

BOOK REVIEW

ESP Wars East & West: An Account of the Military Use of Psychic Espionage as Narrated by the Key Russian and American Players by Edwin C. May, Victor Rubel, Lloyd Auerbach, and Joe McMoneagle. Crossroads, 2016. 410 pp. \$19.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-1941408797.

ESP Wars offers a unique perspective on the research, development, and application of psychic capabilities during the period of the Cold War. It is, however, quite controversial when it comes to details regarding the American side of these activities. One issue the reader may encounter is the narrative voice. Mostly written in the first person, I often found myself wondering who was speaking. Having communicated with most of the authors, I now know that Auerbach was brought in to clean up what was admittedly a very messy early draft of this book.

While examining the roots of the so-called ESP wars, the authors correctly note that the use of psychics is nearly as old as conflict itself. Mystics, oracles, and other religious leaders were often consulted before battles in attempts to divine the outcome and to seek advice from external sources regarding the advisability of engaging in war. Recounted are stories of the Oracle of Delphi asking Apollo for guidance, the efforts of King Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire, and even biblical quotes detailing the use of psychics prior to combat. Russian traditions of use of psychics include employing shamans for support of operations, a methodology that continues among indigenous people to this day. Even the Nazi fascination with the occult is conveyed as this interesting section brings the reader up to date with a historical overview not generally known outside of mythologists and a few conspiracy theorists.

A significant problem that stands out in both East and West camps is that they often encountered bureaucratic nightmares. In all cases, support for the programs appears to have been personality-dependent; a door that swung both ways. That means that when high level officials supported the use of psychics, programs flourished. Under opponents, they died. While many readers may believe that participation in the remote viewing program, eventually known as Star Gate, was alluring and fulfilling, the reality was often far different. There was a constant struggle for both organizational survival and acceptance. Legendary Remote Viewer 001, Joe McMoneagle, once described to me the work environment saying that every day was “like being in a f*****g knife fight in a phone booth.”

The Soviet/Russian participants experienced similar organizational issues. Referring to the Soviet era (1970s–1980s), it was noted that, “The lives of psychics and research parapsychologists were very difficult during those days.” They were allowed to conduct specific experiments but were warned of severe consequences if they exceeded their authorized limits. As a control measure, the KGB kept tabs on their work.

One key difference in psi research efforts between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was their emphasis on the development of psychotronic weapons. These were hardware systems designed to influence or control minds and possibly adversely affect the target’s health. It was hypothesized that the victim could be driven to suicide or accidental death. Interestingly, the book describes psychotronic devices as “non-lethal weaponry,” a term rarely used at that time, and not generally associated with psi research. The authors also indicate this research was done by secret institutes of the Soviet military and not by the KGB. They also note that an integrated ESP and psychotronic weapons program could not exist as the Central Committee of the Communist Party considered parapsychology to be “inconsistent with ideological dogma.” Worth remembering is that the U.S. did conduct some mind-altering experiments, such as those of MK Ultra. However, those were chemical in nature requiring direct ingestion of the drugs. While not successful, the Soviet psychotronic weapons approach entailed a remote capability, rather than physical contact with the victim.

It is later reported that large-scale testing for ESP was conducted in Russia. Professor Vyacheslav Zvonikov found that “about 1.5 percent of Russians possessed extrasensory abilities.” Having tested thousands of subjects, he also indicated that there were regions in Russia where the number of people with those capabilities were significantly higher. He also tested many psychotronic weapons and found most of them to be “pure rubbish.” He did not dismiss them totally, but stated that he did not have time to test all of the ones provided.

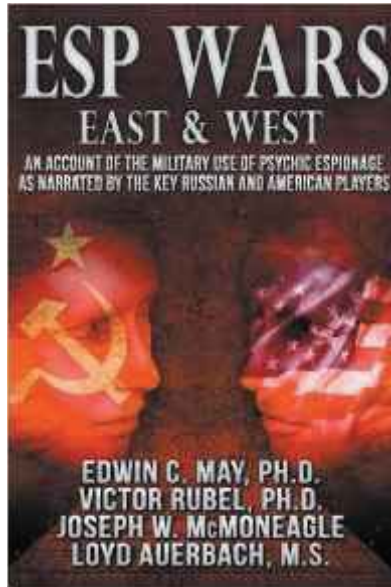
Significantly, KGB Major General Nikolai Sham, himself a proponent for study of psi phenomena, indicated that during the Soviet era “There was nothing comparable to the U.S. Star Gate program.” That does suggest that much of the popular hype in the West was wrong. Many of us always thought this was an area of concentration. The popular book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* did a lot to foster the notion of Soviet superiority in that area of research. Sham’s pronouncement also runs counter to statements by KGB defector Nikolai Khokhlov in which he claimed experiments had demonstrated a lethal capability in lab animals. Worth noting is that Khokhlov, who defected in 1954, based his information on secondhand sources but he was believed at the time.

Another difference between the Russian and U.S. programs was proximity to targets. Based on nonlocal consciousness theory, American remote viewers usually operated from Ft. Meade. Surprising to the Americans, General Sham informs the reader that during the wars in Chechnya the Russians moved their psychics to the immediate area of combat operations. Sham too noted that Marxist–Leninist ideology constrained their efforts. For that reason the emphasis on psychotronic weapons was easier to research.

In his Foreword, General Sham raises a point rarely discussed relative to remote viewing. He states, “unique techniques of developing extraordinary human abilities and qualitatively increasing intellectual and *spiritual levels* (emphasis added) were developed and carefully tested in practice.” The concept of spiritual development is not common in any of the literature on remote viewing.

The book takes an unfortunate turn when the authors denigrate the efforts of the Army managers of the project. They state that involvement with Star Gate was a “career-ender.” That was true in some cases, but not all, as presupposed by the comment. At least one of the managers went on to be promoted to full colonel in a later assignment. May generally blames the Army for the failures of the program and references “the overall poor management of the Ft. Meade Unit and the lax and mostly inappropriate protocols” as institutional shortcomings. He goes on to state that the unit suffered from the “assignment of uninterested or incompetent commanders.” Having discussed this issue with several people familiar with the situation, it is safe to state that that view is not universally held and considered to be quite biased.

Possibly more inflammatory are the comments regarding Ingo Swann and the remote viewers trained by him. Readers need to know that Ingo Swann, an accomplished artist from New York City, was one of the original remote viewers tested by Stanford Research Institute. He demonstrated a number of spectacular successes, including reporting the rings of Jupiter prior to their discovery when Pioneer 10 flew by the planet in 1973.



The book vociferously attacks the training method developed by Swann, claiming he did not understand the significance of operant conditioning or the power of nonverbal communication and clues. The authors note that, "Going the way Ingo proceeded makes it (the training) a major disaster." They also state that with the development of Ingo's methodology, "one can say this borders upon noncompliance of the contract at best and outright fraud at worst." That is strong verbiage and significant to thousands of people who have been trained in a manner that is directly derived from Ingo's protocols. Controversially, the book notes that, "Very few, if any, of the successes came from Ingo-trained people." Addressing the negative credibility associated by some leaders of the Intelligence Community, it is stated, "This attitude can be traced directly back to Swann and his unsupervised indoctrination of the Army and DIA personnel. The fault for this lies directly with the SRI management of the program." This comment presumably targets Dr. Hal Puthoff, who initiated the program with laser physicist Russell Targ.

The technique Ingo Swann developed was known as Coordinate Remote Viewing, or CRV. There exists a substantial discussion as to whether or not remote viewing is a trainable skill, or if only those with innate capabilities can be successful. The debate about the scientific efficacy of CRV has also raged openly. In an online publication called *Eight Martinis: The State of the Art of Remote Viewing*, Issue 13 (October 2015), Dr. Puthoff addressed many of these issues. Regarding CRV, he stated "For scientific evaluation, yes, strict double-blind protocols were used. Furthermore, in nearly all application of CRV to intelligence targets, I insisted on double-blind protocols so that if results were positive, there would be no gainsaying the result was based on the possibility of leakage of information to the remote viewer by anyone present." (The entire interview can be seen at <http://www.eightmartinis.com/eight-martinis-issue-13>.) The material in that publication contradicts many of the comments and castigations in the book.

The demise of the American program is accurately covered in fair detail. During a period of declining budgets, there was great consternation about the viability and continuation of the remote viewing program publicly known as Star Gate. Senior leaders of both the CIA and the DIA were lined up against the program while influential members of Congress supported the effort. It is reported that things got so bad that the commander of the DIA, a lieutenant general, was threatened with *Contempt of Congress* charges if he continued to fail to accept funding approved for the remote viewing project. That was followed by a decision to move the project to the CIA, but Director John Deutch was dead-set against acquiring responsibility. The approach, even though mandated by Congress, was a classic maneuver designed to

kill any project; i.e. they would study it. Of course, the outcome of the study by the independent body was predetermined. It is noted that about 35 sealed boxes of remote viewing material were shipped to the CIA to support the study. The contractor's findings were that the evidence did not warrant support of either the military or Intelligence Community. Rather than being a conscientious, independent effort, it was later learned that none of the boxes provided containing program records and results was ever opened. Clearly prejudice won out over science.

This book does offer a very interesting look into the background of the use of psychics in warfare. In the end, it appears that the rampant speculation about a psi race between East and West was more hype than reality. For most readers, it is worth perusing for historical information not generally available. It is a commendable effort to have both sides of a conflict reviewing their efforts.

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