

The intelligence battle in the Gulf of Guinea: Espionage and counter-espionage operations in Spanish Guinea

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Abstract

The study, on which this article is based, focused on the redistribution of geopolitical maps that took place in sub-Saharan Africa after the advent of the Third Reich, which resulted in the institutionalisation of the practice of intelligence in the Gulf of Guinea. This historical plot testifies to the clash between the colonial branches of the British, German and United States intelligence services through clandestine operations in the Spanish Guinean colony. Addressing the issue of the perception of Spanish Guinea by the intelligence services of the various belligerent European powers, this article highlights the factors behind the apprehension of sub-Saharan Africa as a theatre of operations in the Second World War. The archival sources and the bibliographic data analysed from the perspective of Intelligence Studies, revealed the consideration of the colony of Spanish Guinea as a target of paramount importance by the German, French, British and American units in charge of the underground war, an offensive strategy, which inaugurated a new paradigm from military and security view points for Cameroon under the League of Nations trusteeship.

Keywords: Cameroon, Gulf of Guinea, Intelligence Services, Spanish Guinea, Security.

Introduction

Losses of the German former colonial possessions during World War I found a favourable echo with the establishment of Nazi Germany. Berlin was involved in a de facto integration of these losses into their ambitious global restructuring policy referred to as *Gross-Deutsches Reich*.⁴⁰⁷ As for these territorial claims made by Chancellor Adolf Hitler with regard to the African continent, Kum'a N'Dumbé describes them in these terms:

A map of territorial claims was drawn up [...] by Biefeld at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; it was a kind of synthesis of the different reasons for which the following territories were to form the German colonial Reich of Africa: Togo, Dahomey, the Gold Coast (now Ghana), West Nigeria [...] Cameroon [...].⁴⁰⁸

The materialisation of this renewed interest of the Nazi regime in the colonial enterprise was characterised by the creation of the *Kolonial Politisches Amt*.⁴⁰⁹ The objective here was to prepare the ground for future German colonial administration in their former African possessions and more particularly in Cameroon, which was under the administration of France and Great Britain at the time. To achieve this, Nazi Germany developed a strategy based on information gathering. An intelligence network, comprising clandestine cells, specialised in subversion, was to be established in the former German colonies in Africa. The objective of this network was to counter the British and French influence on the colonial scene.⁴¹⁰

Spanish Guinea⁴¹¹ corresponded to these expectations nourished by the German Command Staff: it was located in the Gulf of Guinea, it was an international maritime corridor used by commercial shipping, and it was located alongside French and British colonial possessions and the Cameroons. These assets constituted an ideal point of support for military purposes, and became a benchmark for intelligence agents during foreign missions. For France and Great Britain, on the other hand, German colonial revisionism constituted a flagrant violation of the status quo established by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 guaranteeing access to all German colonial possessions.

Faced with the rising tide of claims by Nazi Germany targeting its former colonial possessions in Africa, Great Britain was forced to react. A maritime blockade was immediately instituted against Spain, owner of the colony of Spanish Guinea. This dissuaded all initiatives detrimental to British and French interests because the neutrality of Spain enabled England and France to benefit from a vast maritime corridor whose control ensured them a predominant influence in the Gulf of Guinea. It is in this context that the decision by France and Great Britain to create colonial branches of intelligence services within their respective colonial spaces, including in the territories that remained under their trusteeship, such as the Cameroons and Togoland, needs to be understood. Designating Spanish Guinea as a target of high strategic value, multifaceted security infrastructures would be active along the perimeter of the Gulf of Guinea during the war. For the French and British colonial administrations, it was an issue of collecting information but also of coordinating offensive and defensive operations in the area. The prioritisation of Spanish Guinea by Germany, Great Britain and France made this territory of strategic importance, which would in the long run pit the counter-intelligence services of the aforementioned countries against one another.

Reconstructing this conflicting historical period requires a theoretical framework to apprehend the different methodological facets. For operational reasons, Intelligence Studies – and more particularly its structural variant – were therefore used within the framework for this article. According to Thomas, this structural variant “examines the organization and legal framework of intelligence services, whereas political approaches instead primarily deal with the use of intelligence by policymakers and the interaction between politics and intelligence”.⁴¹² The current study analysed the deployment and interactions of intelligence services as a strategic tool used by both European colonial powers to ensure their domination in the colonial scene. From a methodological point of view, this article is based on declassified archival materials from a wide variety of sources containing intelligence memos and specific books. The documentary sources

made it possible to understand the deployment, operation and organisation of the various structures dedicated to collecting information and military activities oriented towards Spanish Guinea during the Second World War.

Insularity of the colony of Spanish Guinea: a strategic asset from a military point of view

In general, islands are strategic areas of military operations. Alfred Mahan, an American naval theorist, provides information on the strategic importance of islands, which he describes as “vantage points, positions from which the fleet can circulate on oceans”.⁴¹³ This military function intervenes in a desire to control the sea lanes, a constant which supports the naval geopolitics of any power. The Mahanian perspective regards islands as defensive infrastructure, outposts in this case, which provide significant projection capacity to a naval power with a view to controlling the maritime domain. Taglioni and Bernardie subscribe to the Mahanian perspective. For them, islands have essential military functions because “the strategic and territorial issues weighing on islands motivate the installation of military infrastructures and often devote many islands as spaces for military strategic operations”.⁴¹⁴ By virtue of its strategic position in the Gulf of Guinea, the island of Fernando Pó offered a wide spectrum of military use in the event of war. This island could easily be converted into a solid bridgehead for troops in the event of preparations for assaults on the British colony of Nigeria, the colonies of French Equatorial Africa, and the Cameroons under French and British mandate.

In addition, the proximity of Fernando Pó Island to the aforementioned territories gave it a further advantage: it was located only about 107 km from the coasts of French and British Cameroon, and was therefore considered as the ideal location through which to enforce a naval blockade. It should be emphasised that the Cameroonian coast is the entry and exit point for agricultural companies established in the hinterland of the African continent. The possible control of the island of Fernando Pó by an enemy force would therefore be a potential source of danger for the continued colonial commercial activity of the Allied countries along the coast, but also and above all for the economic development of the Cameroons under France and Great Britain mandate.

The multiple island configurations of Fernando Pó led France and Great Britain to consider Spanish Guinea as a German outpost established in their area of influence.⁴¹⁵ This posture was especially reinforced by the French, British and American military and political authorities and, on the eve of the First World War, the colony of Spanish Guinea found itself drawn into the spiral of the civil war that was raging in the Kingdom of Spain. The conflict saw Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini offer decisive support to the nationalists led by General Francisco Franco. This promoted the possibility of German military manoeuvres and intelligence operations extending to the Gulf of Guinea, not far from the coast of Cameroon.⁴¹⁶ The French authorities were gathering information that allowed them to construct their perception of Spanish Guinea as a source of threat.⁴¹⁷ One of the indicators reinforcing this perspective was the alliance forged between Franco's Spain and Hitler's Nazi Germany, which definitively established doubts about the neutrality of Spain during the Second World War.⁴¹⁸ This was because, throughout the war, Spain

provided logistical aid to Germany by placing the Canary Islands at the disposal of the German General Staff, until the eve of the defeat of Germany in 1945.

According to this logic, the possibility of a military requisition of the island of Fernando Pó by *Wehrmacht* troops was highly probable, especially since, during the post-civil war negotiations, Germany had shown particular interest in the colony of Spanish Guinea, as Whealy points out:

In February 1937, the Germans, taking advantage of their military aid to Franco, submitted a draft agreement of six articles [...] Later, ROWAK concluded a semi private contract with Spain merchants in Guinea for Okume wood, used in making plywood for building planes. The Germans wanted to buy all the wood the colony could supply. [...] The Germans were also interested in obtaining a three years contract in the spring year of 1938.⁴¹⁹

The ‘Big Four’ of metropolitan intelligence services and their branches

The listing of the colony of Spanish Guinea as a prime target attracted the intelligence services of belligerent European countries to the Gulf of Guinea. The various security and military officials flocked to the area for the establishment of their spy and counter-espionage antennas in the neighbouring colonies and in Cameroon under the French and British mandate. Among the intelligence services of the European capitals and the United States of America, the presence of the *Abwehr*, the *Service de Renseignement Intercolonial* (SRI), the Special Operations Executive, and the Office for Strategic Services were noted.⁴²⁰

The first institution, the *Abwehr*, was the main military intelligence service of the unified German armed forces, specialising in offensive counterintelligence activities. According to Gordon, the installation of this information gathering and special operations institution in Spanish Guinea was the subject of negotiations between the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Ramón Serrano Suñez.⁴²¹ Kuoh goes further by specifying that the Command Staff of the German Army created a second *Abwehr* Office with its headquarters in Santa Isabel. The field agents of this German intelligence organ, he said, made contact with Cameroonians nostalgic for the past of the German protectorate.⁴²² In line with the information provided by Kuoh, Rigden adds that the *Abwehr* had a vast spy network, which had international ramifications, thanks in part to the peaceful relations between Germany and Spain, which increased its scope of operations.⁴²³ Francoist Spain was already serving as a base of operations for *Abwehr* field agents, whose coordination and liaison activities constituted some of the essential missions of the German Embassy in Madrid. This diplomatic representation extended its scope of action around the Iberian Peninsula and into the Canary Islands and Spanish Guinea.⁴²⁴ These colonial possessions in turn served as a base for what Rigden describes as sub-stations, additional operational posts responsible for gathering intelligence and organising subversive activities.⁴²⁵

The second institution, the Intercolonial Intelligence Service, well known by the French acronym SRI, was, according to Duthel, an initiative of the head of the socialist

government, Leon Blum.⁴²⁶ The SRI was an answer to the problems posed by the management of information from the French colonies, but also and above all from the exacerbating rivalry that existed between the intelligence services of the metropolitan France and those of the colonial empire.⁴²⁷ Le Page outlines more details on the issues related to the creation of the SRI:

The creation of this service is to be compared to that of the Intercolonial Intelligence Service (SRI) in 1937. The SRI was attached to the Ministry of Colonies and ensured centralization and coordination of intelligence with the Minister. It functioned [...] without there being any friction, on the contrary, the ministry received a mass of information disseminated without real reluctance by the research bodies. It had been designed to remedy a lack of synthesis and a scattering of resources.⁴²⁸

To put an end to this imbroglio, Prime Minister Léon Blum decided to create the SRI in March 1937. The SRI coordinated and centralised all information collected from the metropolis and the French colonies under the command of General Raoul Salan.⁴²⁹ The attachment of the SRI to the Ministry of Colonies obeyed the will of the French authorities to control the sphere of colonial influence. The SRI system in the Gulf of Guinea was essentially defensive in nature and was based on contributions from the supervisory posts of the Yaoundé Studies Section and the Brazzaville Studies Section. However, this arrangement enabled the SRI to be rapidly deployable and fully autonomous during intelligence-driven operations in the neighbouring British colonies in West Africa. For example, to infiltrate the colony of Spanish Guinea, the method of approach chosen by the head of the SRI was the invitation of the Spanish colonial authorities to visit Yaoundé and Douala. The official objective was to lay the foundations for future security cooperation between the two territories, but for the French colonial intelligence officers, it was rather a question of allowing the SRI to send field agents discreetly to Fernando Pó, Bata, Rio and Benito, where the French consulate in Fernando Pó coordinated the operations.⁴³⁰

The third structure, the Special Operations Executive (SOE), was the main British counterintelligence unit tasked with conducting commando operations during the Second World War. According to Berthillot, these missions consisted of infiltrating enemy lines and organising campaigns of subversion, propaganda and sabotage.⁴³¹ The SOE distinguished itself during the war, a period during which Prime Minister Winston Churchill entrusted the unit with offensive counterintelligence missions in Ireland, France, Scotland and further afield. The profiles of the operational components of SOE made it a formidable and effective organisation, and its agents played a decisive role in the areas of deployment beyond enemy lines where the logistical support that their agents brought to friendly forces in occupied territories proved to be of immense value.⁴³² In West Africa, permanent SOE commando units were stationed in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Their missions consisted of intercepting all suspicious German and Italian shipping, and monitoring the movements of Vichy French supporters. This is confirmed by Jacobs, who states, “[t]he SOE maintained a presence in West Africa from where it could observe the Vichy France, Spanish and Portuguese territories in order to identify and hinder any threat to the British interest.”⁴³³

The fourth and last intelligence service was the Office for Strategic Services (OSS) of the United States of America. The ancestor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the OSS, actively took part in intelligence missions directed towards Spanish Guinea during the war. Declassified reports revealed the existence of an OSS intelligence network of undercover agents comprising European personalities of varied profiles, such as the colonial administrator, merchants as well as cocoa, coffee and timber dealers. The main reason for this sustained interest in such personalities was their influential positions within the socio-political and economical domains of Spanish Guinea. By infiltrating these eclectic social groups with close ties to the Spanish colonial power, the OSS agents were enabled to have access to top-level information regarding the Spanish colonial territory.

An example of this targeted approach operations is provided by a declassified intelligence report, which indicates a certain Ayala, a Spanish merchant, owner of a small stopover hut in Spanish Guinea.⁴³⁴ His constant move from Ebibiyang (Spanish Guinea) to Ambam (French Cameroon) and vice versa drew the attention of the OSS intelligence officers. The OSS requested the help of the Intercolonial Intelligence Service in order to approach the target. The technique used by officers of the Intercolonial Service in order to attract and recruit Ayala is exhaustively described as follows, “[i]t consists of amicable conversations ably conducted by the district commander of Ambam. To familiarise him with our values, a customised stay to Duala and to Yaounde was to be proposed to him in order to provide intelligence needed.”⁴³⁵ The scarcity of information on the activities of the OSS in the Gulf of Guinea perhaps points to the ad hoc nature of its wartime operations. The OSS only focused on pro-Nazi European or Western targets travelling between the African and Asian continents.⁴³⁶ The most illustrative case was that of Heinrich Schuchmann, a German agent of the *Abwehr*, whose movements from Germany to Spain via Spanish Guinea, were tracked and monitored by the OSS.

Between 1934 and 1945, there was a notable revival in the offensive and defensive activities of the *Abwehr*, the OSS, the SOE and the SRI in the Gulf of Guinea. The deployment of these agencies influenced the security and military of Spanish Guinea and its neighbouring colonies during the war.

***Abwehr* operations in Spanish Guinea**

The intelligence reports provided by Lieutenant-Commander Cottet to the SRI identified the availability of viable German military objectives in the cosmopolitan city of Santa Isabel, capital of Fernando Pó Island,⁴³⁷ at the time, an important seaport and main entry and exit point for the local Spanish colonial economy. According to intelligence reports, the commercial function of the port was soon being converted into that of a logistical base for German troops.⁴³⁸ The port of Santa Isabel had a significant advantage, similar to the coastal cities of British and French Cameroon.⁴³⁹ Weary about the place being occupied by Spanish Guinea in the German project of reconquering Cameroon, the French authorities feared the exploitation of the geographical configuration of the island by Germany, especially since the defensive capacity of the colony of Spanish Guinea in general – and the island of Fernando Pó in particular – held several flaws.

According to Bureau of the Command Staff of the French Colonies, Spanish Guinea was crisscrossed by a number of under-resourced military camps. The barracks were commanded by soldiers with the rank of sergeant or corporal. Drawn mainly from the local population, their mission was to monitor the areas under their immediate control. The Spaniards, masters of the island, occupied the ranks of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). An intelligence officer of the SRI posted to Fernando Pó reported on this arrangement, and concluded, “in Santa Isabel capital of Fernando Pó, there is nothing like defence except the small warship, MALASPINA which tours the island from time to time and also makes trips to Bata. There are not many Spanish soldiers.”⁴⁴⁰

For the French colonial administration, the information from the SRI confirmed the existence of German military facilities, a sign of renewed enemy activity in the area.⁴⁴¹ These facilities consisted of the construction of a secret military base and the recruitment of field agents for the *Abwehr*. In 1939, the French SIR also reported the construction of a secret German military base in Spanish Guinea, as described by this intelligence note:

In Spanish Guinea, 400 Germans, under the orders of the former Engineering Colonel Von Der GOOLZ, were said to be occupied deforestation. In reality, they were alleged to be employed in the construction of several basins, four of which have already been completed at the confluence of the Muni and Tambony rivers. These metal basins are 100m long and 12m wide and are dredged 8m deep, separated by 20m intervals. This area is strictly off-limits, even to Spanish authorities. According to this engineer, these basins could serve as bases for submarines.⁴⁴²

The German construction site duly attracted the attention of the intelligence services of France and England. According to Miller, the latter concentrated their surveillance operations on the coasts of Spanish Guinea, and more particularly on the city of Fernando Pó.⁴⁴³ The port of Santa Isabel automatically acted as a supply point for arms and ammunition for the vast network of sleepers who had left for the island of Fernando Pó, Bata and Cameroon under British mandate. According to intelligence briefs, the logistical network at the port of Santa Isabel supplemented the logistical support to German U-boats operating in the Gulf of Guinea and along the Cameroonian coast. Quartermaster Le Blais, stationed at the SRI outpost in Campo, revealed that he had detected the presence of a submarine whose identity remained unknown.⁴⁴⁴ He recounted the scene as follows:

It seemed to him [the intelligence officer] that it was a building the length of the “FOULAH” and entirely out of the water. He immediately went up to the weather forecast for better visibility. We then took the binoculars and could see on the water, a black mass quite similar to the kiosk of a submarine in the 300 ° [...] in the afternoon, the quartermaster FELIX saw the submarine again towards 3.30 p.m. He immediately came to warn the SR postmaster, who put his theodolite on station. [...] Returning half an hour later to the theodolite, he noticed that the “object” had moved barely 2 or 3 decigrades.⁴⁴⁵

For French authorities, the objective was to determine the true intentions of the crew of this vessel, while acknowledging the principal use of submarines in war. This case also raised several questions among colonial security and defence analysts: was it a manoeuvre meant to intimidate the Allied authorities in the region, or was it simply a logistical stop since the Gulf of Guinea was a known maritime corridor used by several naval and commercial shipping? Mainland Guinea was also known to host a refuelling station for ships in transit to Yanbasitu, located at the mouth of the Rio del Muni.⁴⁴⁶ The mystery surrounding the unidentified submarine gave rise to all kinds of speculations, an attitude that confirmed the anxiety of the French authorities since the possible presence of a German military presence near the coast of Cameroon. An intelligence officer, codenamed M., called into question the first version of events reported by the quartermaster of the SRI post in Campo. He provided exhaustive details of the submarine incident:

This submarine would be a pocket submarine of an excessively small type, maybe 250 tons [...] at the front and at the back, a small machine gun closing with a cover. The informant who had never seen such a flag was asked by me to draw it on paper; it is clear from his sketch that this flag is a black swastika on a solid red background. [...] The informant M. saw 3 Europeans descend from it who, Germans according to his information, were received that day by Arona, a German recently installed in Rio Benito.⁴⁴⁷

Several intelligence reports agreed on the German military activities in the waters off Spanish Guinea, and on the mainland, which in this case was the subject of sustained interest for the *Abwehr*. Intelligence officers in the field gave exhaustive details on the connections between the German nationals installed in the European colonies in Africa and those working for the German military intelligence services. Spanish Guinea was no exception in this regard. According to sources obtained by an SRI agent, the Woermann factory, one of the largest trading houses based in Bata, was in reality only a cover for the *Abwehr*.⁴⁴⁸ An intelligence note of 7 November 1934 describes this collaboration between the Woermann house and the German military intelligence service as follows:

It seems that the German organization in Guinea carried out by “Woermann Linie” would be able to provide serious back-up in men, equipment and supplies in the event of military operations attempted on Gabon. The Woermann factories are important and entrusted to men who seem to have other capacities than those of simple traders. Undoubtedly, it is not strange to find the Germans military allure [...] The connection of this organization with the metropolis is ensured by the ships of the same company (Woermann) on a regular basis. There is therefore the possibility for Germany to suddenly intensify its traffic on Guinea at the opportune moment for a report of personnel, material or supplies.⁴⁴⁹

The Woermann Linie Company was not only limited to providing material support to the German intelligence network; it was also recruiting agents to increase the number of operational officers. The core of these deep-cover agents was made up of the Cameroonian veterans of the *Schutztruppe*, the colonial troops that previously served in African territories. German citizens like Marquardt, who formerly served in the navy, were also an

essential element of the *Abwehr* intelligence apparatus in Spanish Guinea.⁴⁵⁰ Declassified archives describe an organisation that infiltrated several commercial activities, which enabled them to carry out their operations with discretion. From detailed information provided by French SRI agents, it was established that *Abwehr* agents belonged to a sleeper cell called '*Neue Guinea*' that was directed by the officer in charge, Otto Kroener, known under the codename PATRON. The ramifications of this intelligence network were felt in Cameroon. The liaison officer in Cameroon was a certain Otzmann residing in Kribi who had formidable number of field agents.⁴⁵¹ Otzmann's task was to relay pro-Germanic propaganda in mainland Guinea and Cameroon.

A certain Schunks von Goldfim did all he could to "praise the colonizing methods of his country".⁴⁵² In addition to human resources, German agents benefited from substantial logistical support. According to information obtained by the French SIR, the wireless telegraph stations belonging to the German commercial companies also provided technical support to the *Abwehr* agents. In one of the intelligence reports on this subject, it was revealed that the Woermann factory (which had a vast network of wireless transmitters and receivers) offered access to agents such as Von Goldfim, Otzmann and Kroener.⁴⁵³ The telecommunications antenna that interested German agents most was the one that connected Ebolowa to Minkomesseng, a locality in Spanish Guinea bordering French Cameroon. In setting up the spy network, the German wireless stations provided speed in the transmission of instructions addressed to field agents. According to the information, Otzmann was responsible for recruiting individuals capable of rallying the *Abwehr* sleeper cell in Spanish Guinea and for collecting information on the security system of French Cameroon. This allowed a certain agent Zuber, who was a dual agent, to feed the intelligence sections of French Cameroon and mainland Guinea with details on recent security developments in the two respective territories.⁴⁵⁴

The response operation of the SOE cells in Nigeria and British Cameroon

For the French and British authorities, the departure of the German U-boats confirmed the desire of Germany to return to their area of influence in the Gulf of Guinea, which indeed required a multifaceted response. The British SOE operation aimed at scuttling a German naval vessel was one such action. Known by the code name 'Postmaster', the objective of the operation was to send a strong signal to the German authorities of the Franco-British political determination to defend their respective interests in the region. Aimed at boarding German vessels along the African coast, said scuttling mission was made possible thanks to the involvement of SOE agents installed in Douala (French Cameroon), Victoria (British Cameroon), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Monrovia (Liberia), Lagos (in the British colony of Nigeria), and in Fernando Pó (Spanish Guinea).⁴⁵⁵ As a reminder, it should be noted that the SOE focused its missions on the foreign territories occupied by Germany and Vichy France. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, the SOE mission was to create and maintain permanent contact with the Gaullist dissidents in the Vichy French colonies in Africa who were principal in spreading the propaganda of the provisional government of the French Republic in Algiers to the rest of the colonial empire.

The pretext found for the SOE commando operation in Spanish Guinea was that of the mistreatment inflicted on Nigerian nationals on the Spanish plantations. Contacted on the issue, inspectors from the International Labour Office (ILO) were dispatched to carry out investigations in the field. Great Britain appointed Charles Michie to defend the interests of Nigerian immigrants by ensuring compliance with new legal provisions, in particular contracts by the Spanish authorities. The real mission of Michie was however espionage on behalf of the British. Michie was in charge of reconnaissance missions on the island of Fernando Pó on behalf of the SOE missions in Lagos (Nigeria) and Freetown (Sierra Leone). This covert operation was intended for preparations for a possible invasion of this part of the island. Pearce also confirms the true status of Michie. For him, Michie was an SOE agent trained in sabotage operations. Pearce puts it like this, “he was to become a member of SOE, the sabotage organization set up by Hugh Dalton at the ministry of economic warfare”.⁴⁵⁶ To carry out his mission, Michie benefited from the help of two agents with very specific tasks: Mr Louis Franck, a banker of Belgian nationality, travelling with a fake British passport, and Mr Leonard Guise, a former district chief. Franck had the role of training the security personnel of the Nigerian police in the operating methods of the SOE. The governor of the British colony of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, assigned him some officers of the colonial troops for this purpose, and a training centre was created on Olokemeji, a farm near the town of Ibadan in Nigeria.⁴⁵⁷

As for Guise, Pearce describes him in these terms, “Leonard Guise, a district officer from eastern Nigeria, had been released from his normal duties and was acting as King’s Messenger, operating between Fernando Pó, Victoria (British Cameroon), and Rio Muni (Spanish Guinea).”⁴⁵⁸ Under cover of acting as His Majesty’s Messenger to the Spanish colonial authorities, Guise was able to gather strategic information on the movements of German commercial vessels travelling along the Atlantic coast. The three SOE agents were working to develop a plan to intercept shipping belonging to Axis countries.

According to Van der Bijl, the execution of Operation Postmaster required local support.⁴⁵⁹ The SOE thus instructed Captain Peter Lake to bribe the employees of the port of Santa Isabel. Lake encouraged them, in exchange for a large sum of money, to paralyse port activities and cause a blackout. Van der Bijl reveals, “[f]irst, Lake discreetly distributed funds to local bars and restaurants at Santa Isabel to entice their crews ashore during the night [...] and also organized a power failure.”⁴⁶⁰ British Cameroon served as an anchor point for the operations of SOE units with the neighbouring island of Fernando Pó. This mission was entrusted to a certain Corporal Charles who carried out daily naval patrols in order to intercept postal packages.⁴⁶¹

On 14 January 1942, Major Gus March-Phillips launched Operation Postmaster. He was an officer and was assisted by a crew comprising Captains Geoffrey Appleyard, Graham Hayes, Denis Tottenham, Frank Perkins, Tom Winter, Ernest Evison, Jock Taylor, Leslie Prout, André Desgranges and Anders Lassen.⁴⁶² A trawler, the *Maid Honor*,⁴⁶³ requisitioned for the occasion, was anchored in Freetown as part of a reconnaissance mission. This was because, according to the information reaching the French and the British intelligence services, the Vichy French colonial territories served as a supply base for the German naval vessels.⁴⁶⁴ The naval patrol allowed the SOE commandos to spot two merchant ships

and a commercial vessel belonging to the Axis countries: the *Duchessa d'Aosta*, flying the Italian flag, and the *Likomba* and the *Bibundi* flying the German flag. The vessel, which caught their attention particularly, was the *Duchessa d'Aosta*, an 8 500-ton vessel, carrying cargo of wool, animal skins, copra, asbestos fibres and electrolytic copper ingots.⁴⁶⁵

At the end of this investigation, the British naval patrol decided to carry out diversionary operations in the waters of Spanish Guinea, where the *Duchessa d'Aosta* was anchored. To do this, units of another ship, the *Vulcan*, and 32 men comprising four SOE agents, 17 volunteers and other members of the colonial armed forces, scuttled the Italian vessel.⁴⁶⁶ According to Captain Mencey, the assault on the Port of Santa Isabel was launched at 22:30. Strong explosions resounded throughout the city of Santa Isabel, making the population believe that they were bursts of cannons announcing the feast of the new moon as tradition dictates. The head of the Guardia Colonial immediately rushed to the port and organised an emergency meeting at the Colonial Guard Headquarters. A decision was subsequently made at the end of this meeting to reinforce the defences of the island of Fernando Pó, which, according to Mencey, had significant flaws.

Conclusion

In short, from this article, it should be noted that the intelligence battle in the Gulf of Guinea was a result of Nazi hegemonic ambitions in Africa. The German desire to reconquer its former African colonies encouraged the European colonial powers in the Gulf of Guinea that the frontlines of their security and defence needed to shift to sub-Saharan Africa. This caused a cycle of a fierce underground warfare led by the colonial branches of the intelligence service in the Spanish territory of Fernando Pó. Actions carried out by the SOE, the SRI and the OSS contributed decisively to the containment of the German project of reconquering its former colonial possessions. With the turn of the tide of the war in Europe, Nazi Germany ended its military intelligence campaign in the Gulf of Guinea, thereby burying any further idea of reclaiming its former African colonies.

Endnotes

- ⁴⁰⁶ Saliou Abba holds a Ph.D. in History and International Relations from the University of Ngaoundéré in Cameroon. His field of research is Military History and Intelligence History where he published series of scientific articles. Dr Saliou Abba has also participated in colloquia organized by the Ministry of Defence of Cameroon and the Cameroon Commission of Military History. He is currently a Researcher Officer at the National Centre for Education, a public research centre of the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation specialised in Social Sciences and Humanities Studies. Dr Saliou Abba is also a member of the Cameroon History Society.
- ⁴⁰⁷ This assertion literally means “Great Germanic Kingdom”. This is a geopolitical project that consists of bringing together all German-speaking entities under the authority of the Führer, Adolf Hitler. In addition, this concept also encompasses the former colonial possessions England and France.
- ⁴⁰⁸ A Kum’a N’Dumbé III. “Black Africa and Germany during the Second World War”. In UNESCO. *Africa and the Second World War*, Symposium report and papers, 1980, 61–62.
- ⁴⁰⁹ English translation: Foreign Colonial Office.
- ⁴¹⁰ G Saville. *The Afrika Reich: a novel*, Henry Holt & Co, New York, 2013.
- ⁴¹¹ According to René Pélissier, ‘Spanish Guinea’ is a generic term designating all the Spanish territories in the Gulf of Guinea. It is partly island and partly continental and shares its limits with the British Colony of Nigeria and French Equatorial Africa. The island territory known as Fernando Pó and which interest us in this study has an area of 2 034 km². See R Pélissier. “La Guinée Espagnole”. *Revue Française de Sciences Politiques* 13/3. 1963. 624.
- ⁴¹² A Scheffer Corvaja, B Jeraj, UM Borghoff. “The rise of intelligence studies: A model for Germany?” *Connection: The Quarterly Journal* 1. 2016. 81. doi: 10.11610/connection.
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- ⁴¹⁴ F Taglioni & N Bernardie. *Contemporary dynamics of small island spaces: From islands to island networks*. Paris: Karthala, 2005, 284.
- ⁴¹⁵ National Archives Yaounde (ANY), Political and Administrative Affairs (APA) 10.165 A. *Spanish Guinea prior to 1932: Army staff, intelligence division*, 29 May 1934.
- ⁴¹⁶ J-L Guébourg. *The small islands and archipelagos of the Indian Ocean*. Paris: Karthala, 2006, 19.
- ⁴¹⁷ ANY, APA 10.165 A, *Intelligence on Spanish Guinea*. Report of 14 May 1934...
- ⁴¹⁸ A-Cazorla-Sánchez. “Surviving Franco’s peace: Spanish popular opinion during the Second World War”. *European History Quarterly* 32/3. 2002. 393.
- ⁴¹⁹ R-H Whealy. *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi role in the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1989, 89.
- ⁴²⁰ For more details, consult P Jacobs. *Daring Raids of World War Two: Heroic Land, Sea & air Attacks*, Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2015 and the Deputy Director for Plans for naval intelligence available at the following link: http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/SCHUCHMANN%20HEINRICH_0016.pdf.
- ⁴²¹ M-B Gordon. “El papel de España en la derrota de la Alemania nazi durante la Segunda Guerra”. *Studia Histórica / Studia Contemporánea*, 18. 2000. 254.
- ⁴²² C-T Kuoh. *Mon témoignage: Cameroun de l’indépendance 1958–1970*. Paris: Karthala, 1980, 18–19.
- ⁴²³ D Rigden. *How to be a spy: The World War II SOE training manual*. Toronto, Ontario : Dundurn Press, 2004, 81.

- ⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴²⁶ H. Duthel, 2012, *La Légion et la bataille à Diên Biên Phủ : la légion est leur patrie*, Norderstedt: Herstellung und Verlag, 2^{ème} édition, p.192
- ⁴²⁷ The French colonies have several intelligence services, such as the Study Section, Sector VII of Brazzaville and the Intelligence Service, in addition to the Police Forces. In a note addressed to all SEYA heads of post, the head of Sector VII denounced the lack of coordination and the non-respect of the protocol for transmitting information to the High Commissioner, which once again confirms the imbroglio observed within the intelligence system.
- ⁴²⁸ J-M Le Plage. *The secret services of Indochina*. YouScribe. 2014. <www.youscribe.com/catalogue/livres/literature/romans-historiques/les-services-secrets-en-indochine-2496852> Accessed on 2 November 2014.
- ⁴²⁹ H Duthel. *The legion and the battle at Diên Biên Phủ: The legion is their homeland* (2nd ed). Norderstedt: Herstellung und Verlag, 2012, 192.
- ⁴³⁰ S Laurent, 2001, « Les services secrets gaullistes à l'épreuve de la politique (1940-1947) » dans *Politix*, volume 14, numéro 54, p.146.
- ⁴³¹ E Berthillot. "Intelligence and counter-espionage between Dublin, London and Edinburgh from 1845 to 1945". PhD dissertation, University of Mirail-Toulouse, 2014, 715. <<http://www.tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01237843>> Accessed on 16 March 2016.
- ⁴³² Rigden *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- ⁴³³ P Jacobs. *Daring raids of World War Two: Heroic land, sea & air attacks*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2015, 57.
- ⁴³⁴ ANY, APA 10400/E, Guerre 1939–1945. Security of the Territory . S.E.Y.A intelligence briefing no. 20, on Spanish Guinea. 13 January 1940, 7.
- ⁴³⁵ ANY, APA 10400/E, Guerre 1939-1945 Sécurité du territoire. S.E.Y.A note de renseignement n° 20, sur la Guinée Espagnole du 13 janvier 1940, p.7.
- ⁴³⁶ C Gorges Chalou. *The secret war: The Office of Strategic Services in World War II*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002, 122.
- ⁴³⁷ ANY, APA 10.165/A, *Information on Spanish Guinea*. Intelligence Report n°5 of Lieutenant Commander COTTEZ.07 novembre 1934.
- ⁴³⁸ ANY, APA 10.165 A, *Information on Spanish Guinea*. Report of 29 May 1934.
- ⁴³⁹ The towns of Victoria and Tiko for British Southern Cameroon, the cities of Douala and Campo for French Cameroon.
- ⁴⁴⁰ ANY, APA 10400 E, *War 1939–1945. Security of the territory*. Note no. 612, General Staff of the Colonies.
- ⁴⁴¹ S Abba. « La colonie de Guinée Espagnole dans le dispositif de défense et de sécurité du Cameroun sous mandat ». Thèse Ph.D en Histoire Politique et des Relations Internationales, Université de Ngaoundéré, 2020, 153.
- ⁴⁴² ANY, APA 10.165 A, *Information on Spanish Guinea*. Note no. 612/2, Colonial Staff, 6 June 1939.
- ⁴⁴³ M-B Miller. *Shanghai on the metro: Spies, intrigue and the French between the wars*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994, 22.
- ⁴⁴⁴ ANY, APA 10400 E, *War 1939–1945. Security of the territory*. Report n°325 on Coastal Surveillance of Campo.
- ⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴⁶ ANY, APA 10400 E, *War 1939–1945. Security of the territory*. Intelligence report no. 508, 6 December 1939.
- ⁴⁴⁷ ANY, APA 10400 E, *War 1939–1945. Security of the territory*. Note no. 3 of the SEYA from Kribi to SEYA chief of Yaoundé.

⁴⁴⁸ ANY, APA 10.165 A, *Information on Spanish Guinea*. Intelligence Report n°5 of Lieutenant Commander COTTEZ. 7 November 1934.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² National Archives Congo Brazzaville. *Information sur le Doctor Schweitzer 1930–1935*.

⁴⁵³ ANY, APA 10.165 A.

⁴⁵⁴ The character of ZUBER seems more than interesting insofar as it allows us to identify one of the most important agents in the defensive counter-espionage device of Cameroon under mandate.

⁴⁵⁵ R Pearce. “Espionage in Africa: The case of the Duchess”. *The Historical Journal* 26/2. 1983. 425.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ N van der Bijl. *Sharing the secret: The history of Intelligence Corps 1940–2010*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. 74

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Jacobs *op. cit.*, 56–57.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

