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## IAN FLEMING'S LASTING IMPACT ON THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Ian Fleming helped create unrealistic expectations of what intelligence agents – such as his James Bond – can achieve. A single individual can save the world – at least in novels.

There are two main types of intelligence: human intelligence (the role of agents on the ground) and electronic intelligence (listening to the other side's radio communications). The CIA has a budget of US\$40 billion, with the bulk of it going on electronic intelligence.

But satellite photographs and communications intercepts can only go so far. It is often the human source that provides the final piece of the puzzle.

One of the CIA's main problems was the lack of agents inside Saddam Hussein's Iraq. They could monitor his radio-relayed conversations but needed human intelligence to make the most of it. It is believed that Britain's MI 6 had more skill in recruiting agents inside Iraq.

Fleming's own intelligence work was mostly done in World War II. He saw the rise of electronic intelligence, with the British cracking the German codes in World War II via Enigma work at Bletchley Park.

This was the beginning of the era of electronic intelligence, with the British monitoring German radio traffic. This is now the more important form of intelligence work.

But Fleming retained a love for the old era of the daring, enterprising individual operating behind enemy lines. He also gave us unrealistic expectations of what intelligence work can achieve.

He created a new type of spy: the "super spy". James Bond is a person of great bravery and patriotism. But he is also a person of high living, elegant taste and presumably a large private income (because no one living in London in the 1950s and 1960s on a Civil service salary could have bought the luxury goods he did). But when dangerous action is required, Bond is ready for it.

The books were a reminder that individuals do count in intelligence work. There is a lot of attention of gadgetry but "Q's" gadgets serve Bond and help his effectiveness. Machines are not as important as agents.

The novels all end with the evil people beaten, the world saved and Bond triumphant. They reassure the readers that the “good guys” will win in the end.

Alas, the real world is not that neat and clear cut. A war has just been fought in Iraq over weapons of mass destruction that may no longer have existed.

A war was the making of Ian Fleming. Before World War II he was a failure. After it, he had a career and a purpose and some insights that he reworked, for one of the most successful set of novels in the 20th century. The James Bond industry looks set to continue for many years yet – even though the filmmakers ran out of Bond novels in 1989.

Ian Lancaster Fleming was born on May 28 1908 in London. His father was Valentine Fleming, who became an MP. Valentine served in the British Army in World War I and was killed on May 20 1917. Winston Churchill, a family friend, wrote his obituary for “The Times”. He left a lot of money to his wife Evelyn St Croix Rose Fleming, providing she did not remarry.

Ian Fleming was born into wealth and opportunity but failed to make the most of his chances. Except for sport, he was not a good student at Eton (from which he left early). He entered the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst but failed to obtain an officer’s commission. He tried to enter the British diplomatic service but failed there too.

He then became a journalist, which he enjoyed. He had a passion for words and found that he was a talented writer, after all. But there was not enough money in it and so tried stockbroking, where he again failed.

In May 1939, with war on the horizon, he became the personal assistant to the director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral John Godfrey. The war gave him discipline, a sense of purpose and an outlet for his writing and creative skills. The bureaucrats admired his skill in writing reports and memoranda.

Naval Intelligence had an international network of agents operating under cover as naval attaches. Its work was highly regarded.

Fleming was at the centre of Allied intelligence work, meeting admirals and agents passing through London (which was the centre of the Allied war effort, even when the Soviet Union and US entered the war). He met William “Wild Bill” Donovan, the creator of the Office for Strategic Services (the forerunner of the CIA) and the FBI’s J Edgar Hoover. His background and breeding were paying off.

Few other writers of spy novels were able to see the world of intelligence work from this elite angle. For example, John le Carre, who created George Smiley, saw it from the point of view of the ordinary agent.



In such a central position, he would have been one of the first people to be aware of one of Britain's best kept secrets: Enigma. He could see how the emerging sophisticated technology of electronic intelligence would change the nature of intelligence. He remained a romantic at heart – a believer that people can make a difference.

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