



Simon Kitson, *Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis, 1940-1942: complexités de la politique de collaboration*. Éditions Autrement, Collection Mémoires no. 110, 2005. 268 pp., index, bibliography, ISSN: 1157-4488; ISBN 2-7467- 0588-5.

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Simon Kitson has made an important contribution to the historiography of France during the Second World War. His book sheds new light on the complexity of state collaboration and what might be termed the social history of espionage. I finished this concise and judicious work with admiration for the author's achievement, for he has demonstrated how the study of intelligence operations raises broader questions about the character of the Vichy regime and life in France during the war years.

Given Germany's efforts to rearm secretly after the First World War it was predictable that its leaders were intensely suspicious of the French after signing the armistice of 1940. Indeed, as Kitson points out, German intelligence operations throughout France and its colonies intensified after the fighting ceased. Agents of the Third Reich sought to hinder any possibility of a French revival by monitoring the state of Vichy's armed forces and public opinion, and facilitating the exploitation of France's economy. The Vichy regime responded with counter-intelligence initiatives intended to preserve its administrative autonomy and territorial sovereignty. They were also supposed to ensure that collaboration with the Nazis remained under the central control of the French state by suppressing individual initiatives to cooperate with the occupier.

As this last point suggests, Kitson is having none of the idea that the pursuit of Nazi spies hints at a 'double game' strategy on Vichy's part. He also refutes suggestions made in postwar memoirs that the regime's intelligence officials pursued a pro-resistance agenda independently of the central government. While regarding Germany as their main enemy these individuals sympathized with many aspects of the National Revolution. They often distrusted the British, were disdainful of the Gaullists, and arrested significant numbers of Allied agents, notwithstanding fleeting contacts with Allied intelligence services. As such, Vichy's counter-espionage efforts demonstrated how far the regime was prepared to go to preserve its authority against all comers, but they were not allowed to impede the largely unfruitful and morally disastrous quest for concessions from and strategic alignment with the Third Reich. Various efforts were made to appease the occupier throughout this period, ranging from allowing German Red Cross visits to imprisoned spies to commuting sentences and prisoner exchanges, even if

Vichy's spymasters balked at the potential information leaks which could result from these measures.

Kitson integrates the history of counter-espionage activities into the story of Vichy's quest to carve out a privileged place for itself in Hitler's New Order. At the same time, he provides a fascinating analysis of those who spied for Germany. Vichy's relative lack of resources – plus the fact that it used them against both Axis and Allied operatives – meant that many of those who spied for Germany were never captured. Yet at least 1500 and as many as 2500 were, the bulk of them French citizens. They spied primarily for money, an impetus sharpened by wartime penury. Other motives were also at work, including pro-Nazi zeal and hostility to the French state on the part of extremist Breton and Alsatian autonomists. Interestingly, some spies who were apprehended claimed they were merely supporting the policy of collaboration endorsed by Vichy itself. This did not save them from harsh prison conditions, rough treatment, and in some cases torture. Indeed, approximately forty individuals were executed.

Kitson's meticulous research in a variety of archives – above all the famed “fonds de Moscou” – enables him to discuss the treatment and fate of spies with authority: it also allows him to consider many fascinating individual examples. Consider, for instance, Maurice Petit and Jacques Grandidier, who were arrested for spying on behalf of Nazi Germany and each sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. In their defence the men recounted how they had previously served with French naval intelligence service and were compromised after their superiors, precipitously fleeing Paris in 1940, left behind a list of agents which included their names. Tracked down by the Germans, they had been ‘ordered’ to serve the Third Reich. Aside from requesting leniency on these grounds Petit, for his part, added that his consistent aim had been to work against Britain and never against France, while Grandidier emphasized his credentials as an honourable man and the fact that his wife lacked any means of support. Both men had their sentences reduced to five years, but nothing beyond that. This episode is instructive not only about how spies were recruited and how they viewed themselves, but also with respect to the kind of arguments used to attain clemency. There are many such particular examples used to such good effect throughout the book; we are clearly in the hands of a skilled historian.

What is the place of Kitson's work in the historiography of France during ‘the dark years’? Julian Jackson's recent, masterful synthesis has underscored how recent scholarship tends to emphasize the complexity of the era, with the motives and actions of individuals often defying binary categories of progressive or reactionary, collaborator or resister.[1] While Kitson is wary of going too far in this direction, seeing counterintelligence as part of Vichy's simultaneous (and self-defeating) pursuit of greater sovereignty and collaboration, to an extent his findings illustrate this trend. While his depictions of key figures like Darlan, Laval and Pétain are broadly in keeping with the findings of previous scholarship, his comments on the attitudes of Vichy's counter-intelligence personnel offer a new perspective. For example, Kitson's summary of the attitude and priorities of the regime-sponsored network Travaux Ruraux points to a complex and somewhat ambiguous outlook: “la France est seule. Elle a de nombreux ennemis parmi lesquels la 'perfidie Albion', qui l'a trahie. Mais l'ennemi numero un est l'Allemagne, et la liberation du pays reste la priorite.” (100)

Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis also contributes to our understanding of the relationship between state and society under Pétain's regime. Kitson has discovered, for instance, that it was the Vichy authorities, not the Resistance, who began the practice of shaving the heads of women accused of consorting with Germans. Hence this brutal practice, part an effort to 'purify' French society at the time of the Liberation must now also be linked to the Vichy project of constructing a new, 'cleansed' moral order.[2]

More generally, Kitson reminds us of the controversial choices some French citizens made in response to the German occupation. Recent work such as Robert Gildea's provocative *Marianne in Chains* emphasizes how under these circumstances ordinary French citizens developed various coping strategies, which frequently involved the formation of new social networks and forms of solidarity.[3] By contrast, *Vichy et la chasse aux espions* reaffirms that alongside these creative responses there was also atomization and desperation; otherwise Nazi efforts at recruiting spies in France would not have enjoyed the level of success they did.

Another key theme pursued by many historians of wartime France is that of continuities between the late Third Republic and Vichy on the one hand, and between Pétain's regime and the post-liberation era on the other. In this respect *Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis* might have gone just a bit further. At the end of the book I was left wondering about the extent to which the behaviour of Vichy's counterintelligence services was foreshadowed by developments during the 1930s and the period of the 'phoney war' (1939- 1940). As for the postwar years, Kitson does point out that a number of Pétain's intelligence chiefs defected to the allies after the German occupation of southern France in 1942, only to wind up on the losing side of the power struggle within the external Resistance between Charles de Gaulle and General Henri Giraud. To go much further in telling this fascinating story would arguably be beyond the purview of this book, but I would have liked to see a little more about the fate and legacy of those who had organized Vichy's counter-espionage network.

These mild criticisms, however, should not detract from the impressive depth of Kitson's research, or his judicious and compelling analysis. He has shown us that in a field of study characterized by rapid growth and increasing sophistication there remain fascinating lines of inquiry for scholars to explore. He has also provided a model for how to integrate the study of espionage with political and social history.

Notes

[1] Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-4.

[2] For the treatment of these women during the Liberation see Jackson, *The Dark Years*, 580-583.

[3] Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation of France 1940-1945* (London: Macmillan, 2002), 16.

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