



Operation Crossbow: The Untold Story of the Search for Hitler's Secret Weapons

Allan Williams

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For the first time, the real story behind the top-secret World War II operations Crossbow and Bodyline, and how photographic interpreters discovered the network of V-1 and V-2 sites throughout Nazi-occupied Europe

The story of the photographic intelligence work undertaken from a country house at Medmenham, Buckinghamshire, is one of the great lost stories of World War II. At its peak in 1944, almost 2,000 British and American men and women worked at the top-secret Danesfield House, interpreting photographs to unlock secrets of German military activity and weapons development. Millions of aerial photographs were taken by Allied pilots, flying unarmed modified Spitfires and Mosquitos on missions over Nazi Europe. It was said that an aircraft could land, the photographs be developed, and initial interpretation completed within two hours—marking the culmination of years of experiments in aerial intelligence techniques. Their finest hour began in 1943, during the planning stages of the Allied invasion of Europe, when Douglas Kendall, who masterminded the interpretation work at Medmenham, led the hunt for Hitler's secret weapons. Operation Crossbow would grow from a handful of photographic interpreters to the creation of a hand-picked team, and came to involve interpreters from across the Medmenham spectrum. In November that year, while analyzing photographs of Peenemunde in northern Germany, they spotted a small stunted aircraft on a ramp. This breakthrough linked the Nazi research station with a growing network of sites in northern France, where ramps were being constructed aligned not only with London, but targets throughout southern Britain. Through the combined skill and dedication of the Crossbow team and the heroism of the Allied pilots, throughout late 1943 and 1944 V-weapon launch sites were located and destroyed, saving hundreds of thousands of lives, and changing the course of the war.

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