

READING COMPREHENSION

A talent for spying - EOI Islas Baleares Inglés C2 (resuelto)

The publication of the history of MI6 reveals the British gift for espionage. The concept of an authorized history of a secret agency, which did not officially exist until 1992, is slippery, to say the least. The publication of Professor Keith Jeffery's *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909 – 1949*, is notable for the very fact of its existence as well as the secrets that it reveals. It also invites a much broader question. Why is British identity so bound up with espionage and subterfuge? Have the British made unusually good spies, and if so, do they continue to do so in today's very different diplomatic environment?

MI6 began with a mistake. —We went to the office and remained there all day but saw no one, nor was there anything to do. That was the verdict of Mansfield Cumming in 1909 after his first day at work as head of the foreign section of the new Secret Service Bureau, the agency that later became the Secret Intelligence Service (or MI6). For once there was simple explanation: Cumming had accidentally started work a week early.


That inauspicious start quickly gave way to serious victories. La Dame Blanche, the most successful intelligence network of the First World War, orchestrated 880 men and women working behind enemy lines. During the operation to penetrate occupied France and Germany in the Second World War, an agent's average life expectancy was three weeks. An incalculable debt is owed to the bravery of those men and women.

But even armed with the evidence of this book, taking measure of MI6 is unusually difficult. First, although MI6 has opened up in recent years (it now has a more conventional recruitment process than the donnish tap on the shoulder) it remains much more secretive than its sister agency MI5. Second, Mr. Jeffrey's evidence covers only 1909– 1949 – perhaps because it stops just short of the most embarrassing era in MI6's history. In 1951, a Cambridge spy ring was exposed, in which double agents such as Kim Philby had betrayed British state secrets in the service of the Soviet Union.

That MI6 was once so dominated by Oxbridge and the public schools exposes both the genius and the fault line in British intelligence. The British class and education system, by honing the ability to hide real feelings beneath charm and polish, made for natural spies. Charm, in Evelyn Waugh's phrase, —is the English disease. But the ability to say one thing while feeling another has practical benefits. —For the British it could be said that the inclination to deceive is already available as a natural asset, concluded one American intelligence chief. Indeed, the United States did not even have a secret service until 1942. In recent decades, MI6 has been accused of being slow to adapt. The absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq undeniably tarnished its reputation. And MI6 was influenced by America's overreliance on high-tech intercepts, rather than face-to-face human intelligence. But 9/11 showed that high-tech systems can only augment traditional intelligence, never replace it.

MI6 has continued to punch above its weight. Oleg Gordievsky's defection was a Cold War triumph. And Libya's decision to abandon its nuclear programme in 2003 owed much to MI6's relationships, its agents' ability to persuade. When it comes to human intelligence, it remains the case that nobody does it better.

Adapted from The Times, August 2010.

 You have read a newspaper article about the publication of a book about one of the British Secret Services. For questions 1–8, which are in your task booklet, choose the answer (A,B,C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. The exercise begins with an example (0).

0. Where would you expect to find such a text?
 - a) In a broadsheet.
 - b) In a tabloid.
 - c) In a magazine.
 - d) On a special interest website.

1. The existence of Professor Keith's MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service is surprising because...
 - a) Of the secret nature of the organization which was not publicly recognized until relatively recently.
 - b) Of the fact that organizations such as MI6 consider that an authorized history of the Secret Service is slippery.
 - c) It reveals other questions not included within its cover.
 - d) Not everyone would agree with the publication of the activities of the Secret Services.

2. During the First World War, MI6...
 - a) Carried out exceptional work despite its undistinguished beginnings.
 - b) Began in a spectacular way but went on to make an important contribution to the war effort.
 - c) Started off badly and suffered disastrous losses of its men and women.
 - d) Was a disaster from its very beginnings and never expected its spies to live very long.


3. MI6 has traditionally recruited its agents by...
 - a) Testing them in the field.
 - b) Tapping them on the shoulder in the street.
 - c) Choosing them from among acquaintances
 - d) Recruiting directly from public schools.

4. The fact that MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service ends in 1949 is significant because...
 - a) It seems to deliberately avoid the more difficult periods in the Service's history.
 - b) The information after that period is probably still classified.
 - c) It does not cover the period when Russian spies infiltrated Cambridge University.
 - d) MI6 has refused to allow its more embarrassing history to be widely known.

5. The fact that MI6 has traditionally drawn its agents from the higher echelons of British society may have been...
 - a) The reason it is faultless.
 - b) Viewed at times as something negative.
 - c) Admired by the rest of the world.
 - d) The only secret of its success.

6. It could be said that during the period described in the book, MI6 agents possessed certain skills, which if sharpened, could...
 - a) Allow them to hide their feelings from others under questioning.
 - b) Be used to say one thing and mean another.
 - c) Be used as excellent espionage tools when dealing with foreigners.
 - d) Allow them to use their background to great effect.

7. In the final two paragraphs of the text, the author seems to be saying that recently...
 - a) MI6 has pulled off some very important deals for Britain.
 - b) MI6 reputation has been irretrievably damaged by the weapons of mass destruction scandal.
 - c) MI6 is excessively influenced by USA intelligence methods.
 - d) MI6 is still more than holding its own in the way it gains and uses intelligence.

 See next page for answer key.



Key

0. A
1. A
2. A
3. C
4. A
5. B
6. D
7. D