

A gentleman's pursuit

Daniel J. Kevles

Reflections on Intelligence. By R. V. Jones. Heinemann: 1989. Pp.376. £19.50.

In *Most Secret War**, R. V. Jones provided a gripping memoir of British scientific intelligence from 1939 to 1945, when he was the head of scientific intelligence on Britain's Air Staff and scientific advisor to the British Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6. In *Reflections on Intelligence*, Jones reviews his postwar experiences in intelligence and offers some postscripts to the first volume, including a number of fascinating responses to it from participants in the secret war on both sides of the Channel. He attempts briefly — but appropriately — to show that systematic scientific support for the armed services began with World War I, and gives a much-enlarged, thoroughly absorbing account of the crucial Oslo Report (about which more below).

What makes the new book particularly inviting is Jones's concern to elaborate on some of the matters explored in the previous work, particularly to illuminate the craft and ethics of the security trade. To this end, drawing material from a broad range of historical episodes, he supplies thoughtful chapters on subjects such as official secrecy as well as on intelligence in relation to security, deception and command. He also offers apothegms of right and proper practice — for example, no agent should be intentionally betrayed; the gathering of information should use minimum force and trespass; excessive secrecy is counterproductive and sometimes silly; no matter how sophisticated technology may become, human spies will always be needed.

In a sense, the practice of intelligence violates the norms of conventional upright conduct ("gentlemen do not read each other's mail", the US Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson said, in 1929, when he shut down his country's cryptographic centre). Jones has his own views about the role of gentlemen in the intelligence game. His sensibilities express themselves throughout the book but nowhere more clearly than in his extended treatment of the Oslo Report.

The report came into Jones's possession in November 1939, having been recently received at the British Legation in Oslo, Norway. It described in seemingly authoritative detail several important German technical developments, including rocket activities at Peenmünde and a radar system for the guidance of German

bombers. An item of independently obtained intelligence persuaded Jones that the Oslo Report was not a plant sent to mislead but a genuine and revealing account of certain key military technologies. In a review of scientific intelligence that he wrote in April 1946, Jones called the document "one of the most brilliant intelligence reports received throughout the war", adding, however, that the source of the report had not been discovered.

Jones discussed the Oslo Report in *Most Secret War* but did not reveal the full text for fear that it might contain a clue to

to Norway, Mayer pecked out the Oslo Report on an old hotel typewriter, expecting at first to send it to Turner but then concluding that it would be safer delivered to the British Legation. In August 1943, Mayer was arrested by the Gestapo for listening to BBC broadcasts. He spent the rest of the war in various concentration camps and, after a few postwar years on the Cornell University faculty, returned to Germany, where he resumed his career, neither recognized nor hounded for his pro-Allied espionage.

In recent years, a number of revelations about the game of intelligence have

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R. V. Jones — intelligence officer and author, he was in charge of British intelligence against the V-1 (flying bomb) and V-2 rocket (right), and played an important and successful part in British Scientific Intelligence during the Second World War.

the author's identity — which by that time Jones knew — and might thus, perhaps, lead to his embarrassment. The text has since been published in volume I of the official *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, and the author, dead for several years, is beyond embarrassment. Jones now freely relates his discovery, in the mid-1950s, of who wrote the report — an absorbing adventure that turned on several chance encounters, one involving a toy pneumatic rubber monkey, that led eventually to Hans Ferdinand Mayer, a physicist who before and during the war had been head of the central laboratories of Siemens & Halske, the noted electrical company.

Although Mayer had studied with Philipp Lenard, a staunch enemy of Einstein's "Jewish physics", he detested the Nazis and admired the English, especially an English businessman named Cobden Turner, with whom he had dealt for many years. Mayer had told Turner about a half-Jewish girl who had been repudiated by her Nazi father and could not leave the country with her mother; Turner arranged for the girl's emigration to England and installed her as a member of his household. While on a business trip

suggested that it is dirty and devious, a trend that Jones deplores. He contends that intelligence benefits from abiding by the rules of gentlemanly conduct, noting, for example, that Niels Bohr was "happy to co-operate with the British Secret Service because he found that it was run by a gentleman" (p.332). Jones judges the morality of Mayer's pro-Allied treachery as superior to that of Kim Philby's pro-Communist perfidy. He sees Philby's as distasteful and cold-blooded, even if idealistic; Mayer's as the result of devotion to the long-term interests of the great European family and to the decencies of civilization that he found embodied in Cobden Turner. Defending those decencies may now seem antique, and identifying them with gentlemen may seem somewhat snobbish, yet there is a good deal to be said for the code of values that people like R. V. Jones brought to the practice of intelligence, which, once integrated into the protection of national security, can all too easily value nothing higher than its own success. □

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*Published as *The Wizard War* in the United States.