

The Secret Life of John le Carré

ALSO BY ADAM SISMAN

A. J. P. Taylor

Boswell's Presumptuous Task

Wordsworth and Coleridge

Hugh Trevor-Roper

John le Carré

The Professor and the Parson

THE SECRET LIFE OF JOHN LE CARRÉ

Adam Sisman

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'All his life he's been inventing versions
of himself that are untrue'

A Perfect Spy

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Introduction: candour & guile

Why write the 'secret life' of John le Carré? Is it right to make public aspects of his existence that he strove so hard to keep private? In writing this book I was conscious that some might consider the subject matter prurient. And to some extent I accept this criticism; if it were no more than an exposé of adultery, then reading it would be not much better than voyeurism. In her book *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (1994), Janet Malcolm pilloried the professional biographer as a voyeur and a busybody, colluding with the reader 'in an excitingly forbidden undertaking: tiptoeing down the corridor together, to stand in front of the bedroom door and try to peep through the keyhole'. That has not been my usual practice. Rather than peeping through the keyhole, I have tended to linger in the corridor, clearing my throat to indicate my presence. I am not one of those that believes that sex explains everything. On the contrary, it seems to me that for most people sex is merely part of ordinary life, not the creative spark.

But in the case of John le Carré, whose real name was David Cornwell, his pursuit of women was a key to unlock his fiction. Not only did it help to explain what he wrote, it helped to explain how, why and when he wrote. David himself was explicit on this

point. ‘My infidelities,’ he wrote to me at a time when, for better or worse, the issue had come to dominate our discussions,

produced in my life a duality & a tension that became almost a necessary drug for my writing, a dangerous edge of some kind ... They are not therefore a ‘dark part’ of my life, separate from the ‘high literary calling’, so to speak, but, alas, integral to it, & inseparable.

Nonetheless he restricted what I was able to write about his affairs in his lifetime, as I detail in the last chapter of this book. My biography of John le Carré, published in 2015, was the truth, insofar as I was able to ascertain it, but not the whole truth. While David was alive, I was obliged to suppress some of what I knew.

Eight years on, there is no remaining reason for reticence. ‘I don’t care what you write about me after I’m dead,’ David said to me on several occasions. He died towards the end of 2020, at the age of eighty-nine, after sustaining a fall in his bathroom, and his wife Jane died only weeks later, after a long struggle with cancer. As for the rest of his family, his three surviving sons feel that, in general, any information about their father that may aid understanding of his work should be on the public record. Now that he is dead, we can know him better.

Besides, the cat is out of the bag. In October 2022 one of his lovers, using the pseudonym Suleika Dawson, published a memoir of their time together. A few weeks later, a volume of le Carré letters appeared, edited by his son Tim (who tragically died while the book was in press); this included two letters from Susan Anderson, another woman with whom David had an affair. These letters are part of a larger collection, available for

scrutiny in a public archive. The story of David's involvement with these two women is recounted in the pages of this book, together with the stories of other women with whom he was involved at one time or another. Cumulatively they provide a picture of a man always restlessly seeking love, for whom extra-marital affairs were not a distraction from his writing, but an essential stimulus.

*

'It's hard not to feel that there is a great deal we're not being told,' wrote Theo Tait, in a review of my biography for the *London Review of Books*. He was right, of course. In his review, Tait differentiated between the first half of the book, which, he wrote, does 'exactly what you want a biography of a novelist to do'; and the second half, which he found much less revealing. 'At a certain point the reader is banished from Cornwell's life.' That point was the moment David met Jane, who became his second wife in 1972. As Tait observed, she took on the role of gatekeeper; and from then on the gate was kept tightly shut.

Tait was one of several reviewers to perceive that the book was the outcome of a struggle between author and subject: 'a truce between candour and guile', as Robert McCrum put it in the *Observer*. My book benefited from access to my subject and his archive, but this came at a cost. In theory I was free to write what I thought fit; but in practice I was constrained. There was the obvious factor that it would have been difficult to proceed had le Carré withdrawn his co-operation, as seemed possible at one stage. Given that he was so protective of his privacy, I found myself questioning why David had agreed to co-operate with me,

after seeing off several suitors in the past. Inasmuch as I was able to answer the question, I came to believe that he had two, partly contradictory motives: he wanted a serious biography commensurate with his stature as a serious writer, and he wanted to be able to control what was in it. One seasoned le Carré watcher believes that he encouraged the biography because he hoped to find out about himself, only to recoil in dismay when I held up the mirror.

Undertaking a life of a living person is always a compromise. Even an unauthorised biographer is inhibited by the law of libel. As biographers of T. S. Eliot and Ted Hughes have discovered to their cost, the law of copyright is another inhibitor when writing about a writer, because (broadly speaking) the writings of the living (or recently dead) may not be quoted without permission. The position is more ambiguous when a biography is being written with the consent of the subject; or even more so when the subject co-operates with the biographer. In a previous book I explored the tension between the two. The subject is, almost by definition, the senior figure; the biographer is in a subordinate position. Each is thinking about posterity. In any agreement between them there will be an element of *quid pro quo*: while the subject remains alive he or she retains some measure of control, even if the restraints are rarely visible. But the biographer is likely to have the last word.

Of course it is helpful to the biographer to meet and to become familiar with his or her subject (though not so helpful as one might imagine), but the more you come to know someone, the less inclined you are to upset them. Familiarity with your subject can be both an advantage and a handicap.

The recent history of biography offers contrasting precedents.

James Atlas's memoir *The Shadow in the Garden: A Biographer's Tale* (2017) recounts in excruciating detail the succession of mishaps and mistakes he made in writing his life of Saul Bellow, like mine published while his subject was still alive, in 2000. On the other hand, Patrick French was able to publish *The World Is What It Is* (2008), his authorised biography of V. S. Naipaul, during his subject's lifetime, despite the fact that his book revealed damaging details about Naipaul's private behaviour. 'A great writer requires a great biography,' George Packer wrote in his *New York Times* review of French's book, 'and a great biography must tell the truth.'

I had been aware from the outset that dealing with David wasn't going to be easy. Robert Harris, who had been commissioned to write a life of le Carré almost twenty years earlier, warned me that I would never be able to publish in his lifetime. As it turned out he was wrong, but only partially so.

At the start David was welcoming, and we were immediately on first-name terms, so friendly that I often had to remind myself that we weren't really friends at all, and that the cordiality could be withdrawn at any time – as I found had happened to others who thought of themselves as his friends.

Perhaps it helped that I was, and remain, an admirer of his work. In my opinion he is a writer of high class, worthy of comparison with the best. Assuming that people are still reading novels in a hundred years' time, I think there is a good chance that they will be reading le Carré. For me, he is the definitive writer of the Cold War era: more than that, he is (as Blake Morrison has put it) 'a laureate' of Britain's 'post-imperial sleepwalk' – a sleep from which, arguably, we have yet to wake. Like most readers, I think more highly of some of his books than others,

and like many I think less well of the later novels than the ones written in what I consider to be his prime, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. Naturally David wanted one to admire all his work, his most recent most of all.

In the introduction to my biography I described an episode that occurred early on. I had driven down to Cornwall for my first visit to Tregiffian, his isolated house on the cliffs above the shoreline near Land's End, where his papers were kept. To reach it you had to turn off the road and drive several hundred yards along a grassy track towards the sea. I had not yet seen David when Jane set me to work, in an outhouse that served as his archive. It was a beautiful spring morning, so sunny and warm that I left the door ajar. After I had been there an hour or so I became aware of a shadow, and looked up from my desk to see David standing over my shoulder. It's an image that stays in the reader's mind, according to Tait:

The book depicts Cornwell as a man you wouldn't want to cross: very clever and very touchy; helpful and generous towards those he trusts, but unforgiving and vindictive towards those he sees as a threat or a disappointment.

The crisis in my relations with David came after I began to uncover evidence of his extramarital affairs. In doing so I cannot claim any special skills as a detective; on the contrary, I learned about his lovers almost at random. I was told about one by some fellow guests at lunch with friends one Sunday; I heard about another late at night at a party, from someone I had just met. David's half-sister Charlotte told me about another lover, an American photographer. When I contacted her, she responded openly, offering to talk; but after she had been in touch with

David, her attitude changed completely. ‘I want no part in your book,’ she wrote to me. I heard about yet another woman, an Italian journalist, from a writer who knew David well. To him, she had spoken freely about her affair with David; but to me, she pretended that it had been a misunderstanding. As soon as one of David’s ex-lovers opened her mouth, it seemed, David shut her up.

I was not especially interested in David’s private life *per se*, though I could scarcely ignore the fact that betrayal was a recurrent theme of his work. It did occur to me too that a man who lives a double life is a man under constant pressure. Did this pressure energise the work? The life of a writer, even a bestselling writer, is not in itself very exciting: in essence it involves sitting alone in a room, with pen or keyboard. Tait was not the only reviewer to comment that the most interesting part of the biography was the story of my subject’s early years, before David Cornwell became John le Carré, and a few years afterwards. Perhaps the drama of the later years was hidden. Were sexual adventures a relief from the tedium of the writing life? Was the excitement of adultery, with the risk of exposure, a stimulus to creativity? Was it a substitute for spying?

*

John le Carré was an enigma, which made him a tempting subject for a biographer. From the beginning of his career as a writer in the early 1960s there had been speculation about him: in particular, about the extent to which his novels drew on his own experience. Almost inevitably his readers become intrigued by the writer. Even his pseudonym was a mystery. He provided

several different explanations of why he chose the name John le Carré, and afterwards admitted that none of these was true.

Few were convinced by his early denials that he had been a spy. Later he admitted to having served in British intelligence; but the more he protested that this had been merely in a humble capacity, the more suspicion spread that he had really been a spymaster. Such ambiguity served his purpose. One feature of his intelligence background is that it allowed his often-cryptic utterances to go unchallenged, because they seemed based on secret knowledge. One can see why it was sometimes necessary for him to obfuscate, but at other times this seemed to arise from no more than a cultivated air of mystery. He encouraged the sense that he was concealing more than he revealed. And his long-lasting success meant that he was interviewed time after time, decade after decade. Each interviewer would mug up beforehand on what he had said in the past and push him to say more. The inevitable result was that his autobiography became more colourful as time passed. Hints hardened into facts, and tall stories became taller.

In a piece he wrote after my book was published David would regret having given so many interviews, which he conceded was ‘not a process that is compatible with self-knowledge’. He summed it up as follows: ‘First you invent yourself, then you get to believe your invention.’

One example of this is the writing of his breakthrough novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. The book was a great leap forward from the two novels he had written before, and it seems plausible that he wrote it in a burst of creative energy, as he often suggested. But, in his telling, that outpouring of creative energy became more and more compressed as the years passed.

In a television interview given almost forty years after the book was published, for example, he claimed that he had written the book in a mere five weeks, in an anguished response to the Berlin Wall going up. In fact the border between East and West Berlin had been sealed, and construction of the Berlin Wall had started, a full fifteen months before the manuscript of the book was submitted to his publishers. He actually wrote the book in eight months: still impressively quick for such a complex book.

Everything he said, therefore, needed to be examined sceptically. David often spoke about his refusal to meet ‘Kim’ Philby,* the most notorious and perhaps the most successful of Soviet double agents, when the opportunity arose on a visit to Moscow in 1987. By 2010, when he gave an interview to Olga Craig of the *Telegraph*, this decision had become elevated to one of the highest principle. ‘I couldn’t possibly have shook his hand,’ he told her. ‘It was drenched in blood. It would have been repulsive.’ But the diary of his travelling companion records David as saying at the time that he would ‘dearly love’ to meet Philby one day – ‘purely for zoological purposes, of course!’

This was not necessarily a paradox. Confronted with the opportunity to meet Philby, David recoiled from an encounter that he had been willing to contemplate in principle. Such discrepancies, if indeed they are discrepancies, are not, in my opinion, examples of bad faith, but merely evidence that David, like all of us, edited his past as he revisited it, which he did more than most people. He reimagined incidents in his past for his

* His real name was Harold, but from his schooldays on he was always known as Kim, after the eponymous boy-spy hero of Kipling’s novel. Like Kim, Philby had been born in India.

John le Carré

9 Gainsborough Gardens
NW3 1BJ

15 July 2010

Dear Mr Sisman,

Let me say first that

I was on the point of going up to Waterhouse's
in Hampstead to buy your book on HT-R
when your letter arrived: so thank you for
it, and for what you kindly say about
my work. I am, as you may suppose,
very divided about how to respond —
flattered by your interest, + consoled by
it, since I have had similar letters
from biographers whom I do not rate
highly — and I thank, as you say,

David Cornwell's first letter to me, 15 July 2010.

John le Carré

2

it would be best to meet, & explore
 the possibilities. There are huge hindrances:
 my own messy private life, the demise
 of so many people I worked with
 or otherwise knew, and my habitual
 reluctance to discuss my very limited
 & unspectacular career in intelligence.
 I see you finding disenchantment
 everywhere, & your readers doing the
 same, and I worry, of course,
 about my children & grandchildren,
 probably quite unnecessarily. Anyway,
 do let's meet & talk, if only

John le Carré

3

That I may give you the longer version
of my relationship with H.T.R., from
which I emerge an even bigger fool than
the one he describes.

I haven't read your 'tough'
from beginning to end, just dipped,
but let me in passing congratulate
you on its splendid reception, &
thank you again for writing. Like
H.T.R., I would wish you to write
without restraints: perhaps that's
the problem!

With best wishes,

David Cornwell

fiction, and what he remembered afterwards tended to be the fictional reimagining rather than what had actually occurred.

*

The appearance of my biography in 2015 dispelled some of the myths about David's past. It was based on an agreement we had reached at the outset. He did not want me to use the term 'authorised', presumably so that he could distance himself from what I wrote if he so chose, but we agreed that my book should be definitive, insofar as this was possible. I have little doubt that one of his motives for encouraging me was *pour décourager les autres*.

My involvement with David Cornwell started in the most straightforward fashion. I wrote him a letter, proposing myself as his biographer, and he responded, inviting me to come and see him at his house in Hampstead to discuss the suggestion. This was in the summer of 2010. My timing was opportune, as I would discover: he was just beginning to read my most recent book, a biography of the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper. David had known Trevor-Roper slightly and had clashed with him on two separate occasions, almost twenty years apart. When we met a week or so later, he told me that he had enjoyed my portrayal of Trevor-Roper's combative personality.

He made it clear from the beginning that he wished me to write 'without restraints', which was what I wanted too. I estimated that it would take me four years to write, as proved to be the case. We came to an agreement, by which David (as he quickly became to me) granted me access to his archives, a list of introductions to people he had known (friends and enemies) and an indefinite number of extended interviews.

In his reply to my initial letter David had highlighted two biographical problems: one was ‘my habitual reluctance to discuss my very limited & unspectacular career in intelligence’, and the other was what he called ‘my own messy private life’. I was able to overcome the first problem, at least to my own satisfaction. Though David remained silent about his intelligence work, I heard about it nonetheless. If I could not provide all the details, I was able to show how, when and where he worked throughout. I was able to trace his career in espionage, from his recruitment by MI6 in post-war Berne while still a teenager, as a source of low-level intelligence and as an occasional ‘mule’; his National Service in the Intelligence Corps in occupied Austria; his re-recruitment as an informer by MI5, while an undergraduate at Oxford, when he befriended left-wing students in order to spy on them; his service with MI5 in his mid-twenties, vetting candidates for senior positions who might prove a security risk, and running agents in the Communist Party; and finally his transfer to MI6 and his service in what was then West Germany, working out of the British Embassy in Bonn. There he wrote *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, a colossal bestseller, on a scale that happens perhaps only once in a decade. It reached the top of the bestseller list on both sides of the Atlantic, and remained there for week after week, far outselling one of Ian Fleming’s James Bond books published around the same time, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. Its enormous success enabled David to retire from spying to concentrate on writing; after the age of thirty-three he would never hold another job of any kind.

*

His marriage to Jane was often characterised in public as an

ideal partnership. 'I think we're more monogamous than most couples,' he told one visitor. It's hard to know what he meant by this if it wasn't meant ironically, because the truth is that he was serially unfaithful. Without much effort I was able to identify eleven women with whom he had affairs during the first thirty years of their marriage, and I am aware that there were plenty more besides these. Of the eleven, three are now dead (one was killed in a road accident, one by a terrorist bomb, and one took her own life, years after her affair with David had ended), and two repelled my approaches – but the remaining six have talked to me, at length. In recounting their stories I have been conscious that what he told them may not always have been true, though confided in private. Sometimes what he told one woman cannot be reconciled with what he told another. We may not be able to judge to whom he was lying; all we can say for certain is that he was lying to somebody.

Several of these women are recognisable as characters in his novels. Lizzie Worthington in *The Honourable Schoolboy* is based on one of them; Tessa Quayle in *The Constant Gardener* on another. Most of them were younger than he was, some of them much younger. One was the au pair looking after his youngest son. With another woman, almost thirty years his junior, he had two affairs: the first in the mid-1980s, the second fourteen years later. His last that I know about was with a journalist more than forty years younger. Though married with young children by the time I spoke to her, she told me that she considered the relationship with David the most important in her life.

When David decided to seduce a woman, he would pursue her relentlessly, using the manifold gifts at his disposal. A handsome man even in late middle age, he could be scintillating company,

witty and attentive, with a fund of entertaining stories and a deep reservoir of experience to draw upon. He wrote playful and erotic letters to his lovers, making them feel missed and desired. He lured those with literary ambitions into imagining that they might write together. Like his father, he had the ability to make people love him even when they knew that they shouldn't, and to want to protect him and share his life. And he had deep pockets, so that he was able to take women to the finest hotels and restaurants, drape them with jewellery, pay their rent, and fly them overseas for erotic assignations.

Why did David pursue these women with such intensity, and what does it say about him? When compelled to confront this issue, he told me that the restless, self-destructive search for love was part of his nature. In his mind this went back to his childhood, to his unrequited love for his mother, who abandoned her children at an early age. Perhaps too he was influenced by German literature, particularly the literature of early German romanticism, which took a grip on him at an early age and remained close to his heart, encouraging a tendency towards heightened emotion and self-dramatisation. Several of his novels culminate in the protagonist's suicide – which, he told his long-term editor Roland Philipps, was the ultimate romantic conclusion. The founding text of the German Romantic movement is Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which reaches its culmination when Werther, despairing of unrequited love, shoots himself with a pistol given to him by his beloved.

David claimed that these extramarital relationships were 'impulsive, driven, short-lived affairs ... often meaningless in themselves', but while that might be true of some of them, others appear to have been much more serious and long-lasting.

He needed to be loved, and at times seems to have believed himself to have been in love, at least in the moment. He told several women that he was willing to leave his wife for them. Of course he did not do so. Whether this was a tactic, or whether he meant it at the time, is an open question. Perhaps he was not really capable of love. ‘That’s what I do,’ he has Barley Blair, protagonist of *The Russia House* (1989), say. ‘I bewitch people, then the moment they’re under my spell I cease to feel anything for them.’ Much the same is true of his *alter ego* Magnus Pym, in his autobiographical novel *A Perfect Spy* (1986). ‘He’s the Pym who can’t rest till he’s touched the love in people,’ Pym himself admits to his confessor, Jack Brotherhood, ‘then can’t rest till he’s hacked his way out of it.’

‘I must go and lie to my wife,’ he told one lover, as he rose from the hotel bed and padded towards the telephone. Though he took great care to hide what he was up to from Jane, she inevitably became aware of some of it, and it was hard for her, especially as she had to suffer David’s infidelities in silence most of the time. Occasionally her misery would erupt: just before his sixtieth birthday, for example. ‘You don’t have to celebrate with me, if there’s someone else,’ she burst out, in front of an embarrassed visitor. He proposed to one, a particularly glamorous woman (a former model), that she should move in with them, to form a *ménage à trois*. Jane told herself that ‘nobody can have all of David’. He flattered her that her input was important to his work, but he said the same to other women too. Each in turn became his ‘muse’. His writing pal James Kennaway advised David that he would need a different woman for each book, advice David appears to have taken to heart. Thus Liese Deniz inspired *The Honourable Schoolboy*, Verity Mosley and Janet Lee

Stevens *The Little Drummer Girl*, Sue Dawson *A Perfect Spy*, the Italian journalist *The Russia House*, Susan Anderson *The Tailor of Panama* and to some extent *Our Game* also, Yvette Pierpaoli *The Constant Gardener*, and so on.

David's adulterous behaviour during his second marriage followed a precedent established in his first. When he read the first draft of my biography, he grumbled that I had given too much importance to his involvement with Susie and James Kennaway in the mid-1960s, 'in relation to greater and more formative influences later on'. I could scarcely avoid the subject, as all three had published books about the affair, David's being his only non-espionage novel, the disastrous *The Naïve and Sentimental Lover* (1971). This was another *ménage à trois*, in which the emotions ran high between all three. One evening the trio went together to the cinema to see *Jules et Jim*, and Susie sat in the dark between the two men, holding hands with both. David wanted me to remove some of the details, particularly his 'toe-curlingly' impassioned letters to James Kennaway, whom he addressed as 'dearest James' and 'lovely boy'. And he insisted too that I remove any mention of his affair in the mid-1960s with his secretary Liz Tollinton, on grounds that seemed to me spurious: that this might upset his sons.

This subject of his adultery was one which loomed large over the writing of my biography. As I progressed, and inevitably uncovered more discomfiting details, David became agitated, and wrote to me in increasingly fervent terms. Our relations became strained. The book was able to proceed only after mediation by his eldest son, Simon, who visited me in Bristol to discuss the project. He fully agreed with me that David's relations with women were key to a full understanding of his work,

and proposed that I should keep ‘a secret annexe’ for eventual publication in some form after both David and Jane were dead. The secret annexe is the basis of this book. It is not a substitute for or a condensation of my 2015 biography, but a supplement, containing material that I felt obliged to omit then, as well as information that has emerged since. It might be described as What Was Left Out. To make this book comprehensible to readers who might not have read the biography I have included a few paragraphs from the latter, but otherwise there is no overlap between the two.

‘I am a writer who was a spy, not a spy who writes novels,’ David told his friend Federico Varese, an academic specialising in studies of the Russian mafia. John le Carré was a major writer, but David Cornwell was only a very minor spy. He always hid behind his security cover, maintaining that he could not talk about his comparatively unimportant intelligence work. This made it difficult for me to deal with the subject; he could always trump anything that I wrote by suggesting that there was more that he was regrettably unable to reveal. But more important, and indeed crucial to a full understanding of the man and his work, was that he prevented me from writing about his extra-marital affairs – which served as an ersatz form of spycraft, his real operations in the field, as it were, that would last almost until his death. It introduced recurrent *sturm und drang* into what was otherwise a quiet, ordered life. Now he has died, it is important to add this coda to the biography that he encouraged, semi-authorised, and then tried to undermine.

ONE

Spying is lying

‘People believe what they want to believe,’ wrote David to one of his lovers. ‘ALWAYS.’ He was referring to the ‘revelation’ that Graham Greene had continued working for British intelligence into his seventies. ‘No good me telling them that GG was far too drunk to remember anything, & that his residual connections with the Brit spooks were romantic fantasy.’

When he wrote that people believed what they wanted to believe about Greene, he might just as well have been writing about himself. People were willing to believe almost anything about him, even if he denied it (especially if he denied it) – for example, that he had once been earmarked as a possible future head of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, more popularly known as MI6). According to David, the Chief himself, Sir Dick White, had told him in a farewell interview that he was highly thought of within the Service; and that, had he remained, he might have been a candidate for the ‘top job’ in due course. This is a suggestion that one former MI6 officer, with a long and distinguished career behind him, described to me as ‘ridiculous’. The idea that anyone with less than four years’ experience in any organisation could be considered as a candidate to run it in due

course is, to say the least, unlikely. Yet this is what David wanted us to believe. Perhaps he believed it himself.

The secret history of David's career in the intelligence services is that it was uneventful. 'The trouble with David,' observed one MI6 contemporary who served with him, 'is that he was never involved in a successful operation.'

Following his induction into MI6, and after undergoing training at Fort Monckton near Portsmouth, David was posted to Bonn, capital of what was then the Federal Republic of Germany, where he would serve out his short career, until the worldwide success of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* enabled him to retire and write full time. (For his last few months with the Service he relocated to the consulate at Hamburg, in an attempt to avoid the limelight.) According to a colleague who worked alongside him, there was not much for him to do there. Operations against the enemy in the East were not run from Bonn. David was working under diplomatic cover, notionally as a Second Secretary: attending press conferences and receptions with other diplomats, politicians and journalists, and escorting German politicians on visits to Britain and British politicians on visits to Germany.

David's covert role had originated in British concerns about a possible neo-Nazi revival. His perfect German allowed him to pass as a native, and he was tasked with detecting and investigating potential Nazi cells or organisations, and with recruiting German sleepers who would join such groupings in order to provide information on them. This had to be kept 'ultra secret', particularly from their German hosts, because British officials could not be seen to be interfering in German politics. But in reality there was little to do, since the feared neo-Nazi revival