

Tradecraft and Technology – Intelligence in the Civil War

Lecture One: Initial Efforts Yield Great “Spy” Stories; But Have Limited Impact

A. Background/Introduction

B. Purpose & Scope: Focus on Eastern Theater in first two years of the war

C. American Civil War and Intelligence

- Why does this matter? The Civil War was a defining moment in our American story.
- Intelligence in Civil War: Challenge for historians has been the lack of accurate, reliable information.
- Civil War intelligence literature is made up mostly of “pot boilers” focusing primarily on the exploits of spies, hopelessly mixing fact and fiction.

D. Value of Intelligence: Relearning the Lesson

- We continue to “forget and relearn” the same lessons about the value of taking information from all sources and “fusing” it into a correlated and cross-checked whole, called “intelligence.”
- Key goal of intelligence – protecting against surprise
- Data overload and rice bowls – challenges then and now

E. Early Efforts: No Centralized Structure; Civilians Fill the Gaps

- In 1861, the idea of a centralized intelligence structure was decades away – neither side saw the need for a national-level effort
- U.S. Government hires civilian detectives
- Pinkerton protects President-Elect Lincoln’s arrival in Washington

F. Early Efforts: Confederacy – Focus on Washington D.C.

- Virginia’s Governor Letcher - earliest recruiter
- Story of Rose O’Neal Greenhow

- The “Secret Line” delivery route
- “Secret Service Bureau” - clandestine unit within the Signal Corps, which was part of the War Department.

G. Early Efforts: Union - Who Is In Charge?

- Union had no readymade spy network. Each general handled his own intelligence collection & analysis
- **Spy Stories**
 - Lincoln’s personal spy – William A. Lloyd
 - Lafayette Baker – General-in-Chief Scott’s intelligence officer
 - Timothy Webster – Pinkerton’s double agent
 - Elizabeth Van Lew – “Out Lady in Richmond”

H. The Fourth Estate – Newspapers & Photographers Provide Intelligence

- Newspapers – reporters are natural intelligence officers. Over 500 war correspondents, aided by telegraph and photography, accompany all armies (imbedded).
- Photography, relatively new technology, brings the horrors of war home to civilians.
- Press had huge impact on public sentiment and support for the war – especially critical as casualties & costs mounted