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Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones. *The Nazi Spy Ring in America: Hitler's Agents, the FBI, and the Case That Stirred the Nation*. Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781647120047 (hardcover, \$29.95).

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Espionage is a tricky activity for historians to narrate, and spying an even trickier occupation to describe, simply because, if it is done right, espionage is supposed to be secret, and to remain secret. Consequently, before undertaking any attempt to document, narrate, and describe the history of the secret services, all that the average intelligence historian can usually see are two large signs that say 'Keep Out' and 'Go Away.' All too often book projects have to be abandoned because prospective authors are simply unable to find adequate archival or published material to support a full-length monograph. We investigative historians can hardly be blamed for occasionally feeling that we are perceived by the guardians of the secret world, whoever they may be, as some kind of *post facto* enemy, poking our unwelcome academic noses into things that are and should forever remain the sole preserve of the secret services. This is particularly true for Second World War intelligence historians, who still regularly encounter retained or heavily weeded files; blank lines, paragraphs, and whole pages; and concealed personalities, some 80 years on. But one perseveres stoically, of course: one defiantly hoists one's own large sign, which says: 'Keep Calm and Carry On.' And this Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones has done admirably with *The Nazi Spy Ring in America*, his latest study of espionage and counterespionage in the United States, producing — against considerable historiographical odds — a thoroughly readable yet learned contribution to the operational history of German intelligence and American security.

During its relatively brief but troubled existence from the early 1920s to 1944, the German military intelligence service (the Abwehr), or more precisely its active-espionage branch (Abwehr I [Abw I]), operated across the world as far afield as North and South America, South Africa, the Middle East, and China. As becomes clear early in Jeffreys-Jones's narrative, because of the service's decentralised organisation, its overseas operations were not planned, initiated, or controlled by Abw I HQ in Berlin (and later Zossen). Rather, they were haphazardly managed by intelligence officers who were stationed around Germany at or near various military-district headquarters, in the case of American operations in the naval-intelligence departments of Hamburg station (AST Hamburg, from 1938) and Bremen substation (NEST Bremen, up to 1938). Here the selection of operational priorities and targets was a highly subjective process conditioned by the whims and fancies of individual station chiefs and desk officers, such as Captain Erich Pfeiffer of Abw I M (naval intelligence), the chief antagonist in the book under review. This specialisation of so-called *Schwerpunkte* (special interests) at the station level is just one aspect of the general dysfunction that plagued the Abwehr throughout its history.

Another matter of relevance is the poor quality of Abwehr *V-Leute* (field agents). It is well known that in the recruitment and training of field agents, as opposed to intelligence officers, the German secret services generally preferred quantity to quality. Consequently, the relatively high operational failure rates that ensued could always be offset against the relatively low value and expendability of personnel. Once realised, this callous, sacrificial policy frequently lowered morale among agents and led to even poorer performance in the field. When coupled with the Abwehr's lack of central control over deployed agents and generally poor radio communications links, many overseas agents felt abandoned and proved highly susceptible to enemy efforts to 'break' and/or 'turn' them when captured.

One could go on and on about Abwehr dysfunction, but this is hardly the appropriate place to do so.¹ However, it is necessary to examine the issue of failure briefly here, as my only reservations about this marvellous book relate to what I perceive as its deceptively lenient evaluation of the Abwehr's generally poor operational performance. This is important because readers need to realise that J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was not pitting itself against the greatest intelligence service in the world. Whether archived or published, the available specialist literature on the Abwehr (and its rival, RSHA VI)² is not copious; yet most of it at some point addresses issues around the German services' catastrophic intelligence failure or operational failure — they are not the same thing — before and during the Second World War.³ Intelligence failure concerns such activities as product acquisition, evaluation, and distribution; threat identification; and scenario prediction. Operational failure, on the other hand, concerns the planning, logistics, recruitment, training, deployment, equipment, communications, and outcomes associated with specific missions. In terms of overall Abwehr performance, the key question is whether the organisation's catastrophic failure was largely the result of systemic incompetence or was purposefully engineered by nationalist officers opposed to National Socialism who were bent on undermining the Nazi war effort. Even today, 80 years later, scholars still seem puzzled by this *entweder-oder* problem and unable to resolve it. One reason for their indecision is possibly a lack of definitive information, for any relevant documentary evidence that might have clarified things was probably destroyed in the mayhem of 1945, if not before. However, it seems more likely that it is simply wrong in the first place to pose such a binary question — the correct answer is probably 'both.'

But Jeffreys-Jones's interpretation of the Abwehr's generally poor operational record does seem charitable. Possibly this is because he discusses the one area of relatively early Abw I operations where the outcome was uniquely significant. In his own words, "[Adolf] Hitler's spies sent home a lot of trivia, but also some vital secrets: for example, details of the Norden gyroscopic bombsight; the hull design of the new generation of top-speed destroyers; information on the computerization of code setting and breaking; the design of aircraft retraction devices on the latest class of aircraft carriers; and blueprints of the

¹ In my own work I have written extensively about Abwehr operational failure, most notably in *Nazi Secret Warfare in Occupied Persia (Iran): The Failure of the German Intelligence Services, 1939–45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 45–57, 222–239 passim. See also the definitive work by David Kahn, *Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 235–236 passim. Kahn errs only in attributing too much of the Abwehr's catastrophic failure to Admiral Wilhelm Canaris's conflicted personality and leadership style; however, he instances many other organisational, operational, and technical causes of extreme dysfunction.

² RSHA VI was Amt VI (Branch VI) of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Directorate [RSHA]), also known as the SS-Auslandsnachrichtendienst (SS Foreign Intelligence Service). Many writers still refer to RSHA VI (inaccurately) as the Sicherheitsdienst (SS Security Service [SD]), of which it was in fact merely one branch, another being RSHA IV or Amt IV (Branch IV) of the RSHA, commonly referred to as the Gestapo (Secret State Police). RSHA VI also had a poor operational record, but for very different reasons from the Abwehr.

³ This literature is mostly biographical, centred on the life of the *Amtschef*, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. In chronological order, besides Kahn (note 1) and Mueller (note 6), the most significant published works are: Ian Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence* (London: Gollancz, 1951); Karl Heinz Abshagen, *Canaris: Patriot und Weltbürger* (Stuttgart: Union, 1956); Gert Buchheit, *Der deutsche Geheimdienst: Geschichte der militärischen Abwehr* (Munich: List, 1966); Klaus Benzing, *Der Admiral: Leben und Wirken* (Nördlingen: Benzing, 1973); Heinz Höhne, *Canaris: Patriot im Zwielicht* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1976); Richard Bassett, *Hitler's Spy Chief: The Wilhelm Canaris Mystery* (London: Cassell, 2005). Also, in February 1975, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft ehemaliger Abwehrangehöriger (Association of Former Members of the Abwehr [AGEA]) released a limited-circulation periodical (*Die Nachhut*) containing officers' memoirs and operational narratives, all to be found in a single bound volume at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg. See *Die Nachhut: Informationsorgan für Angehörige der ehemaligen militärischen Abwehr*, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BArch-MArch), MSG 3/667. The most authoritative source on RSHA VI is: Katrin Paehler, *The Third Reich's Intelligence Service: The Career of Walter Schellenberg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

new generation of American fighter planes.”⁴ Otherwise, I find it difficult to agree with him that Allied postwar assessments reflected “a British victory hubris and an ignorance of the Abwehr’s successes elsewhere” (202). What successes? Where? Certainly few triumphs can be credited to Abw I active-espionage missions or Abw II sabotage-and-subversion missions in any other theatre. Only Abw III (counterintelligence) could lay claim to such successful signals deceptions as the infamous *Englandspiel* in the Netherlands, in addition to a problematic record of atrocious but often highly productive cooperation with the security police and Gestapo in occupied Europe and the Soviet Union. In fact, widespread operational dysfunction, certainly of Abw I and Abw II, was unquestionably rooted in the prevalent nationalist, anti-Nazi political sentiment among most Abwehr officers in those two branches of the service. From the moment that Admiral Wilhelm Canaris became *Amtschef* on 1 January 1935, the service (especially Abw I and Abw II) gradually assumed a dual role in the context of anti-Nazi resistance. On the surface, it demonstrated manifest compliance with the Führer’s (and the general staff’s) aims and policies. Under cover, it cultivated and sustained an honour-code of covert self-sacrifice — demanded by Canaris of his branch heads and senior officers — in an effort to undermine and confound the most odious aspects of the Nazi cause and to ensure the survival of the German nation, whatever the cost to be borne by the service in terms of operational efficiency, success, and reputation. And that cost was considerable, leading ultimately to the Abwehr’s dissolution in 1944.

As might be expected under such circumstances, with very few exceptions, Abw I espionage operations (and Abw II sabotage-and-subversion operations) evidenced dysfunction and failure in all theatres before and during the Second World War, which worsened rapidly in 1943 as Germany’s war situation deteriorated, and the SS interfered increasingly with and duplicated Abwehr competencies. Perhaps because most of Jeffreys-Jones’s narrative is restricted to the early stages of such global disarray, up to 1941, the general underperformance of German operatives and spymasters was not obvious. For most of the period the author deals with, as he himself points out, while the Abwehr were already on a war footing, the Americans were still at peace (228). In such more relaxed circumstances, expectations were perhaps lower and standards less rigorous. Had he found himself confronted with the shambolic state of certain important Abwehr stations after 1942 — e.g. Vienna (AST Wien), which was responsible for southeastern Europe, or Istanbul (KONO) which operated throughout the Middle East — then his assessment might perhaps have been more severe.⁵

On the other hand, methodically — clinically even, with little pathos, despite the pitiful frailty and inadequacy of so many of the Abwehr *V-Leute* he portrays — Jeffreys-Jones dispassionately dissects, documents, and describes a succession of ambitious but often poorly conceived, erratic activities aimed chiefly at hijacking some of America’s most significant prewar and early-war secrets. While doing so, he compels the reader relentlessly forward from one German blunder or betrayal to the next, with a consummate narrative skill more often associated with novelists than intelligence historians. At the same time, while keeping the reader in constant suspense, this book is a significant scholarly contribution, rich in factual content and solidly sourced. The author’s most impressive achievement lies perhaps in his ability to maintain what is nothing short of a miraculous balancing act between high cat-and-mouse drama and high information content that can only be truly appreciated after surveying the meagre (patchy, fragmented, nonspecialist) Abwehr literature at his disposal.⁶

⁴ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, “A Forgotten Scandal: How the Nazi Spy Case of 1938 Affected American Neutrality and German Diplomatic Opinion,” *Passport* (September 2020): 46.

⁵ KONO = Kriegsorganisation Nahost. See, for example, various critical statements by Wilhelm Kuebart, head of Abwehr army intelligence (Abw IH), The National Archives (TNA), KV 2/410.

⁶ Apart from archival sources, the most reliable works on the Abwehr listed in the author’s bibliography are the following: David Kahn (see note 1); Michael Mueller, *Canaris: The Life and Death of Hitler’s Spymaster* (London: Chatham, 2007); Oscar Reile, *Die geheime Westfront: Die Abwehr, 1935–1945* (Munich: Welsermühl, 1962); John H. Waller, “The Double Life of Admiral Canaris,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 9 (Fall 1996): 271–89. At the opposite end of the scale of reliability, I would place Ladislav Farago, *The Game of the Foxes: British and German Intelligence Operations and Personalities Which Changed the Course of the Second World War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971). Between these poles is arrayed an eclectic assortment of sources, few of which could be described as specialised.

Certainly, little literature is to be found on the subject of long-range operations in the United States. Of course, the Eurocentricity of most works on the Abwehr is understandable, since the service's brief history is deeply rooted in Canaris's personal struggle to survive the murderous domestic politics around Hitler and the constant interservice threat posed by the rival RSHA VI, all centered on the German capital. So-called *Ferneinsätze* (long-range operations) were only sustained in such regions as the Middle East, and then mainly by the sabotage-and-subversion branch, Abw II, not by the active-espionage branch, Abw I. Only a few useful articles have been published since the war that deal specifically with Nazi espionage in America.⁷

As might be expected, Jeffreys-Jones prevails masterfully over these shortcomings. From his ample, detailed notes and bibliography we can monitor how he has tracked down every scattered source on Abwehr personalities and operations, wringing from each the very last drop of material information to be had. Thus he guides us unerringly through the two main phases of U.S.-based German activities: (1) the Rumrich spy ring, which lasted until June 1938, when four German agents were indicted in New York on charges of spying, together with 14 additional operatives who were unreachable in Europe; and (2) the Duquesne/Ritter spy ring, which operated until June 1941, culminating in the arrest and trial of 33 U.S.-based German agents, as well as the identification of 37 unindicted personalities outside America, who could never be brought to justice.

When it comes to investigating the American counterintelligence operations that targeted the Abwehr and its U.S.-based operatives, and the legal wranglings and court proceedings that ensued, the documentary evidence from both sides of the Atlantic increases dramatically. Here in the central chapters of his book, Jeffreys-Jones's work is supported by a large tranche of archival records, including detailed FBI accounts of both spy rings, postwar Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) and other liquidation reports, MI5 profiles and interrogation reports, and his own extensive track-record of many years in the field of U.S. intelligence studies, including his solid history of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2007).⁸

These sources, both archival and published, including many press reports, provide an adequate foundation for the American side of the book's narrative, and for Jeffreys-Jones's portrayals of J. Edgar Hoover and Leon G. Turrour, Hoover's brilliant agent in charge, who undoubtedly ranks as the chief protagonist of this tale. Indeed, one of the book's strongest, most vivid chapters ("Of Propaganda and Revenge," 177–190), which accurately depicts the maelstrom around Turrour's post-trial pushback against fascism, is marked by Jeffreys-Jones's sense of contemporary American opinion and culture. Of the two prominent and controversial G-men, Turrour emerges as by far the more intriguing, dynamic character given that he was so evidently wronged by his notoriously vain, peevish boss. Clearly a special investigator of immense talent, Turrour's potential long-term value to the FBI was squandered and negated by Hoover, which undoubtedly caused Turrour great anguish. However, the U.S. military ultimately so benefited from his distinguished service that it is hardly possible to see him as a tragic figure of true Aristotelian proportions, and Jeffreys-Jones wisely avoids portraying him as such. After all, describing and analysing global covert warfare gives rise to interservice issues of far greater importance than petty intraservice conflicts and rivalries, as we know from countless examples in both Allied and Axis intelligence history.

In other words, although the Americans may ultimately have triumphed over the Nazis globally, Jeffreys-Jones succeeds in showing us vividly throughout his narrative that both sides in this shadowy struggle were significantly flawed at the strategic and tactical levels, though never equally so. From the very start of Willi Lonkowski's ambitious eight-year espionage mission in 1927 to the final arrests of the Duquesne/Ritter spy ring in the summer of 1941, the Abwehr were always out-resourced, outsmarted, and outmatched by the U.S. authorities. Furthermore, they endured the continuous disadvantage of occupying

⁷For example: Hans L. Trefousse, "Failure of German Intelligence in the United States, 1935–1945," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (June 1955): 84–100; Arthur L. Smith Jr, "The Foreign Organization of the Nazi Party and the United States, 1931–39," in *Germany and America: Essays on Problems of International Relations and Immigration*, ed. Hans L. Trefousse, 173–82 (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1981).

⁸Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

an alien covert space and were, like most wartime spies ‘behind the lines,’ forced to adopt a fugitive, defensive posture which was at odds with their need to mount successful offensive espionage operations. Additionally, Jeffreys-Jones points to a fundamental dichotomy at the core of German covert operations that weakened the organisational structure and transatlantic lines of communication required to support and sustain them. There was an inherent tension between the non-Nazi Abwehr intelligence officers who planned and initiated missions at their Hamburg and Bremen desks, and the *V-Leute* deployed to execute them across the ocean, most of whom were enthusiastic Nazi ideologues, more closely aligned with the Party, the SS, and the Gestapo than with the Abwehr (128 passim). It also becomes clear that the relatively autonomous German ships’ masters and shore-based personnel who were co-opted to facilitate the insertion and exfiltration of agents, as well as the conveyance (smuggling) of intelligence product and messages, could react to operational situations adversely and unexpectedly. Nor were the shipping magnates themselves enthusiastic about the consequences of their collusion being exposed, and seriously damaging their international reputations and threatening their trade and profits (122). Ultimately, the Auswärtiges Amt (German Foreign Office) and even Canaris himself became alarmed at the negative diplomatic consequences of any revelation of Abwehr espionage for U.S.-German relations, all of which impinged on the efficacy of Pfeiffer’s work at Bremen substation and (later) Ritter’s at Hamburg station (122–123; 202).

This study does not of course belong to the genre of diplomatic history. It belongs rather to the discipline known in German as the *Geschichte der Nachrichtendienste* (literally “history of the intelligence services,” for which the normal English-language term is simply intelligence history). However, Jeffreys-Jones concludes his study with an analytical chapter devoted to “Diplomatic Fallout” in which he examines the overall significance of German espionage in the U.S., i.e. the true impact of Nazi espionage on public opinion and U.S. foreign and domestic policy, including issues around neutrality and expenditure on military intelligence and security, even into the postwar years and the Cold War era (225–237). Yet strategic analysis is to be found throughout the book. With some indebtedness no doubt to one of America’s finest diplomatic and military historians, Gerhard Weinberg, the author evaluates Hitler’s discounting and dismissal of America’s strategic importance as “a work in progress with a distinctly downward trajectory” (85).⁹ This remains one of the book’s most significant statements, for it betrays the fatal flaw at the core of most Abwehr activities in the U.S. (and elsewhere). The fact is that on a grand scale all Abwehr U.S.-based espionage operations were essentially Sisyphean: they never pleased or truly engaged the interest of the Führer. In strategic terms and progressively from 1941 onwards, Hitler appears to have seen the U.S. only through the lens of antisemitism (“a Jewish rubbish heap”) (85), while his consuming obsession and absolute operational priority was always the struggle against Stalin and Bolshevism.

This is an excellent read: informative, intriguing, entertaining, and suspenseful throughout. The book has clearly been assembled according to the only tried and true methodology for intelligence historians: first consult the archives, pouncing on previously classified material the moment it is released. Only when the records have been harvested, processed, and analysed — exhaustively — should one turn to the published literature, with minimal reliance upon it. By using this approach, Jeffreys-Jones has succeeded in achieving a delicate, appropriate balance between official records and secondary sources, between scholarly and popular material, meaning that his work should appeal to the widest imaginable readership, ranging from the general public and young undergraduates to mid-career historians, and even to critical, irascible old emeriti like myself. Indeed, my only remaining criticism is born not of distemper but of common sense and the best interests of all readers of any age in search of visual content. The absence of any appendix material other than a simple *dramatis personae* is striking. Surely here an opportunity has been missed to synthesise and visualise (tabulate, chart, or map) Abwehr activities and America’s secrets in terms of time, place, space, and outcome (success or failure). Otherwise, the author’s organisational craft and penmanship are estimable: he steers a straight chronological course, his language and style are lucid and concise, and he drives his narrative ever forwards at a cracking pace. *The Nazi Spy Ring in America* is also to be commended from a specialist viewpoint as a pioneering work, in the sense that one of the many lacunae in the neglected history of Abwehr overseas operations has now finally been filled, most satisfactorily.

⁹ See Gerhard L. Weinberg, “Hitler’s Image of the United States,” *American Historical Review* 69 (July 1964): 1006–21; *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 86–87 passim.

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