

**Matthew S. Seligmann, *Spies in Uniform. British Military & Naval Intelligence on the Eve of the First World War*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 286 pages, \$99 (hardcover).**

The British intelligence veteran and distinguished Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper once remarked: “So long as governments conceal a part of their activities, other governments, if they wish to base their policy on full and correct information, must seek to penetrate the veil.” Today, this onus falls squarely on the intelligence community. In the years preceding World War I, Britain’s military and naval attachés to Berlin shouldered much of this task. Matthew Seligmann’s well documented and appropriately titled book, *Spies in Uniform*, takes an in-depth look at how they went about it.

The collection of military and naval intelligence was one of the attachés’ key functions. Of the surprisingly wide range of sources available to them—including newspapers, official inquiries to the German authorities and reconnaissance trips across the country—human intelligence generated by far the best information. Some of it was obtained on a quid pro quo basis. For instance, in 1907 Naval Attaché Captain Philip Wylie Dumas provided journalist John Bashford with a full copy of the German naval estimates for that year. In return, Bashford informed Dumas of German efforts to increase the power of their 11-inch naval guns—intelligence that Dumas never could have obtained directly from the Germans.

Given the attachés’ function as Britain’s primary intelligence gatherers, the obvious question arises whether they engaged in espionage. Although Seligmann rules this out, he details the case of a certain Frank Dunsby, resident of the coastal town of Neufahrwasser, who for several years reported his observations on German submarine construction, dock layouts, and other naval matters to the British naval attaché. In 1912, the German authorities opened an espionage investigation regarding Dunsby. Although the case was subsequently dropped, Dunsby’s reconnaissance activities smack distinctly of espionage—which would have made the British naval attaché a spy handler. Seligmann also quotes from an official British document, dated 1909, on the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau (precursor to MI5 and SIS) whose purpose was to ensure that “our naval and military attachés...would...be freed from the necessity of dealing with spies.” This wording suggests that the attachés were, in fact, involved in espionage, at least until 1909.

Whether through open sources or espionage, the attachés were generally *au courant* on German military and naval affairs. They also ventured their own opinions about German intentions. By and large, it appears, they shared widespread British concerns about German bellicosity. Military Attaché Frederic Trench, for example, bought hook, line and sinker into popular if mistaken notions about German plans to invade England and reported accordingly to London. Closer to the mark, in 1908 he predicted war for the year 1915.

The attachés’ reports were keenly read in London. Therefore, the “harbingers of the German menace,” as Seligmann calls them, conceivably strengthened those politicians who favored a hard line against Berlin. Ultimately, this policy resulted in Britain’s declaration of war on Germany in August 1914. In contrast to revisionist

historians like Niall Ferguson, Seligmann applauds this fateful decision. Regardless of whether one subscribes to his point of view, Seligmann has produced a fine study of a hitherto underappreciated intelligence provider to the British government. *Spies in Uniform* is highly recommended to anyone interested in Anglo-German relations, pre-World War I intelligence and the role of service attachés in the intelligence gathering process.

**Reviewed by** Dr. Thomas Boghardt, Historian, International Spy Museum, Washington, D.C.