded beyond belief. It might contain enough substance for a decent magazine article, but don't read it in hopes of sorting this out from the chaff. The padding is accomplished in two ways: first, by the use of bogus scholarship and irrelevant detail, and second, by the addition of several useless sections at the end. Chapter I provides a splendid example of the first technique. Much is made of what appears to be forerunners of the pulse-jet engine (French Patents No. 374,124 and No. 412,478), so the author can conclude that "there is reason to believe that the German pulse-jet was, in fact, an independent invention, but that does not mean that its designers may not have been influenced, even without knowing it, by ideas which stemmed in the first place from Marconnet's work."

In his use of the second technique, Collier shows more imagination than anyone who has waded through the book would have thought possible.

The following sections bring up the rear.

"Inquest." Labeled Chapter 11, this is a section in which the author asks himself silly questions and comes up with the expected silly answers. Question: "Was either V-1 or V-2 a new departure in the sense that it introduced a new principle of strategy?" Answer: "Pilotless winged missiles and long-range rockets are bombardment weapons, or in short, artillery. Whether a mere extension of the range of artillery can ever be said to introduce a new principle of strategy can only be a matter of opinion."

"Chronological Summary." This apparently reproduces the notes used in writing the book; they began with the French patents.

"Appendix: V-1 and V-2." This is apparently intended to be a technical description of the two weapons. The V-1 discussion again refers to the French patents.

"Bibliography and Sources." A modest list, not surprisingly; it includes Andrew Tully's well-known work on CIA and (you guessed it) the two French patents.

"Index." Quite detailed; contains five page references to the French patents.

Had enough?

Bibliography

1 See Studies VI 3, p. 55 ff, and VI 4, p. 37 ff.

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Posted: May 08, 2007 08:11 AM