



Intrepid's Last Secrets: Then and Now: History, Spies and Lies

Bill Macdonald

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Intrepid's Last Secrets is an excellent biography of William Stephenson, an important participant in the real world of World War II cloak-and-dagger operations.

Bill Macdonald's *Intrepid's Last Secrets* chronicles the amazing career and outsized historical impact of secret agent "Intrepid," otherwise known as William Stephenson.

The text follows Stephenson from his birth to his death and covers all aspects of his career—even the popular belief that Fleming drew upon the example of Stephenson for his James Bond novels. The biography doubles as a convincing argument for Stephenson's introduction into the pantheon of great World War II heroes.

Born in Winnipeg, Stephenson is shown joining thousands of other patriotic Canadians in enlisting at the outbreak of World War I. He later joined the British Royal Flying Corps and found his way to Depression-era London, and he reached his greatest heights during World War II.

The book is in-depth in showing how Stephenson ran an elaborate and effective intelligence operation for the British government from New York City. There, while trying to goad the US into joining the war and stifling Nazi propaganda efforts in North America, Stephenson rubbed shoulders with the likes of Winston Churchill and writers Roald Dahl and Ian Fleming, both of whom spent the war with the British intelligence services.

Told in precise prose and built upon thorough scholarship, the book's pages are decorated with footnotes that showcase its grounding in the historical literature. Driven by information rather than action, it details backroom dealings and planning sessions, rather than the violence of the war. It does not presume preexisting knowledge; each major figure covered is introduced with thorough context, including Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and German Ambassador to Fascist Italy, future *Valkyrie* plotter Ulrich von Hassell.

Herein, Stephenson's operation—once cast aside as being of minor importance—is shown to have played a critical role in the defeat of Hitler's empire. Of particular relevance are details about how many inroads Italian Fascism and German National Socialism made in both the United Kingdom and the United States; intellectuals, business leaders, and military men are shown to have been among those enamored with right wing totalitarianism, and Stephenson and his organization are credited with helping to dismantle such intellectual currents.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (October 23, 2019)

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