



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.

Roundtable Editor: Martin C. Thomas, Exeter University

Roundtable Participants: Peter Jackson, University of Wales, Aberystwyth; Sean Kennedy, University of New Brunswick; Kim Munholland, University of Minnesota; Douglas Porch, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School

Vichy, Secret Service and the Limits of Collaboration

Review by Peter Jackson,
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis is a highly original work of outstanding scholarship. Simon Kitson has made an important contribution to the history of the Second World War, the social and political history of wartime France and the role and functioning of intelligence services. He has succeeded in doing so primarily because he has linked the problem of counter-espionage under Vichy to larger questions of collaboration and resistance. In doing so he adds considerably to our understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between the Vichy government and Nazi Germany on the one hand and between the regime and the French people on the other.

Some works of history are valuable because they bring to light new information. Others are important because they re-interpret the existing evidence and offer alternative explanations that challenge historical consensus. The very best scholarship manages to do both. *Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis* falls firmly in this third category. Kitson is the first scholar in any language to make extensive use of a the mass of new archival evidence on French intelligence activity before and during the Second World War that was repatriated from Russia during the 1990s and made available for consultation only at the turn of the century. The result is a history of the hitherto relatively unknown activities of France's wartime security services that focuses primarily on their efforts against German intelligence.

This in itself would have been a useful exercise as our knowledge of intelligence work under Vichy has depended overwhelmingly on the accounts offered in the memoirs of well-known veterans of France's intelligence services such as Michel Garder, Henri Navarre and especially Paul Paillole. Kitson uses documentary evidence to provide a new interpretation of the role and activities of the intelligence services. But he also goes much further in setting the activities of Vichy's secret services in their military, political and social context. The result is a study that traces the limits of collaboration in wartime France from the decisions made at the level of high politics to perceptions of officers within the security services to the choices made by individuals during the difficult war years. Kitson demonstrates that these limits should be understood as

dynamic rather than static because they were constantly under negotiation. They were usually being rolled forward as the regime was forced to make ever more concessions to the Nazi conquerors. What also emerges from Kitson's research and analysis, however, is a fascinating picture of Vichy efforts to maintain and exercise national sovereignty. The security services were useful instruments in this regard because they could be deployed to ensure that German officials were kept within the limits of the relatively moderate armistice agreements negotiated in the summer of 1940.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the ongoing dialogue between Kitson's analysis and the accounts on offer in the memoirs of various secret service veterans during this period. The vast majority of these *mémoristes* represent their activities as aimed overwhelmingly against the extensive network of German agents established in France after the armistice. They also claim that, after an initial 'honeymoon period' before the contours of Vichy policy became clear, secret service activity was very much at cross-purposes with the collaborating orientation of the regime. Counter-intelligence work against Allied or Gaullist agents, according to their accounts, was limited to a strict minimum and undertaken primarily to protect agents whose cover had been compromised and were in danger of being arrested by the Gestapo. Kitson cross-examines this picture of the Vichy security services using the wealth of documentary evidence now available in the French defence archives. His conclusions at no point discredit entirely the memoir accounts of secret service work under Vichy. They do, however, provide important nuances to the overall representation of the Vichy security service activity as being engaged virtually exclusively in resistance.

In a fascinating chapter entitled "Les ambiguïtés des services spéciaux" Kitson illustrates the complex nature of intelligence work during this period and the complex loyalties of those responsible for counter-espionage under Vichy. He shows that, while the vast majority of these officials were above all anti-German and most of their efforts were indeed directed against German intelligence, there were also strong affinities between the politics of many secret service officers and the politics of 'national revolution' as implemented by Vichy. Alongside the virulent anti-communism of most of these officials there also existed deeply ambiguous attitudes towards Britain. Kitson argues persuasively that "On doit écartée l'idée manichéenne qu'être antiallemand veut forcément dire être proallié". Attitudes toward Britain and the Gaullist movement were legacies of the bitter experience of defeat in 1940. But they were strengthened greatly by perceived British attempts to smash French imperial power through attacks on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir, on French West Africa at Dakar and on France's Middle Eastern interests in Syria. These events also coloured attitudes towards Gaullist agents in France, who were often perceived to be the unwitting agents of British imperialism. Anti-Communism and a measure of Anglophobia were common currency within the Vichy regime and Kitson provides ample evidence that they were very often behind the arrest of communists resisters as well as British and Gaullist agents inside the Unoccupied Zone from 1940 through 1942.

In underlining the complexity of political loyalties and choices under Vichy, Kitson has also contributed to the wider question of the nature of anti-Communism and anti-Germanism in France during the era of the two world wars. Historians have too often tended to represent political choices during this period in 'either/or' terms. It is assumed that the ideological polarisation of the inter-war years forced individuals to choose between communism and

fascism, to cry 'Better Hitler than Stalin' or even 'Better Hitler than Blum' (Léon Blum was the first ever socialist premier of France and head of the Popular Front government elected in the spring of 1936). But this stark opposition was not the way most French men and women understood their choices. Kitson has demonstrated that, even among intelligence officials charged with identifying and eliminating threats to the state in the politically charged atmosphere of wartime France, it was possible to be both anti-German and anti-communist. While affirming that virtually all counter-intelligence officers shared a passionate hatred for communism, Kitson also concludes that "Toute étude fondée sur le dépouillement des archives des services spéciaux de Vichy aboutira forcément à la conclusion que c'est l'espionnage allemande qui est leur principale cible, et de loin". [p. 71]. It is clearly time to move beyond the simplistic opposition between communism and fascism when attempting to understand the political climate of France before and during the Second World War. This false dichotomy imposes an artificial order on what were very complex political choices made during an extraordinary period in European history.

Far more important in conditioning secret service work, however, was the Vichy regime's desire to maintain its sovereignty during the difficult circumstances of the war. Here once again Kitson provides a distinctly different interpretation to that on offer in the memoir literature. While a central theme of the *mémoristes* is that of constant tension between the security services and the government, and that anti-German dimension to intelligence work was unknown to government officials, in Vichy, Kitson identifies instead an "étrange mélange de résistance et de provichysme". [p. 100] And he demonstrates that, in many ways, the secret services were effective tools of government policy. His analysis of this issue is particularly sophisticated and should push the study of Vichy France forward considerably. Kitson argues that the Vichy regime aimed to maintain three distinct types of sovereignty: territorial sovereignty, administrative sovereignty and the sovereignty of the state over the individual. These categories provided ample political space for counter-intelligence work against foreign agents of all kinds but particularly against German intelligence. As counter-intelligence chief Paul Paillole observed in April 1942 "Il faut que vous sachiez aussi que de l'efficacité des services de contre-espionnage dépend le libre exercice de notre souveraineté nationale". [p. 181]

Germany was obviously the overwhelming threat to the independence of unoccupied France and any effort to constrain its activities in the Southern Zone would benefit the overall strategy of maintaining the maximum French sovereignty. Several high-ranking authorities within the regime, including General Maxime Weygand (war minister and then French delegate-general in North Africa), General Charles Huntziger (Weygand's successor as war minister), and Henri Rollin (deputy director of French police), were well-known for their anti-German sentiments. Kitson demonstrates beyond any doubt that these and other Vichy authorities knew what the security services were up to and approved of the arrest, and even the execution, of German agents (eighty per cent of whom were French citizens). He therefore is justified in concluding that "L'activité antiallemande des services spéciaux entre dans une optique vichyste". [170] This is not to say that overall Vichy policy was anti-German and that we need to rethink the standard view that regime was committed to sincere collaboration. It is instead to point out that Vichy government had its own agendas and objectives. While collaboration was central to these, it did not dominate every aspect of policy. This is a distinction too often lost particularly on non-specialists of this period. It in no way excuses the reprehensible complicity of the regime and its

officials with the policy of mass murder implemented by the Nazis during this period. Indeed it only serves to further underline the distinctly French origins of the persecution of Jews in wartime France. French participation in these evils was not considered a threat to French sovereignty or in any way incompatible with the overall aims of the Vichy regime.

At the same time, the arrest, detention and execution of German agents often created diplomatic tensions with Germany. Significantly, whenever counter-intelligence work against German spies ran counter to the overall policy of collaboration, it was the latter policy that always prevailed. Given the balance of power in Franco-German relations, good diplomatic relations with Germany were considered to be more important to the aim of maintaining territorial sovereignty than were the counter-espionage efforts of the security services. Yet the status of the Unoccupied Zone could and would be reversed without any consultation with the Vichy authorities. Like so many aspects of Vichy policy, aspirations to territorial sovereignty were based on political and strategic illusions that would be shattered by the march of events.

Perhaps the most interesting and imaginative aspect of Kitson's analysis is his use of the concept of the sovereignty of the state over the individual to illuminate the evolving limits of collaboration in wartime France. He points out that the activities of German intelligence in France constituted a threat to the monopoly the state possessed on collaboration. As Robert Paxton pointed out long ago, the policy of collaboration aimed at securing specific advantages for the state in relation to Germany and the rest of occupied Europe. When individuals worked for German intelligence they were not only betraying their country, they were also subverting the state's ability to gain the maximum concessions possible from all co-operation with the German occupiers. This was the logic behind the regime's attempt to 'centralise collaboration'. The security services were useful in limiting this form of unofficial and unsanctioned collaboration. Kitson stresses that they achieved only modest results however. The limited resources available for counter-espionage work, even when supplemented by funds obtained by deceiving other intelligence services, were never adequate for any serious effort to root out German intelligence activity in France. The point, however, is the way secret service work once again complemented the overall aims of the regime.

The importance of this book lies not in the results obtained by Vichy counter-intelligence work against the Germans. This activity had little impact on the course of the war. Nor will Kitson's book force scholars to change their views regarding Vichy's overall policy of collaboration. The signal contribution of this book is what it tells us about the perceptions and motivations of both Vichy officials and individuals who chose to work for German intelligence. Kitson illuminates the complexities of political choice in France during the Second World War from an entirely original and hitherto neglected angle. He shows how, while secret service work against Germany was a manifestation of the 'instinctively anti-German' sentiments of the vast majority of Vichy military officials, it also complemented the priorities of the regime. It helped to preserve a measure of independence and sovereignty while at the same time serving the aim of 'centralising collaboration'. Kitson thus trains a powerful analytical lens on the limits of collaboration in Vichy France. These limits were always negotiable and were constantly being rolled forward by force of circumstance. But they existed and were an important component of the exceedingly complicated political mosaic of France during its 'dark years'.

It will be interesting to observe how Kitson's research and conclusions are received in France, where the history of French intelligence before and during the Second World War was for many years dominated by the personality of Colonel Paul Paillole. By far the most prominent veteran of France's intelligence services of this era, Paillole had also written two books about these issues. The first, *Services Spéciaux* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1975), was a memoir account of his experiences as an intelligence officer from 1935 through 1945. The second, *Notre espion chez Hitler* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1985), was an account of the role of Hans-Thilo Schmidt, an agent inside the German ministry of defence who was run jointly by the French and Czech secret intelligence services during the 1930s. A third book, entitled *L'Homme des services secrets*, was essentially a series of interviews on the subject of the Second World War given to the French journalist Alain-Gilles Minella in 1995. Paillole was also co-founder of the Amicale des Anciens des Services Spéciaux de la Défense Nationale in 1953. He served as president of this association from its inception through 2001. During the nearly sixty years between the end of the Second World War and his death in 2002, Paillole exerted a powerful influence over the way wartime intelligence activities were represented to the general public in France. He even took part in the negotiations undertaken with Russia to obtain the repatriation of the secret service archive upon which much of Kitson's study is based. It is ironic that Paillole died just as Kitson was writing the first academic study of the wartime history of France's security and intelligence services to be based overwhelmingly on this documentary evidence.

I have very clear recollections of my two meetings with Colonel Paillole in 1993 and again in 1998. During our second meeting I sat beside him at lunch during a conference on intelligence and policy making at St Cyr. Paillole, hale and lucid despite his advanced years, was typically courteous, asking me where I was from and what I was working on. Upon learning (once again) that I was working on a study of French intelligence assessments of Nazi Germany during the 1930s he became very serious, asking me whether I intended to "dire la vérité". I assured him that I would do my very best. After further interrogations he became satisfied that I was "sérieux": "Evidemment vous connaissez bien les archives, et vous seriez sans doute d'accord pour dire que nous avons tout fait pour avertir les décideurs politiques, mais ils n'ont rien fait ... et voilà, la vérité sur l'essentiel". I was about to rejoin that my interpretation differed slightly, that French intelligence had not been perfect and that the relationship between intelligence assessment and political action is more complicated than he had implied. But Paillole seemed to have lost interest in the details. He turned instead to the person on his other side, Colonel Maurice Catoire, another veteran of wartime secret service work, and said "Écoute mon viel ami, ce jeune homme est en train d'écrire un livre sur le renseignement avant la deuxième, et, en plus, il a l'intention de dire la vérité!". "C'est très bien," responded Catoire. "Oui, c'est bien," added Paillole. "On va suivre votre travail avec attention". Predictably, I was both charmed and a little disconcerted by this encounter. Some French secret service veterans, at any rate, seemed to have rather fixed ideas concerning 'the truth'.

It is therefore highly likely that some of Kitson's evidence and several of his conclusions will cause a stir among the milieu of the Amicale des Anciens des Services Spéciaux. There may well be considerable resistance to the view that there was a confluence of interests in many respects between Vichy policy and the work of the security services. Yet, at the same time, there is cause for great optimism concerning the future of intelligence history in France. Happily, the publication of *Vichy et la chasse aux espions nazis* comes at a time when the academic study of

intelligence appears to be taking off. Study of intelligence as an academic sub-discipline in France was pioneered Admiral Pierre Lacoste, a former chief of France's foreign intelligence service [the DGSE]. Admiral Lacoste's seminar at the Université de Marne la Vallée attracted a talented succession of speakers and did much to launch intelligence studies as a serious academic endeavour. Bertrand Warusfel has since assumed responsibility for organising a series of lectures on intelligence. The subject will no doubt be pushed forward by the publication earlier this year of *Secrets d'État: Pouvoirs et renseignement dans le monde contemporain* by two young scholars who are now in the vanguard of a growing number of French academics interested in intelligence and intelligence related issues. Yet, it remains undeniable that the French have much ground to make up in relation to 'les anglo-saxons'. Kitson's superb book will no doubt stimulate further scholarly inquiry in an area that has been too long neglected by French academics.

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