Reviews

Spy Book: The Encyclopedia of Espionage by Norman Polmar and Thomas B. Allen

New York: Random House (1997) ISBN 0 679 42514 4 (633 pages, \$30.00 US)

Reviewed by James D. Calder

Spy Book has been reviewed in several US publications. One is never certain, however, that good reference books have been introduced to European and other communities. This is an exceptionally well designed and richly detailed tome, especially in view of the reasonable purchase price. Its A-to-Z topical arrangement, combined with its extensive index of terms and subjects, affords ease in searching for both common and obscure events and personalities in espionage history. As the cover indicates, there are more than 2,000 entries. The volume makes a great shelf companion to other reference books, such as Jeffrey T. Richelson's *A Century of Spies: Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1995), and Ernest Volkman's *Spy: The Secret Agents Who Changed the Course of History* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

The introductory material contains a 'Perspective on Spying' in which the authors briefly offer observations on the range of historical coverage, which is from 1800 BC to the late twentieth century. They point out that the project's research extended over several years, and that information was taken largely from records and chronicles. The book's mission is to involve the reader in '...a personal intelligence collection effort' (p xii). To assist this journey, a chronology of background dates, mainly of wars and related events, is located at the front. Also included is a brief description of how to use the book, and an extensive list of acknowledgments for sources in different countries. Neither author is unfamiliar with the world of spying, and this partly explains the thoroughness of reflection upon international resources describing and interpreting circumstances in the murky underworld of espionage (see an earlier book, *Merchants of Treason* (Delacorte Press, 1988) and several of the authors' other writings in article and book form).

The real value of any encyclopedia lies in the richness of detail in combination with clarity of explanation. How many spy buffs are familiar with the German Air Force PAG device (Personen-Abwurf-Geraet) for parachuting agents behind enemy lines in World War II? Who remembers that in 1573 Sir Francis Walsingham was the architect of the British secret service, supported by private funds and employing a cipher system reflecting his fascination with codes? What elements should be included in a brief history of the intricacies and oddities of American intelligence operations from World War II to the present? The authors' crisp writing style entices the reader to turn pages in an otherwise limited-use resource like turning pages in a steamy novel. Occasional photographs reduce the dryness of the encyclopedic format. A later edition should expand the number of pictures and artistic renditions, particularly for more obscure events and characters.

This reviewer has drawn great pleasure and factual correction from this book. It is a source of

comfort to know that a paperback version has recently been released. The only suggestion I have is that the authors should broaden the scope of citations to events and personalities in regions of the world other than North America and Europe. An 'encyclopedia of espionage' should explore places like ancient and modern China, India, Japan, and South Africa. Otherwise, this book should have a special place on every security expert's reference shelf. Security and loss prevention experts can take some lessons from the realm of spies and traitors so well summarised in *Spy Book*.

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