

Sharing the Secret, by Nick van der Bijl, Pen & Sword, 2013, 420 pp.

Reviewing this book was never going to be easy. It is a book that most of us would shy away from even contemplating writing. This is not the first attempt to write a history of the Corps: it is, as Nick tells us, the third. Tony Clayton made a valiant effort before with *Forearmed* published in 1993 and in my view failed: a near miss would describe it. Obviously, as Nick's book so vividly illustrates, a lot has gone on since 1993 and in this respect makes a valuable addition to recording the history of the Corps. I am sure that each one of us who buys or gets the opportunity to read this book (there is a copy in the archives) will – after finding the index – immediately look to see how their unit or their contribution to the Corps has been treated, if at all. Very few will be disappointed, so widely does it range.

A major fault of *Forearmed* was that the author (or perhaps the publisher or the authorities) failed to include an index, which diminished the value of the book immensely. To correct this, one has since been written. *Sharing the Secret* does not suffer from this, having one of the finest indices I have seen in such a book. Having praised the index I must confess to a sense of irritation, no in all fairness, frustration by the failure to include any notes or references. Regardless of the very good reasons that Nick has hinted at, these are essential, in my view, in any history and the book suffers from not being able to follow up numerous intriguing facts.

Laying it out in 20 chapters over varying periods of history follows Clayton's example. Oddly, this makes it awkward to read and to follow. I found myself on a number of occasions wondering in which year I was, the author not always following his own layout. On many occasions I was lost, having to go back to try and find the beginning of a sentence. I don't want to sound in the slightest way critical since by any standards it was a monumental task but does the book suffer a little from, perhaps having been cut and pasted? It feels that way. Not surprisingly, judging by the huge number of personal anecdotes which are a welcome addition, I found the anecdotal style quite refreshing; certainly it is not a book to bore. Unfortunately, Nick has been badly let down by his editors in many respects, not least with poor proofreading, faulty punctuation and a few spelling errors and anomalies. Oddly this is the second book I have reviewed this week with the same problem. (It has not stopped the other book reaching the final of the Intelligence Book of the Year Award 2014. I think that this book could be a serious contender). If I am to pick bones, my petty complaint – and this is a personal view - is that it is unbalanced. Possibly Nick has been too dependent on, perforce, a limited number of sources, not least I feel, the *Rose & Laurel* The activities at Bletchley Park, Heliopolis in Egypt, India and Australia have a mention but in my opinion, sadly, too little. There is no analysis or evaluation of the contribution made by the many hundreds who served in the many facets of Sigint. It is difficult to get any idea of the sheer scale of the operation and the Corps contributions such as 'SIXTA' (when Traffic Analysis was developed to an extraordinary degree), the Testery which made an incredible contribution to the resolution of the 'Geheimschreiber (Fish) traffic and, not least, the Corps participation in the incredible TICOM, operation, in itself an extraordinary story. This made a contribution of real value well into the Cold War. But then, we will all have our axes to grind! There is also only a brief mention the ATS who wore the Intelligence Corps badge, several hundreds of whom worked there.

I sincerely hope that there will be a second edition (if not more; it is worthy of it and perhaps. this will allow amendments and additions to be offered and made: I found several minor mistakes with my very limited knowledge of the Corps activities over this incredible period.

It is a difficult task walking such a tightrope; trying to meet the requirements of members of the Corps – and what a critical audience that is – let alone lay people interested in anything relating to military intelligence and not least the academics and military historians. Blondini-like, with the occasional wobble I think that Nick has succeeded and we owe him a great debt of gratitude for even undertaking it.

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