



Secret Classrooms: An Untold Story of the Cold War

Geoffrey Elliott, Harold Shukman

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Lambasted by the Soviets as a "spy school", the Joint Services School for Linguists (JSSL) was a major Cold War initiative, which pushed 5000 young National Servicemen through intensive training as Russian translators and interpreters, primarily to meet the needs of Britain's signals intelligence operations. Over its nine-year life it operated from military camps in Surrey, Cornwall and Scotland, and special enclaves created at Cambridge and London Universities. It had parade grounds rather than sports fields and pupils included a remarkable cross-section of talented young men who came to JSSL as National Servicemen and went on to a diversity of glittering careers: professors of Russian, Chinese, ancient philosophy, economics, history; authors such as Alan Bennett, Dennis Potter and Michael Frayn; screenwriter Jack Rosenthal; and churchmen ranging from a bishop to a Discalced Carmelite friar. The two authors, both of whom emerged from JSSL as interpreters, have drawn on many personal recollections and interviews with fellow students, as well as once highly classified documents in the Public Record office.

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