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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Only Ostensibly Anomalous

I read with fascination Adrian Parker's excellent review (Parker, 2010) of Archie Roy's *The Eager Dead: A Study in Haunting* (Roy, 2008). Parker cites an example from the 1974 book *The Challenge of Chance* (Hardy, Harvie, & Koestler, 1974), in which co-author Arthur Koestler states that several top-secret codewords for the 1944 D-Day invasion showed up in crossword puzzles in *The Daily Telegraph* immediately prior to the military operation. Subsequent events not mentioned by Parker shed light on this remarkable scenario, which is a cautionary tale for anyone investigating ostensibly anomalous phenomena.

The codewords that appeared in the crosswords immediately prior to D-Day were those for the American landing beaches (Omaha and Utah), the Allies' floating harbors used in the landings (Mulberry), the naval assault phase (Neptune), and the overall term for the operation (Overlord). In previous months the words Juno, Gold, and Sword had also appeared, all codenames for beaches assigned to the British. This understandably triggered fears at MI5 that the Germans were being tipped off by a British spy. However, when Leonard Dawe, the crossword puzzle designer, was arrested and interrogated, he proved utterly clueless about the invasion.

So where did the codewords come from? Had Dawe unconsciously dipped into "the Jamesian cosmic reservoir" or the "universal memory repository," which Parker mentions in his review, and unknowingly extracted the codewords?

Apparently not. According to an article in *The Daily Telegraph* in May 2004 (Gilbert, 2004), the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day, the mystery of how the codewords came to appear in the crosswords was solved in 1984, when Ronald French, a property manager in Wolverhampton, came forward. According to French, Dawe, headmaster of Strand School, a boys' grammar school in South London, occasionally invited his pupils to help fill in the blank crossword patterns as an intellectual exercise (James Lovelock, the scientist who originated the Gaia hypothesis, was a former pupil at Strand). Dawe would then create the clues to solve the words. French, who was 14 at the time and a student at Strand, claimed that during the weeks before D-Day he had learned the operation's codewords from American and Canadian soldiers camped nearby, awaiting the invasion. "I was totally obsessed about the whole thing," he said. "I would play truant from school to visit the camp and I used to spend evenings with them and even whole weekends there, dressed in my Army cadet uniform. . . . Everyone knew the outline invasion plan and they knew the various codewords. Omaha

and Utah were the beaches they were going to. They knew the names but not the locations. We all knew the operation was called Overlord. Hundreds of kids must have known what I knew," French said. The soldiers talked freely in front of him because it was obvious to them that the boy was not a German spy.

"Soon after D-Day, Dawe sent for me," French explained, "and asked me point blank where I had got the words from. I told him all I knew and he asked to see my notebooks. He was horrified and said the books must be burned at once. He made me swear on the Bible I would tell no one about it. I have kept that oath until now," French said in 1984.

MI5 also grilled Dawe's senior colleague Melville Jones, the newspaper's other crossword compiler. Dawe almost lost his job, but not quite. "[T]hey eventually decided not to shoot us after all," he said later.

The Challenge of Chance was published in 1974, so Koestler would not have known about the mundane explanation of these events that surfaced a decade later.

So it appears that Dawe was not unconsciously dipping into the great cosmic soup after all. One is reminded of T. H. Huxley's observation, "The greatest tragedy of Science—the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact" (Huxley, 1894).

Thanks to Adrian Parker for reminding us.

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