

# World War I Espionage

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December 11, 2001

## 1 Introduction

Little is known by the public about the art and science of espionage. Espionage is secret watching. This two-word definition embodies the duality of intelligence gathering. The more publically-popular side is Positive Intelligence—information gathering. Watching. The other side is secrecy, Negative Intelligence.

## 2 Positive Intelligence

### 2.1 What is Positive Intelligence?

Positive intelligence is espionage involved in the acquisition of information. Areas within this field include collection, translation, maps and photographs, and codes and ciphers (cryptanalysis)[3].

## **2.2 Influences on World War I**

During the First World War, positive intelligence had an obvious effect in only a few instances, which indicates that the negative intelligence efforts of the various groups involved were successful.

In one instance, German forces fighting Russia very successfully used positive intelligence. The Germans were up against two Russian generals. The Russians, though, sent all their messages back and forth unencoded, making it extremely easy for the Germans to follow all the movements of the Russian armies. Furthermore, it became obvious that the two generals hated each other, and would not come to one another's aid. The Germans attacked one army, correct in their guess that the other would not help, and then destroyed the other[1].

## **3 Negative Intelligence**

### **3.1 What is Negative Intelligence?**

Negative intelligence is manipulation of information that is broadcast. Areas of negative intelligence include propaganda, counter-espionage, codes and ciphers (cryptology), and forgery.

### **3.2 Influences on World War I**

Negative intelligence was an important part of the First World War. It was used by every group that had a positive intelligence force. In America, propaganda was very effectively used to sway public opinion through emotional appeals[2]. Elsewhere, the quality (or even

presence) of codes used in communication was important to the outcome of the war—by the end, the British could read quite a lot of what the Germans sent[3].

America had voted Woodrow Wilson into office as a peacemonger. Through effective and persistent propaganda, though, the Wilson administration managed to sway virtually the entire public opinion to war. This was done using a mixture of emotional appeals, unconfirmed reports, and outright lies[2].

In one failure of negative intelligence, the German fleet, making its only appearance in the war, moved out of its harbor. The British, though, overheard a radio message that gave away the movement, and sailed to meet the German fleet in the Battle of Jutland. The Germans had fewer vessels, but those that they had were of higher quality than the British fleet, and shot more accurately. The Germans did well tactically, but were less able to sustain losses than were the British, so they retreated, never to leave port again[1]. Had the British been unprepared, it seems likely that the Germans could have inflicted sufficient losses on the British to remain at sea.

## 4 Conclusion

The public generally has no idea what happens in the field of espionage. That's the point.

## References

- [1] Isaac Asimov. *Asimov's Chronology of the World*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1991.
  
- [2] Aaron Delwiche. *Of Fraud and Force Fast Woven: Domestic Propaganda During the First World War*. Washington University (online), <http://carmen.artsci.washington.edu/propaganda/war1.htm>, 1994.
  
- [3] Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones. *American Espionage*. The Free Press, New York, 1977.