

"Secrets of the Cold War: US Army Europe's Intelligence and Counterintelligence Activities Against the Soviets During the Cold War" by Leland McCaslin
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Despite some interesting anecdotes depicting life as a member of the US Army's Military Intelligence Corps (or as a member of similar associated organisations i.e. BRIXMIS), the book offers few "secrets" to the reader and fails to create a truly engaging narrative of the activities of military intelligence and counterintelligence during the Cold War period. Nor does the Secrets of the Cold War explore in any detail the true importance of such intelligence work to the US, NATO and its adversaries. An opportunity is missed to truly examine what the contributions of US army counter-intelligence were. Instead a mix of hypotheticals and unconnected anecdotes offers the reader some insights into the life of a practitioner.

The Preface to the book does offer this as to the reader early on, stating that the book aims by no means to be comprehensive, but given the ambitious title of the book it is hard not to be somewhat disappointed. Many of the activities covered in the book are already well documented within the historical record, and whilst the lay-reader may gain some limited insight from the book, professional or amateur students of the Cold War or of Intelligence Studies are unlikely to find sustenance from this collection of disjointed tales.

To start, Secrets of the Cold War attempts to provide the reader with an idea of the threats which US Army intelligence was tasked with tackling. Whilst it is easy to forgive the fact that the threats detailed within the seven "case studies" of the first chapter are derived from the period of the latter Cold War, it is somewhat more questionable why the author chose to use actual historical events for the three case studies dealing with the threat from left-wing terror groups yet created fictional scenarios to deal with the direct threat from Soviet and Warsaw Pact intelligence, especially given the title of the book. A cynical reader may excuse the over emphasis of the terrorist threat depicted (three of seven case studies) as a likely nod to a wider current audience who think only of intelligence in relation to counter terrorism. However the remaining fictional "case studies" offer little in the way of seriously highlighting the threats that were faced by US forces in Europe (or even allied forces) and often read more as self-indulgent attempts at writing espionage/romance fiction.

Despite this criticism, some of the anecdotes offered throughout the book are engaging and make for enjoyable and sometimes amusing reading. Recollections of Warsaw Pact counterparts on the infamous train routes between West Berlin and West Germany highlight the humanity of the forces arrayed against NATO, whether it is soldiers exchanging a subversive smile, or officers trading memorabilia for western consumer goods. Although the book may offer little to those wishing to seek knowledge of the wider conflict and the role of intelligence in it, the reader could be forgiven for enjoying some of the old war stories from the cold warriors who were actually there, especially those that deal with the very early Cold War.

The chapters detailing the activities of the three allied missions to Soviet controlled territory are also worthy of note. Although this subject has received some attention from other sources, the accounts given by those who took part make for an engaging read, highlighting some of the incredible bravery and guile of those undertaking these missions. This section also draws the reader's attention to the danger that these missions operated under, with the death of Lt Col Arthur D. Nicholson receiving particular attention. Perhaps the most significant insight offered in the book is offered in this section, highlighting clearly that despite such incidents, those operating as part of BRIXMIS, FMLM, and USMLM, did not want the somewhat grey rules on their conduct and activities clarifying, even if this meant increased danger for them, as any clearer rules would hurt their intelligence collection activities.

However, towards the

end of the book, the reader's heart sinks at the frequent quoting of Wikipedia as a source, even for particularly famous passages of speech such as Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" homily. Whilst this book is clearly an amateur history rather than an academic study, references to Wikipedia do leave a bitter taste in the mouth of the reader. Overall a reader should not approach this book expecting the kind of meat that the title suggests. Better suited it may be to those with particular experience of the Cold War, who can relate to some of the tales told: to be read for personal curiosity rather than to seek information or knowledge