Hitler's Man in Havana: Heinz Luning and Nazi Espionage in Latin America

Thomas D. Schoonover
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Schoonover tells a hilarious story: the Abwehr sought the best but in Heinz Lüning got the worst. It needed an agent in Havana: given naval routes and schedules, U-boats could wreak even greater havoc on ships carrying war materiel eastward to Britain and westward to the Pacific theater. Heinz Lüning wanted a comfortable war: espionage in Latin America (he had lived briefly in the Dominican Republic) seemed ideal. The Abwehr had no faith in its agent; Lüning had no commitment to his mission. He couldn't build a radio, mix secret ink, or recruit a network.

Identified via British mail intercepts in the Bahamas, Lüning was arrested, tried, and executed for his never-made radio con-tacts with U-boats whose never-fired torpedoes caused imaginary Allied deaths. Schoonover demonstrates how everybody (except Lüning) benefited; acclaim for UK, US, and Cuban security chiefs; a Cuban—US rapprochement; and boosted morale as the “massive spy network” had been neutralized. Ineptitude and manipulation get no better—but sparked Graham Greene’s Our Man in Havana. Schoonover had to dig deep to find his facts; to prevent widespread embarrassment, a semi-official cover-up still persists.

PETER SKINNER (January 9, 2009)

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