

THE MINISTRY

Cloak, dagger, poison, sorcery and seduction: the secret war for freedom fought on America's soil.

In 1938 Winston Churchill, fearing the inexorable rise of Hitler and the Third Reich, launched his secret counter-stroke. With no permission from any government whatsoever he formed a totally new arm of state, the Ministry for Economic Warfare. Better-known as the Special Operations Executive (SOE), The Ministry was to serve one sole purpose: to resist Hitler's rise by all possible measures, and to prevent Nazi world domination and enslavement.

Acting under an ancient act of Royal Prerogative, Churchill had a private word with the King. An age-old law states that if the democratic rule of the British Parliament is threatened, then the royal ruler can personally intervene. This the King did, and so The Ministry was formed. 'We must use ... sabotage, continuous propaganda, terrorist acts against traitors and German leaders,' declared The Ministry's founders. 'We need absolute secrecy, a certain fanatical enthusiasm, and a willingness to work with different nationalities.'

Churchill's greatest fears – shared by President Roosevelt – were that the American people would not have the stomach for a second, distant 'European' war, and that Hitler would win the race to build the atom bomb. 'What danger is there, pray, that an atomic bomb might fall on London?' Churchill wrote, in 1938. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister for Propaganda, was equally attuned to the bomb's dark promise. 'Research in the field of demolishing atoms is so advanced that ... tiny efforts result in such immense destructive effects.'

Churchill appointed as The Ministry's global chief WWI flying ace, former POW and intelligence supremo William 'Little Bill' Stephenson. For years Stephenson – a Canadian and a close confidante of Churchill's – had been warning about Hitler's rise to power. Quietly, they sought out the earliest volunteers for The Ministry - an eclectic bunch of adventurers, artists, poets, actors, scientists, magicians, plus a good smattering of common criminals. To them, The Ministry would become known as The Firm, or most commonly The Racket.

Long before US entry into the war, Stephenson - codenamed INTREPID - was established in The Ministry's ultra-secret American headquarters. Having crossed swords with the enemy before, in WWI, he was doubly fearful of the blind, twisted fanaticism of Nazism and haunted by the spectre of a Nazis bomb. 'If Germany conquers Britain,' he warned, 'the way is clear for the development of this weapon with which Hitler can blackmail the world.'

The Ministry was established in an unremarkable New York brownstone apartment block. From there a top-secret war of espionage, covert operations and assassinations would be waged across America. But Roosevelt feared that the American public would never support such acts on US soil, not least until the Pearl Harbour attacks had proven the case for America going to war. The Ministry would need to be WWII's single greatest secret.

To prepare the new brand of soldier-spy-assassins an ultra-secret training camp was set up in a remote lakeside wilderness. Named Camp X – the 'School for Mayhem and Murder' to

its attendees - a cadre of gunmen, street cops, bank-robbers, magicians and ladies of the night began to teach the dark arts of murder, assassination, burglary, seduction, espionage, entrapment, hypnotism and deception. Trainee agents were taught to kill silently using whatever came to hand: a fountain pen, hat pin, or nail file driven into the brain.

In Washington, The Ministry Agent codename CYNTHIA - Amy Elizabeth Thorpe, a beautiful socialite who had already helped smuggle ENIGMA encoding machines to Britain – seduced key Nazi diplomats. From the intelligence so gained she helped insert agents into occupied Europe, hunting the Nazi bomb. ‘Ashamed? Not in the least ... my work saved thousands of British and American lives,’ Thorpe remarked. ‘It involved me in situations from which ‘respectable’ women draw back – but wars are not won by respectable methods.’

Using the so-called double-cross system enemy agents were compromised and turned. But if one proved inviolable he – or she – was quietly eliminated, and the means for such targeted assassinations were inventive and horrifyingly dark. As the intelligence was harvested, so the fears of German nuclear dominance were vindicated. So advanced were the Nazi scientists – the *Uranverein*; the uranium club - that US politicians and military officials began moving their families to remote country residences, to safeguard them from Nazi nuclear strikes, plus an ultra-secret programme was launched to put teams of experts with Geiger counters on the streets, to check bomb strikes for radiation.

Then, in May 1940, Nazi Germany overran Belgium, seizing 2,000 tonnes of uranium ore, which had been mined in the Belgium Congo, the world’s richest source of uranium. The Ministry’s focus turned to this vast African country and the race for the Congo’s uranium began. Via an extraordinary series of covert operations The Ministry set up a top-secret uranium smuggling ‘pipeline’, covering thousands of miles of steaming jungle, storm-swept ocean and hostile skies. Thousands of tonnes of the precious uranium ore were spirited out of the Congo to America, to fuel the fledgling Allied nuclear programme.

Even as Axis and Allied forces fought this murderous, shadow war for uranium, so a series of desperate sabotage missions were green-lit by The Ministry. Their aim was to penetrate Hitler’s intensively guarded nuclear programme and drive a dagger into its dark heart. At only one place did it appear remotely vulnerable, in Norway’s remote and snowbound wilderness. There the Germans were producing deuterium oxide – better known by the sinister term ‘heavy water’ – the matrix within which uranium breeds an atom bomb.

‘The fate of the world seemed to hang on those ... young agents,’ Stephenson remarked of The Ministry’s nuclear raiders. In a series of do-or-die missions – involving ship hijacks, kidnapping of foremost nuclear scientists, top-secret ‘Moon Flights’, blackmail, and a string of blistering assaults defined by suicidal daring – the Nazi’s heavy water plant was blown to smithereens. But then, in the summer of 1944 the V1 and V2 rockets started to rain down on London. Churchill was haunted by the fear that Hitler would choose to tip his new terror weapons with ‘dirty bombs’, so spreading mass death and panic. And so The Ministry’s teams of agents were dispatched to begin their final cat-and-mouse missions to stop them.

Writing of his most famous creation, author Ian Fleming remarked: ‘James Bond is a romanticised version of a true spy. The real thing is William Stephenson.’

The Ministry will be the first rendering of this extraordinary and ground-breaking story in all its revelatory depth and detail. Much of this hitherto untold history is related in number one bestselling British author Damien Lewis's recent book, *Hunting The Nazi Bomb* (Quercus, 2016). Author Lewis is widely acknowledged as being a leading expert and authority on clandestine and special forces operations of WWII, and a foremost author in this field. Many of the files of *The Ministry* - saved for posterity, in Government archives – have recently been opened. They will form the foundation stones of the authenticity of the series.

'Germany's use of the atomic bomb, which the War Cabinet, with their inner knowledge so much dreaded, was delayed. Before their researches were complete she was a beaten nation.' From a secret British Government report written shortly after war's end.