

Evert KLEYNHANS

Hitler's South African Spies: Secret Agents and the Intelligence War in South Africa

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The topic of the Second World War belongs among very attractive issues within the contemporary laic and expert public. Some heated laics often try to prove that they are, because of piles of read volumes of secondary literature and their perfect knowledge of biographies of Winston Churchill and the president Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Zhukov's manoeuvres at Stalingrad or about Silver A, good or even excellent experts in the Second World War, even better than historians themselves. Many particular topics of the Second World War are quite often recycled, and they regularly appear on the bookshops' counters. However, the book is not always a work of an erudite expert. This is certainly not the case of the submitted monograph by Evert Kleynhans *Hitler's South African Spies*. This work is important for two reasons: Kleynhans decided to take the "unbeaten" path when he focuses on a less reflected topic: activities of the German intelligence service in South Africa, but mainly because he supports his conclusions by citing rich historical sources.

The author – a Senior Lecturer in Military History at Stellenbosch Uni-

versity – specialises in military history, to be more specific in participation of the South African Union in both world wars and war conflicts of Africa in general. He has published more than twenty papers, and he ranks among specialists on this problem. Kleynhans spent five years preparing and working on *Hitler's South African Spies* and his research is based on primary resources obtained in South African (*South African National Defence Force Documentation Center, National Archives of South Africa*) and British archives (*The National Archives*).

The book is well arranged into 16 chapters, in which Kleynhans analyses activities of German secret organisations during the Second World War and the involvement of South Africans in espionage. In the introduction, the author stated the aims of his research: 1) to explore a wider functioning of intelligence of the Axis powers in the South African Union during the Second World War, 2) to trace the initial contacts which were made between Germany and South African opposition, 3) to follow the origin of so-called Operation Rooseboom,

4) to analyse steps of the organisation Ossewabrandwag, leading to establishing a viable spy network and contacts with Germany, mainly in connection with so-called organisation Felix, 5) to follow the efforts of the Allies' counter-intelligence service in the South African Union during the Second World War, 6) to study post-war attempts to get the evidence to accuse Dr Hans Van Rensburg of high treason, 7) to investigate the unsuccessful attempt of Union War Prosecutions with Van Rensburg in connection with the change of the political situation.

Kleyhans is skilfully oriented in the history of German-African relationships, which dates back to the mid-17th century. He describes the efforts of general Jan C. Smuts to drive all the German citizens out of the new mandate of the former colony of German Southwest Africa after the First World War, and the opposite approach of Smuts' successor in the position of Prime Minister James B. M. Herzog. He, as a pure African nationalist, supported contacts with Germany, both in the diplomatic field and in business agreements.

In the text, the steps of the South African Union at the beginning of the war conflict are stressed. The Union declares, together with Great Britain and other dominions as the part of the Commonwealth, a state of war against Nazi Germany in 1939. For precautionary reasons, many citizens of the Third Reich who were present in the country as well as in the neighbouring German Southwest Africa became dangerous, and South African authori-

ties decided to capture them. Not only them, but also the members of militant and extremist organisation Ossewabrandwag (OB) attracted the attention of South African security sources. In this organisation, thousands of African nationalists, who supported Nazi Germany, were gathered even before the war conflict. The leader of OB was charismatic Dr Hans Van Rensburg. Members of OB did not agree with the participation of the South African Union in the war because they accused the then British Empire of being responsible for the misery of WWI and the Boer War. That is why they came into a conflict with the people who supported the relationship of the Union and the British Crown.

Then prime minister of the South African Union Jan C. Smuts acted against OB and paramilitary troops, so-called *Stormjaers* (according to an example of Nazi *Sturmabteilungen* and in some respect also *Schutzstaffeln*, they were organised so that they would be ready to stage a coup in case of German victory and to lead the active resistance against Smuts' war government), who also ended after the beginning of the war in internment. The reason for this step was mainly the fact that the activities of the members of OB included besides other things the determined effort to create and maintain direct radio contact with the highest spy agency of Nazi Germany (*Abwehr*). Passing of valuable information was enabled mainly by strategically placed spies of OB in key South African ports and other positions of state administration.

Here the author gives the evidence of a detailed description of several attempts of OB to help German agents to organise in different ways the network of spies, which worked all over South Africa. The reader meets for example the spies Mr and Mrs Radley, who supported the Nazis (pp. 31–41), ex-boxer Robey Leibbrandt who participated in the unsuccessful Operation Weissdorn (pp. 41–45), and spy Hans Rooseboom, who established direct but clumsy contact between OB and Germany thanks to the German diplomatic mission in Lourenço Marques (pp. 46–78). OB helped Rooseboom to hide in different farms of its supporters and organised his escapes, and finally he conflicted in opinions with Van Rensburg, who tried to destroy him.

The author gives a lot of space to a spy organisation with the cover name Felix, to be more specific to a spy called Lothar Sittig, who with the technical support of OB members working in the post office, made a powerful transmitter which was used to manage the direct contact with the German secret service, and coordinated an exceptionally large amount of very useful war intelligence information (pp. 93–173). But what Felix and Sittig didn't know was the fact that all his broadcasts were overseen by the British and South African intelligence services. Kleynhans also emphasises spy activities of the German Embassy in port Lourenço Marques, to be more specific of general consul Paul Trompke and his deputy Luitpold Werz, and in the book it is named as the so-called Trompke Network.

The author also draws the readers closer to the war at sea: the battle of the Atlantic where the submarines sank boats weighing millions of tonnes; the Mediterranean Sea became a prohibited transit zone for ships going to the Suez Canal; the importance of the strategic bases of Singapore, Aden and Cape Town rose again. During the two years following the outbreak of the war, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of the German Navy, introduced a new class of submarines to guard the South African waters and sink allied boats. Canaris acted not only as the chief of the German Navy, but was also the head of *Abwehr*, the German military secret service organisation. From these positions, he knew South African military secrets including the movement of allied boats in South African harbours. However, thanks to the admiral's disagreement with the Nazi regime, we could "thank" him for sinking only about 200 allied boats by Nazi submarines near the South African coast. Kleynhans describes how Admiral Canaris was accused by his own South African connection of intentionally suppressing military information, how he was removed from the office by the Nazis at the time when the Third Reich began to fall, and as a person suspected of high treason was also executed (p. 137).

The end of the book is about a "witch hunt". Post-war Prime Minister of the Union Smuts appointed his lawyers to search Europe and find evidence from the side of OB (the so-called Rein Mission and Barret Mission). The result was two reports of Mr Rein and Mr Barret,

and they handed in persuasive evidence that if Van Rensburg and other important members of OB were accused of high treason, they would be found guilty. As the case was very exceptional and sensitive, there were only six copies of Barret's report. After the election in the Union in 1948, there was a change in the position of the prime minister, and the new prime minister, Daniel Francois Malan, ceased to be interested in the case. There were

no official accusations against Hans van Rensburg and OB. Although all the copies of Barret's report disappeared from archives, the author managed, after years of searching, to find one copy which enabled him to support his investigation of archive material serving as evidence, and therefore his work can be considered highly appreciated documented evidence.

Alena Tíkalová