

**Tammy M. Proctor.** *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2003. vii + 205 pp. \$26.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8147-6693-4.



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## Virtuous Victim or Seductive Vamp?

Historians of both women and war have made remarkable progress in broadening our understanding of the multifaceted roles played by women in times of war. The notion that women have made substantial contributions to their countries during war no longer seems a remarkable assertion, as it is now widely accepted and explored by historians. That said, there remains too little attention to women's espionage, especially when it falls outside of the framework of expected female spy activity. In Tammy Proctor's thoughtful analysis of British female intelligence work during WW I, she aptly demonstrates the disconnect between women's actual contributions to espionage and the stereotypes of female spies which continue to capture both the popular imagination and—to a lesser extent—scholarship on the subject. As she points out, the scholarship that does exist tends to be biographical in nature, an unintended consequence of which is the perpetuation of exceptionalism in women's espionage history. Significantly, the book examines not only the actual role played by women but also the images

of female spies that infuse popular culture. Women spies have generally been cast into two categories: either they are unscrupulous seductresses like the Mata Hari archetype or, like nurse Edith Cavell, they are eulogized as virtuous victims. Both stereotypes undermine the meaningful contributions made by women. The author makes good use of sources from a variety of countries, including Britain, the United States, France, and Belgium, to reconstruct the work done by female spies for the British in WWI.

Proctor, who is an associate professor of history at Wittenberg University, initially became interested in the subject of female spies through her research on British Girl Guides. Here she found female espionage turning up in the most unexpected places and thus began a project which ultimately revealed that over 6,000 women provided intelligence information for Britain between 1909 and 1919. *Female Intelligence* is divided into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. Each of the chapters explores a different aspect of women's espionage. The author begins with an examination of women's contribution to intelligence

work in the formative years just prior to WWI before moving into an analysis of the restrictive impact of DORA (Defense of the Realm Acts) on women and the range of WWI intelligence services provided by women, which included office work, cryptology, hiding soldiers, and passing information, to name just a few. Women, argues Proctor, helped build the British Intelligence network from quite literally the ground up despite the prevalent belief that women lacked the capacity for true patriotism and service to country. For instance, married women's nationality was determined not by her country of origin but by her husband's nationality. This in turn made the notion of women's patriotism suspect at best. At a time when women could not vote or hold office and when popular assumptions about the inability of women to keep secrets characterized official discourse on women's roles, women nevertheless proved their usefulness as spies.

*Female Intelligence* should have broad appeal both to scholars and to wider audiences interested in women's history and the study of espionage. This book is ideally suited for use in an upper-division course on women and war, women in the military, or gender studies. The clear and concise prose along with the book's short length and the conclusions at the end of each chapter make this engaging work easily accessible to anyone interested in the subject.

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