

‘Paid agents (lesser sort), ‘play acting’ and the Dutch national character

The Intelligence Service is an indispensable reconnaissance body within the General Staff, not only to serve the Operations department, but also to assess the politico-military situation in peace time. No commander will neglect to first investigate what is known of the enemy before issuing orders.¹ This is how, in 1921, then captain H.A.C. Fabius summarised in the *Militaire Spectator* the raison d’être of the military intelligence service, of which he was the de facto founder.

Dutch Lieutenant Colonel Th.F.J. Muller Massis (front row left) accompanied by military attachés from other neutral countries visits the Gutehoffnungshütte industrial complex in Oberhausen during the First World War



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Fabius himself actively contributed to charting out the politico-military situation in other countries and published situational overviews in the *Militaire Spectator* from 1914 onwards. Having taken over the Agency for the Investigation of Foreign Armies in 1913, he oversaw its transformation into GSIII a year later.

In his 1921 article, Fabius reflected on the influence of the First World War, or the Dutch neutrality policy, and the subsequent threat of revolution in Europe, on the intelligence domain. He noted that the Ministries of War, Navy, Colonies, Foreign Affairs and Justice had a vested interest in intelligence, but considered 'a strictly-implemented centralisation necessary' for the assessment of reports. In his article, Fabius also discussed the ways in which intelligence was gathered. For example, providers of intelligence also included the military attachés, who did 'nothing secretive', but who were solely involved in the 'study of the army configuration' in the country in which they were stationed. The attaché would not consort with agents, 'who could just as well be directly or indirectly spying on him under false pretences.'

In the event of a longer-term war, according to Fabius, vigilance was called for against false propaganda messages with political intentions. These messages could have come from both 'deliberate and inadvertent agents'. The first category included 'paid agents (lesser sort)'; the second group included people who, 'due to exaggerated feelings of sympathy', had become 'inadvertent instruments' of the enemy. During the First World War, there were agents active in the Netherlands who wanted to obtain information about their enemy 'via an impartial

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territory', or information about the neutral Netherlands itself. Fabius referred to the latter as 'spies within the meaning of the Penal Code' against whom real action needed to be taken.

Lieutenant Colonel A. Wolting made reference in the *Militaire Spectator* to an interview in which it was said that Dutch officers even felt that 'espionage was beneath them' in the run-up to the Second World War because the 'play acting' reportedly did not mesh with the Dutch national character. But it is ultimately the task of intelligence work 'to collect data about the potential enemy, wherever and however is required!' wrote Wolting.² ■

- 1 H.A.C. Fabius, 'De Inlichtingendienst bij den Generalen Staf', *Militaire Spectator* 90 (1921) 397-408.
- 2 A. Wolting, 'De eerste jaren van de Militaire Inlichtingendienst (GSIII, 1914-1917)', *Militaire Spectator* 134 (1965) 566-571.