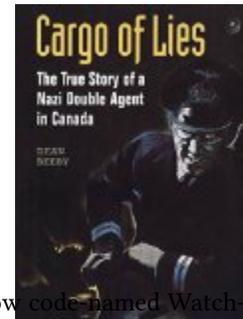


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Dean Beeby. *Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. xi + 214 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8020-0731-5.

Reviewed by R. A. Ratcliff (University of California, Berkeley)
Published on H-German (October, 1997)



The lurid dust jacket of Dean Beeby's *Cargo of Lies* suggests an action-packed spy story, but this tale of World War II intrigue also offers an inside look at Canada's handling of their first double agent. Beeby, a Canadian journalist, has tracked down the true story behind the celebrated 1942 case of a German spy whose capture offered the Canadians their first chance to run a German double agent. The British had already proved exceptionally skilled at finding and turning German agents (we now know they had neutralized all German agents in England by 1941) and Canadian officials were eager to copy that success.

Beeby has based his account on the German agent's file (*Watchdog*) obtained from Canadian Security Intelligence Service under the Canadian Access to Information Act. Not only has he painstakingly tracked down and requested thousands of pages of interrogation reports and internal memos; he has also interviewed several of the surviving participants. Beeby argues that the *Watchdog* case demonstrates the ineptitude of Canada's neophyte intelligence service and may have actually harmed Allied intelligence and security. He also suggests that this case of German activity in Canada disproves the traditional postwar image of the Abwehr as inept and careless. Although Beeby ultimately fails to prove these points, he does lay out the many obvious errors committed by officials initially handling the German spy.

Werner Alfred von Janowski, a trained German saboteur, came ashore from a U-boat in November 1942 in northeastern Quebec. His strong accent and out-of-place possessions led to his capture within twelve hours. Once the counter-spy section of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took him into custody, they decided to "turn" him and so produce their first double agent. Then

the plot thickens: is Janowski (now code-named *Watchdog*) really a willing double agent? Did the German Abwehr want Janowski to be caught and "turned?" Were the Canadians unwittingly aiding a sophisticated triple agent only pretending to betray Germany? Are there other Abwehr agents roaming Canada undetected and wrecking havoc on Allied security?

Around this central story, Beeby weaves sparkling vignettes of the ordinary people whose lives were changed by Janowski's mission. We learn the poignant stories of two sailors whose lives are altered by torpedoes fired from the U-boat delivering the spy. A young boy fulfills his dream of helping the war effort by identifying—and capturing—a German spy. These charming, well-told digressions, however, should have been tied more firmly to the book's main tale. Beeby introduces us to a horde of characters before we get to the heart of the story and at times the adventures of the German spy seem almost a sidelight to the larger tale of Canadian life during World War II.

Beeby slowly unveils the numerous lies Janowski told his interrogators. Clearly Clifford W. Harvison, the RCMP interrogator in charge of Janowski, did not have the skills or knowledge to exploit his captive adequately. Beeby describes him as self-aggrandizing and incompetent—not only with the Janowski case, but with postwar espionage as well (p. 193). Although Beeby deals deftly with the many variations of Janowski's life story, the details may confuse those unfamiliar with the different arms of German intelligence. Beeby wants us to believe that the Abwehr was so diabolically clever, it could put ashore a man certain to be caught, so that he could fake being turned by Canadian Intelligence. Yet this same Abwehr had allowed this well-trained and dedicated spy

to believe Nazi propaganda that Canadians “were on the verge of revolt” (p. 53). Moreover, Beeby claims the Abwehr listened “around-the-clock” in 1942 for their agents’ signals (p. 90). This statement contradicts most other research, including my own, on the flaws which undermined the German intelligence services.

In fact, *Cargo of Lies* at times illustrates precisely those traits which made Allied intelligence so successful. Throughout the book Canadian, British and American intelligence and counter-intelligence cooperate—albeit not always without tension. British intelligence comes off well, as usual, in this account. Beeby provides an excellent description of the British Double Cross (“XX”) System drawn from Sir John Masterman’s classic text. Once the XX Committee’s representative appears on the scene, “Janowski’s true colors as a triple [agent are] clearly revealed” and the British settle for protecting their other double agents from exposure (p. 135).

Although Beeby weighs the possibility throughout that Janowski’s real mission was to be captured and turned into a triple agent, he admits in the end that such a plan was highly improbable. Rather Janowski’s “chief failing was arrogance ... [and he] succumbed to the carelessness of conceit ...” (p. 189). Beeby confirms that although Janowski almost certainly did alert the Abwehr to his capture, he never posed a serious threat to Allied

security. Beeby’s most tantalizing tangent describes how another Abwehr agent, put ashore in the early spring of 1942, managed quietly to blend into Montreal, eluding capture until he turned himself into Naval Intelligence in late 1944. How did this man, Alfred Langbein, manage to escape detection for over two years? Does his success indicate that other Abwehr agents were successful on Canadian soil? Such questions remain to be researched.

Beeby writes in a vivid, cinematic style. His depiction of small town life, spy fever, and the technical details of “turning” an agent would make a gripping film. Although the lack of footnotes is frustrating, the extensive listing of sources by chapter in the back will help a patient scholar and provide those new to the field with important secondary sources. Indeed, Beeby has produced an informative tale for the general public. For specialists, he presents that Canadian experience of running a double agent which prepared their intelligence to better manage Gouzenko, the Soviet who defected to them three years later.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-net. All rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: R. A. Ratcliff. Review of Beeby, Dean, *Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. October, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1407>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.