

TERRY CROWDY

DECEIVING HITLER

DOUBLE CROSS AND DECEPTION IN WORLD WAR II



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For my father

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	6
Preface	7
Prologue	13
1 <i>Snow</i>	14
2 The Invasion Spies	32
3 Burning Lies	51
4 The System	62
5 <i>Snow Falls</i>	77
6 The 'Dicky' Period	96
7 Spanish Intrigues	108
8 'A' Force	128
9 The Controlling Officer	145
10 El Alamein	164
11 The Development of Agent Cases	183
12 <i>Mincemeat</i>	195
13 London Calling	207
14 The <i>Fortitude</i> Plan	220
15 By Special Means	247
16 Vindication	264
17 Mediterranean Swansong	281
18 The Final Deceits	293
Epilogue	304
Appendices	306
Sources and Further Reading	328
Endnotes	332
Index	345

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PREFACE

The deceiver by stratagem leaves it to the person himself whom he is deceiving to commit the errors of understanding which at last, flowing into one result, suddenly change the nature of things in his eyes.¹ (von Clausewitz)

WRITING OVER 400 YEARS BEFORE Caesar attempted to invade the British Isles, the legendary ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu pronounced, 'All warfare is based on deception.' Aside from the days of chivalry, when rival heralds would agree a fixed time and place for battle to commence, or when officers invited their opponents to fire first, commanders have often resorted to ruses and devious stratagems to mislead and stupefy their opponents.

During World War II the military deception practised by the Western Allies was so sophisticated it is unlikely to be repeated on the same scale again. Principally a British creation, at the crucial part of the war, when the Allies began the liberation of France, entire German divisions were held back from the fighting or delayed in their arrival because Hitler and his generals had been duped into deploying them elsewhere.

To summarize, the cornerstone of this success was security. In the 1940s Britain was an island with a watchful and vigilant public on high alert. It was not an environment conducive to German spies. Worse still, from the German point of view, the Germans' chief spy in Britain at the beginning of the war was also working for the British. Through information provided by this agent British code-breakers were able to break the German secret service's codes, which allowed them to be forewarned when new spies were despatched.

Where the British were incredibly smart – or perhaps devious would be a better word – was in the way that they used the captured agents. Despite a general clamouring to have captured spies executed, wherever possible the spies were kept active and given controlled information to pass back to their masters. This practice was also employed by the British security services in the Middle East with equal success. Before long, there grew a need for organizations that could vet the information passed back by the spies. This was to ensure that nothing operationally vital was accidentally leaked, and to ensure a consistent approach to German intelligence questionnaires.

DECEIVING HITLER

This led to the establishment of a system of global deception, ensuring the coordination of misinformation provided to the German intelligence services. From Kabul to Lisbon, and Nairobi to Reykjavik, the German intelligence stations were fed a picture entirely of the Allies' making, all of which was digested, sent to Berlin and placed before Hitler and his staff. As Nazi High Command pondered and deliberated, the progress of these bogus reports was monitored at the British code-breaking establishment at Bletchley Park. By reading the German intelligence services' secret traffic, the deception planners were able to tweak the performances of their best channels. It allowed them to play on the fears of the German High Command, or to endorse the delusions Hitler most wanted to believe.

Of course, there were a number of means by which to deceive the enemy other than through double agents. The first and most obvious was by physical means – by the use of camouflage to hide what could be seen, or to make it appear to be something else. This included the creation of dummy installations, vehicles and even ships, which might confuse enemy reconnaissance. There was also the possibility of deceiving one's opponent by emitting false signals traffic, which the enemy 'Y Service' (radio intercept service) would intercept. In much the same way that the ancients would count the campfires of an enemy army, by World War II one could count the number of radios on the air, and, by the urgency of their operation and movement, forecast intentions without necessarily being able to understand the language used. Thus we find dedicated teams of radio operators driving round deserts and the fields of south-east England, reproducing the noise and chatter of colossal phantom armies, which double agents had already led the Nazi hierarchy to believe existed.

The third means of deceiving the enemy was the use of psychological warfare, through what came to be known as 'Black propaganda'. The British conducted a masterly campaign, planting rumours and gossip among the German soldiery and command and even setting up radio stations and newspapers purporting to be the work of the Germans themselves. These factors combined to form a symphony of lies, delivered and orchestrated by the highest and most secret branches of the Allied command structure, ones that few people knew of and even fewer appreciated or understood.

True enough, no one doubts that the liberation of Europe was a result of the fighting men at the sharp end of the conflict. Deception was by no means a guarantor of success, and many cover plans failed to work, went unnoticed, or were completely ignored by the German military and High Command. In many cases, Allied commanders were distrustful of their purpose and

PREFACE

suspicious of the practitioners, seeing them as diverting resources away from the real task at hand. However, even in those cases where deception plans gave no tangible benefit, neither did they do any harm.

It is no coincidence that for the Western Allies the biggest turning points in the war against Hitler – El Alamein, the *Torch* landings in North Africa, the invasions of Sicily and Normandy – were all backed by elaborate and well-executed cover plans, which were promoted by the double agents. This is not to say that these operations would have failed without them, but victory would almost certainly have come at a much higher price: perhaps even too high a price.

On a personal note, I was introduced to this subject by my father, who did important work during the 1980s in helping to document Kent's World War II invasion and anti-aircraft defences. Although principally interested in ack-ack, my father came across an interesting story about how a decoy for Chatham naval base was built on the marshes near the Isle of Sheppey. A man who had worked at the site during the war explained that at night they would use lighting effects to simulate doors opening and closing, and other breaches of the blackout instructions. The Germans would see these pinpricks of light and deduce they were over their target. Once the bombs started to rain down, the operator would ignite large tanks of oil and other flammable material. Water would be sprayed onto the fires to create large plumes of steam, and give German pilots the impression that firemen were trying to extinguish the blaze. Adding to my fascination with this ruse, my father then told me about a double agent called *Garbo* who tricked the Germans into thinking the D-Day invasion was due to arrive at Calais rather than Normandy. After several years of research I know that this story was just the tip of the iceberg. I have remained fascinated by this subject ever since, and hope this work will help introduce others to the world of double cross and deception during World War II.

Much of the secret material relating to this subject has now been declassified by the British Security Service, but it must be remembered that this was not a story that the authorities wanted told. Not realizing that Soviet spies like Kim Philby had long since betrayed the secret of Britain's wartime deceptive apparatuses, the story of double cross, deception and code-breaking remained a closely guarded secret after the war. The memoirs of Churchill, Eisenhower and Montgomery all allude to certain stratagems employed to hoodwink the Nazis, but with conflict against the Soviets a real possibility, they did not want to reveal their most secretive tricks of the trade.

DECEIVING HITLER

Until the dam began to burst in the 1970s, only a handful of deception operations trickled into the public consciousness. One of the most well-known operations was told in the film *The Man Who Never Was* (1956) based on the book by Ewen Montagu, one of the real planners behind Operation *Mincemeat*, the planting of bogus information on a corpse left adrift off Spain. Another ruse, albeit told with great artistic licence, led to the making of *I Was Monty's Double* (1958), a film starring M. E. Clifton James, who reprised his real wartime role for the cameras. The first inkling that double agents might have been used came with *The Eddie Chapman Story* (1953). The actual spy involved, Eddie Chapman, came out with his own version of events – *The Real Eddie Chapman Story* (1966) – which found its way onto movie screens as *Triple Cross* in the same year.

The sense that something big was waiting to come out was increased by the arrival of *The Counterfeit Spy* (1971), by journalist and ex-Black propagandist Denis Sefton Delmer. This ostensibly introduced the world to the career of the double agent *Garbo*, whom Delmer gave the codename *Cato*. In 1972 the former MI5 officer and Oxford don J. C. Masterman circumvented officialdom by releasing his book *The Double-Cross System* in America. This account was originally written as an official report at the end of the war. In it Masterman detailed the extent to which the British 'Twenty Committee' controlled Nazi espionage and double crossed their controllers. The report also made mention of one of the Twenty Committee's biggest 'customers', the London Controlling Section, the organization responsible for global deception policy.

In 1974 the Yugoslav Dusko Popov released his highly readable memoirs, *Spy/Counterspy*. Although certain names were changed, and certain situations somewhat enhanced to fit Popov's billing as 'the real James Bond', they fleshed out Masterman's story. However, many of Masterman's former colleagues saw his publication as a betrayal of trust and they retained their silence. The most partisan champion of 'the deceivers' was David Mure, a former member of the A Force deception organization in the Middle East. Mure was scathing of Masterman and highly prejudiced against what he called the 'private armies' of the security services and others. Despite this bias, which with the hindsight of several decades does appear unfortunate, Mure's book *Master of Deception* (1980) is useful. Partly based on the unpublished memoirs of Dudley Clarke, the commander of A Force, it contains a foreword by Noël Wild, Clarke's one time deputy and also head of deception on Eisenhower's staff at the time of the Normandy invasions. Mure's work is complemented by the excellent work *Trojan Horses* by Martin Young and

PREFACE

Robbie Stamp. This contained numerous important accounts given by those actively involved in deception, including David Strangeways, the implementer of the D-Day deceptions.

Over the course of a decade, more and more information came to light about the secret war – much unearthed by the trailblazing author Nigel West and, more officially, through the publication of Professor Hinsley's multi-volume official history, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (1979–90). The fourth volume of this work is particularly useful and is complemented by Michael Howard's volume *Strategic Deception in the Second World War*, publication of which was much delayed by the Thatcher government. More recently, since the turn of the millennium, interest in deception and the double cross system has continued to grow. The most important publication in this period came from Thaddeus Holt in *The Deceivers* (2004). This weighty tome sets out, really for the first time, the American angle on deception, and is absolutely essential from that point of view.

In terms of information on double agents, we have benefited from the declassification of a number of Security Service documents, in particular the Guy Liddell diaries. Although occasionally 'weeded' for information still considered too sensitive for our knowledge, the minutes from Twenty Committee meetings and the dossiers of individual double agents are also available. Many of these have been consulted for this work and give a great level of detail and wonderful colour to the agents' stories.

Following the release of this information, it is time to revisit the story of the double agents and their controllers in detail and to show how, through the formation of the Twenty Committee in 1941, the British double cross system expanded, was copied in other theatres, and ultimately became the most profitable means by which Allied deception planners could sell their lies to German Intelligence. Without the availability of double agents like *Garbo*, *Tricycle*, *Tate* and *Brutus*, it is unlikely the deceivers would have attained anything like as much success as they did. In return, without dedicated organizations providing the double agents with material to feed back to their controllers, none of the named cases would have survived very long without their duplicity being discovered. For that reason, the value of the double agents must be reasserted and their activities set in the proper context.

Although the arts of deception and double cross were practised by other nations during the war, the aim of this book in covering the origins of the double cross, the deception agencies and how they developed from

DECEIVING HITLER

detering the German invasion of England to protecting the Allies' eventual return to the Continent, means that there is a focus on activities in Britain and by the British during the war. In keeping with the informal atmosphere of the wartime secret services, names, once introduced, are given informally without accompanying rank. Also in keeping with the style of the day, the terms MI6 or SIS refer to the British Secret Intelligence Service and are used interchangeably throughout for colour and accuracy.

PROLOGUE

ON 24 SEPTEMBER 1942 A top-level secret meeting took place in London. Among those present were the Directors of Intelligence of the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. The guardian of the Enigma secret and head of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was also present, along with the head of the Security Service's B Division, who was responsible for counter-espionage in the United Kingdom. Sitting before them was an immaculately dressed colonel in his mid-forties. Known simply as the Controlling Officer, Johnny Bevan had been charged with masterminding a global deception policy with the aim of hoodwinking the Axis into wasting their resources and manpower by whatever means came his way. Like his predecessor in the post, the Controlling Officer had some inkling that the secret services had some special means of feeding information to the German intelligence service, the Abwehr.

However, where his predecessor had been kept in the dark about the true nature of this 'special means', Bevan was about to be told. Like the breaking of the Enigma code, it was one of the greatest secrets of the war. As he listened, first to the head of the SIS and then to Guy Liddell, the head of B Division, it became clear that the Allies had a major advantage over the Germans in this war. In addition to being able to read the secret codes of the Abwehr and other enemy organizations, the Security Service, MI5, firmly believed it controlled the only active German spy rings then operating in the United Kingdom. If Bevan wanted to dupe the German intelligence services, there was a pool of well-established double agents on hand to carry out his bidding.

How this had come about, and why Germany's spies were now working for the British, was quite a story. As Bevan quietly took this information in, Liddell explained to him how everything had begun with an agent he called *Snow*.

SNOW

ACCORDING TO HIS security file, Arthur George Owens was a shifty-looking, short, bony-faced, Welshman.¹ Born in 1899, Owens had emigrated from the United Kingdom and become a naturalized Canadian, only to return to Britain in 1933. On paper he lived in Hampstead with a wife and son, but in truth Owens was a bit of a rolling stone, with a taste for Scotch and a string of infidelities to his name. By trade he was part electrical engineer, part travelling salesman. Always on the move, often left short of cash by his vices, Owens' descent into the world of espionage was both predictable and necessary.

On returning to the United Kingdom from Canada Owens obtained a post with a company that had contracts with the Admiralty. Through business he travelled to Belgium, Holland, and occasionally Germany. After these trips abroad, Owens would often pass technical information back to the Admiralty. In 1936 Owens decided to profit from this arrangement and asked for payment in return for future reports. With the authorities in agreement, Owens was passed from his usual contacts in the Naval Intelligence Division (NID) to Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and given the codename *Snow*.²

It was not a happy union.

When Owens was introduced to his case officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Peal, something in their chemistry collided. In his dealings with Peal, Owens developed a very real hatred of the English and came to think of himself as a Welsh Nationalist. In revenge for centuries of abuse against his homeland, Owens determined to pull one over the old foe and, towards the end of 1936, he developed ambitions of becoming a German spy.

Considering his contacts, Owens thought he would be highly attractive to the German secret service. In addition to his work for the Admiralty, he made regular trips to restricted RAF stations and had friends – also Welsh Nationalists – working in secure locations such as the Short Brothers works at Rochester in Kent.

On the pretext of picking up German girlfriends for weekend flings, he started attending a social club for German ex-patriots on Cleveland Terrace, Bayswater.³ The club was managed by Peter Brunner, who was the London

representative of Captain Hans Dierks, an Abwehr officer stationed in Hamburg. Owens befriended Brunner, telling him about his trips to Hamburg and Cologne and his love of the country, and, of course, the local *Mädchen* (local women). The only regret the Welshman expressed was that he often spent his evenings abroad sitting in dreary hotel rooms companionless and bored out of his skull. To alleviate this, he asked Brunner if he could put him in touch with some friends of his to keep him company when working abroad.

Brunner took the hint, and before long told Owens that he knew an engineer called Konrad Pieper who would be eager to meet him next time he travelled to Brussels. Convinced that Pieper would turn out to be an Abwehr recruiter, Owens checked into the Metropole Hotel in the Belgian capital. He met Pieper and was rather cryptically informed that he might like to go to Hamburg and contact his firm, A. G. Hellermann, and to speak with a certain Herr Müller about making a business deal.

In the world of espionage using such double speak was standard fare. Everyone stuck to elaborate cover stories, because they never knew who was listening or if they were being set up as the victim in a 'sting'. What if Owens was a 'plant' by the British secret service? What if there had been a terrible misunderstanding by Brunner and all Owens wanted was a drinking buddy after all?

Owens travelled to Hamburg and met with Müller, in fact an alias of Brunner's controller, Hans Dierks. Owens volunteered his services and, despite some misgivings that the Welshman was too good to be true and might well be a British secret service plant, Dierks accepted him into his nest. At first Dierks kept Owens at arm's length, never meeting him on his home turf of Hamburg, but always abroad. However, after socializing with Owens, Dierks came to respect the Welshman's seemingly absolute hatred of the English race – a hatred born of rivalries that people not of the British Isles might find surprisingly intense.

The one problem Dierks had with Owens was his information on naval matters – the Abwehr man's primary concern – was not up to scratch. Owens was far more useful as a source on the RAF, so Dierks passed his case over to a colleague in the summer of 1937.

The new contact introduced himself as Dr Rantzau, the managing director of the import-export Reinhold & Company. He was in fact Captain Nikolaus Ritter, Leiter of I.Luft, Hamburg, that is to say Chief of Air Intelligence in the Abwehr's Section I (espionage department). Ritter was in his early forties and had learned his English in a ten-year stint in New York where he had worked in the textile industry. When a slump had put an end

DECEIVING HITLER

to his business, Ritter was scooped up by the Abwehr and – despite an almost complete lack of technical training – was put in charge of air intelligence matters relating to Britain and America.⁴

The ‘Doctor’ took Owens out for dinner at the luxurious Vier Jahreszeiten Hotel and then went onto the Münchener Kindl for a drink. It was here that Ritter made his approach to Owens, offering him cash in return for intelligence. Pleading that he was short of cash for various ‘domestic’ reasons, Owens accepted the German offer and was thereafter codenamed *Johnny*.⁵

All the while Owens had been ingratiating himself with the Abwehr, he continued to meet his MI6 case officer. Either from intuition, or from a reciprocal dislike of the Welshman, Peal became suspicious of Owens and asked Scotland Yard’s ‘Special Branch’ to monitor him. Intercepting the Welshman’s mail, in September 1936 Special Branch came across an innocuous letter to ‘Dr Rantzau’ asking for a meeting in Cologne. What attracted the censor’s attention was the address given for this Rantzau – PO Box 629 in Hamburg’s Central Post Office. This was a known Abwehr pick up address.⁶

When Owens next went abroad, Peal had him tailed by British agents. They followed him and gained proof that he was meeting with the Abwehr. In turn, it appears Owens must have noticed the tail, or had a well-developed sixth sense for sniffing out trouble. On his return to the United Kingdom he was scheduled to be brought in for questioning, but before this could happen, Owens went to Peal and confessed to being in contact with the German secret service. This was quite an admission, but Owens was ever so slightly economical with the truth.

He told Peal that he had approached a German engineer named Pieper from whom he had been buying secrets. Unfortunately the material provided was not of sufficient quality to be of much use to him, so Owens soon found himself unable to pay Pieper’s expenses. When he told the German of this, Pieper invited Owens to make money by working for the Abwehr. Owens had wrestled with his conscience, but ultimately decided to go along with Pieper in order to best serve the British secret service.

Of course, Peal – rightly – did not believe any of this, and told Owens he was going to turn him over to be prosecuted. Bold as brass, Owens defied Peal to do this, threatening to expose his contacts with the British secret service in his trial. To avert publicity, Peal allowed Owens to escape with a formal caution and continued to allow him to come and go as he pleased. Behind the scenes, the MI6 man ensured that all the Welshman’s mail was intercepted.

Owens went back to Hamburg and met with Ritter without revealing his brush with the authorities. Ritter began organizing training sessions for Owens on his visits, including a course on using wireless transmitters. Other than that, Ritter treated Owens to nights out in Hamburg's infamous red light district – the Reeperbahn.

Here Owens explored his fascination with the seedier side of German life under Hitler. His favourite nightspot was the Valhalla Klub. In the club every table had a telephone. If you liked the look of someone on another table you simply called them up and invited them over for a drink. It wasn't long before Owens had a particular favourite among the girls who frequented the club, to whom he frequently poured out his heart and soul over his favourite tipple.

In the background, the Abwehr was watching Owens like a hawk. To prevent there being any risk to security, after one of Owens' visits the pretty blonde was arrested by Abwehr officers and told to leave town in a hurry. She was replaced by the blonde-haired 'Ingrid' – a trusted Abwehr agent. When Owens next went to the club, Ingrid was sitting on the next table and telephoned the Welshman. Owens replied and from that point on Ingrid became his regular Hamburg girlfriend.⁷

Meanwhile, Owens continued to report to MI6 and somewhat boastfully revealed that he had been appointed the top German agent in England and had been promised a radio transmitter by the Germans.⁸ In the build-up to war he claimed to have raised a network of 15 sub-agents or informers. Although the British thought this list was purely notional, it is clear that Owens was somehow getting information from at least 35 different sources.

At the Abwehr's request he also tried to contact the British Union of Fascists (BUF), planning to bring four secret transmitters into the country to transmit Black propaganda in the event of war. This idea soon died a death after the members he contacted made it quite clear that although they might be sympathetic to a fascist government's policies, they would never betray their own country in wartime.

In January 1939 the Abwehr stepped up its preparations for the coming war. Owens had been receiving radio training in Ritter's Hamburg apartment and although *Johnny* was not much of a radio operator – spending most of his time singing Welsh folk songs for the amusement of his operators – towards the end of the month, Ritter sent a wireless transmitter in a diplomatic pouch to the German embassy in London. The transmitter was concealed inside a harmless-looking suitcase and deposited at the cloakroom in London's Victoria train station. The receipt for this piece of left luggage was posted to Owens.

DECEIVING HITLER

On 7 February, the Welshman retrieved the radio and took it to Special Branch for them to look over. They in turn gave it to MI6, who dismantled it and then could not work out how to put the thing back together again. Farcically, MI5 had to be called in and their specialists had a go. The MI5 men did manage to fix the set and then handed it back to Owens who, puzzled at why the British had not wanted to hang on to the set themselves, went and hid it at the Kingston home of his mistress, Lily Funnell.

Over the coming months Europe began to slide towards the abyss of war. Having given up the Sudetenland to Germany in October 1938, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist when Hitler ordered the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. That same month Hitler denounced an earlier non-aggression pact between Germany and Poland. Reading the writing on the wall, Britain and France – shamed out of appeasement by the fall of Czechoslovakia – pledged their support for Poland if it was attacked.

August 1939 would be the last month of peace in Europe for almost six years. As the Germans secretly negotiated to keep the Soviet Union out of the war, they also drew up their plans to attack Poland. Knowing that Britain had threatened to intervene and that war between the two countries might soon be upon them, Owens was called to Hamburg on 11 August for one last meeting – or ‘*treff*’, as meetings between agents and their German case officers were known.

Earlier in 1939 Owens had left his wife and moved in with Lily Funnell. According to Owens’ German paymaster, Ritter, ‘Lily was blonde like *Johnny*’s wife, but that was the only thing they had in common. While his wife was small, calm and affected, Lily was large and robust, a whole head taller and a number of years younger than *Johnny*, merry, intelligent and with a great deal of natural sex appeal. *Johnny* was obviously in love with her.’⁹ On this last peacetime meeting, Owens took Lily and a friend of his, Alexander Myner, whom he thought had potential as an Abwehr recruit. On 18 August, while the party was away, Owens’ long-suffering wife called in at Scotland Yard and reported that her husband had tried to recruit their son and various friends as German spies. This let the cat out of the bag with the authorities, and would have been the end of the case had Owens been apprehended on his return to England. Fortunately, as it turned out, when Owens returned on 23 August the port authorities missed him and he was not detained.

On the same day that Owens returned to the United Kingdom, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed in Moscow between Nazi Germany

and the Soviet Union. This non-aggression pact, with a secret clause to partition Poland, paved the way for Hitler to attack. On 1 September the German Army broke through the borders into Poland and on 3 September British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that Britain had declared war on Germany. Thus began the second great European war of the 20th century.

XX

With the outbreak of war all German and Austrian nationals in the United Kingdom were required to report to their nearest police station. In September 1939 there were 71,600 enemy aliens registered and in addition to this number MI5 had identified almost 400 other suspects it wanted to intern at the commencement of hostilities. To sift the good from the bad, the suspects were processed by special one-man tribunals and put into three categories: A, B and C. Those marked Category A were to be detained immediately; B were subject to certain travel restrictions and were not allowed to travel more than short distances without a permit; while the majority of individuals were labelled category 'C' and were left at liberty.¹⁰

In 1914 such a measure had crippled the German espionage ring in Britain. On the first day of the war – in fact at dawn on the day Britain declared war – a fledgling MI5 had arrested every German spy in Britain, leaving the Kaiser's armies blind and allowing the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to cross the English Channel unnoticed. However, in 1939 the dragnet failed to deliver the same results and a handful of spies were left at large.

Principal among these was Arthur Owens. Having arrived back in the United Kingdom, Owens had begun radio transmissions to Germany in the early hours of 28 August. Owens was still puzzled as to why the authorities had given him his transmitter back. Had they done so hoping he would incriminate himself by using it? When sending out his initial messages, Owens was curious to see if he was intercepted. He wasn't – but he did not know that. He believed the authorities were just setting a trap for him – giving him enough rope to hang himself with.

Therefore, again hedging his bets, on 4 September Owens telephoned his contact at Special Branch, Detective Inspector Gagen, and asked for a meeting at Waterloo train station. At their rendezvous the inspector served a detention order on Owens under Emergency Regulation 18(b) and took him into custody.¹¹ From his cell in Wandsworth Prison, Owens asked to see

DECEIVING HITLER

his MI6 case officer, Edward Peal, and also a MI5 officer who had followed his case over the years, Thomas Argyll Robertson.

Known by colleagues informally as Tommy, or more commonly 'TAR' after his initials, Robertson had joined MI5 in 1933. A graduate of Sandhurst, his recruitment was perhaps typical of the service: he was friendly with the son of the head of MI5, Vernon Kell. In 1939 Robertson was head of a sub-section of MI5's B Division, the branch responsible for counter-espionage. His own sub-section, B1, was concerned chiefly with German espionage.

By all accounts Robertson was a very personable fellow, non-judgemental with a natural ability to read people and situations. He was extremely handsome and was most often seen in a military uniform, by preference in the tartan trousers worn by the Seaforth Highlanders – the regiment he had served in before joining the Security Service.¹² One often told story that perhaps best demonstrates his manner is how, a few years before the war, he got a communist mole, John King, drunk at the Bunch of Grapes pub in the Brompton Road, Knightsbridge. When the suspected communist passed out from drink, Robertson took the keys to his safe from him, broke into his office and seized a number of incriminating papers.¹³

In contrast to his relationship with Peal, Owens appeared to get on quite well with Robertson, and so the Welshman offered him a deal. In return for his liberty, Owens would reveal the location of his hidden transmitter, thus enabling the British to use it to broadcast misinformation to the Abwehr. Robertson agreed and Owens revealed that his radio was hidden in the home of his mistress in Kingston.

Owens' motivation at this stage is worth considering for a moment. Was he, as MI5 believed, a double agent, playing for both sides but mainly siding with the British, or was Owens in fact a triple agent? By this we mean he was primarily a German agent, but one who had gone to the British and convinced them he was working for them (thus a double agent), but who had done so only in order to carry on working for the Germans under the very nose of MI5. It may have even been the case that he was not working to any grand scheme, but was an opportunist who would shift allegiances as and where necessary in order to secure his liberty and his next pay day. This last hypothesis may be closest to the truth.¹⁴ But regardless of the reasons behind it, the transmitter was brought to Owens' cell in Wandsworth and set up for broadcast to Germany. For MI5 it was to prove a pivotal moment in the course of World War II.¹⁵

XX

Before describing the first message broadcast to the Germans, one should be aware of a certain fact concerning Morse code. To the trained ear, as Morse code is transmitted, the style in which it is tapped out can be as distinctive as a person's handwriting. It would be certain that whoever taught Owens how to use the radio set would also be able to identify Owens' hand as it tapped out the message. The British were aware of this, but they did not want Owens sending the messages himself. They instead recruited a prison warder who mimicked Owens' Morse style.¹⁶

From his cell in Wandsworth Owens dictated the following cryptic message to be broadcast to Germany:

MUST MEET IN HOLLAND AT ONCE. BRING WEATHER CODE.
RADIO TOWN AND HOTEL WALES READY.

When Robertson asked for an explanation of this cryptic message, Owens told him that his primary mission was to transmit meteorological information vital for the use of the German Air Force and Navy. Now that war had been declared, he needed a shortened version of the code, which would allow him to spend less time on air and reduce the risk of his transmissions being picked up by British listening devices. Owens had also been asked to recruit sub-agents from the Welsh Nationalist Party. Owens needed to travel to Europe in order to meet Ritter and obtain funds and further instructions. Robertson accepted this explanation, and when Ritter replied, suggesting Brussels as the venue of their next meeting, the MI5 officer allowed Owens to go free.

On 15 September 1939 the Welshman crossed the Channel to Rotterdam and went on to Antwerp, where he met Dr Ritter in an Abwehr safe house. At the meeting Owens told Ritter that he had recruited a promising Welshman named Gwilym Williams, a former Swansea police inspector and an ardent Welsh Nationalist. Ritter appeared keen and asked *Johnny* to bring Williams over to the Continent on 21 October for industrial sabotage training.

At this meeting in Antwerp, Owens introduced Williams to Ritter along with someone called the 'Commander' and Major Brasser of Air Intelligence. The real identity of the 'Commander' was Kapitänleutenant Witzke, head of the Hamburg Abwehr's Section II – sabotage department. He took Williams under his wing and interviewed him.

At 6ft 2in (1.88m), Williams was an imposing figure. He explained that he was an activist in the Welsh National movement who had retired from the police force that January. He had served in the artillery during World

DECEIVING HITLER

War I and claimed to be an explosives expert. He was also – remarkably for a man who was illiterate when he left school – a keen linguist, proficient in 17 languages or dialects. He told the Commander he was ready for action as soon as they could smuggle in equipment to him. The Commander indicated that this should not be a problem, as Belgian smugglers would be employed for the mission. Williams was gladly accepted into the fold and assigned the serial number A.3551. As a mark of his importance to Ritter he was given his own separate cover address in Brussels through which he could contact his controllers.¹⁷

In the excitement of his recruitment, Williams had omitted to mention one important fact. Through his gift for languages, he had also worked as a court interpreter and had come into contact with MI5. Working for the British Security Service under the codename *GW*, the former policeman was in fact a British spy!

Matters were to get worse for the Germans. Having decided that Williams was going to be used as a saboteur, they planned to use Owens as a messenger to their existing contacts in the United Kingdom. This was exactly what MI5's Tommy Robertson had hoped they would do.

Ritter also gave Owens £470 in banknotes and four detonators concealed in a block of wood.¹⁸ His instructions were to bank the money and await instructions about recruiting more agents. He was also offered £50,000 if he could find someone who would pilot one of the RAF's latest aircraft back to Germany – clearly an attempt to obtain the Supermarine Spitfire fighter, which had come into service in 1938.

Owens was also asked to get in touch with another agent still operating in the Liverpool area called Eschborn, codenamed A.3527. He was given a message to pass on to Eschborn from Captain Dierks, which was contained in some microphotographs hidden behind a postage stamp on a letter.

Owens was also instructed about receiving payments. At the railway station on the way to Antwerp a man introduced himself to Owens as Ritter's secretary and was joined by a woman. No names were given. The couple told *Snow* he was going to be paid by a woman who lived near Bournemouth. The woman would either hand him the cash or put it through his letter-box. She might meet him in the street in Kingston and would probably be wearing a fur.

Sure enough, when Owens returned to England, Robertson revealed that two envelopes, each containing £20, had arrived for him. Although Robertson suspected that these had been posted by a foreign diplomat resident in London, without any scruple Owens told Robertson all about the female agent U.3529 in Bournemouth.

Searches were made in the sorting offices of Bournemouth and Southampton for envelopes similar to the ones addressed to Owens, but the German agent appeared to cover her tracks well, using post boxes in a variety of locations.

In the end it was the last batch of four £5 notes that led MI5 to the German paymaster. Tommy Robertson, his assistant Richmond Stopford, Owens and his mistress Lily – who had also been served a detention order – sat down together and looked at the banknotes. On the back of the notes was written ‘S&Co’, which Lily Funnell deduced meant the Selfridges department store on Oxford Street. In 1939 a £5 note was a significant amount of money and so Stopford went to the store to see if any of the cashiers could remember handling the notes.¹⁹

As luck would have it, one of the cashiers at Selfridges could clearly remember that an elderly foreign lady had come into the store and asked to exchange five single £1 notes for a £5 note. Not only had the lady made this unusual request, she had placed an order at the store and the cashier remembered making a note of her name and address. The tip was followed up and by the end of November it led them to a woman living in Bournemouth named Mrs Mathilde Krafft. She had avoided being picked up because she had married an Englishman and had become a naturalized British citizen in 1924. When Krafft went visiting a steamship company, MI5 had two girls from Selfridges identify her as the lady that had changed the £5 notes.²⁰

At first the authorities did not arrest her, but put her under surveillance in order that she might lead them to other spies. In due course her intercepted mail revealed that she was corresponding with an Editha Dargle in Copenhagen, a city known to be used by the Abwehr as a forward base. MI5 called in MI6 and asked them to investigate Dargle. Unfortunately MI6 went to the Danish police, who bungled the operation by confronting Dargle directly about Krafft. Dargle denied everything, and sent a letter to Krafft warning her not to use this address again.²¹ With no further use for her, Krafft, alias *Claudius*, was interned at Holloway Prison. She was not released until 1944.²²

In addition to selling out Krafft, Owens handed Robertson the microphotographs intended for Abwehr agent Eschborn. When developed, they revealed a miniaturized questionnaire of intelligence queries, which Eschborn was meant to complete. Tommy Robertson decided to send Owens to meet Agent A.3527 as ordered, telling him not to mention anything about his work for MI5 and to see what happened. Owens made contact with the man and then passed his address on to MI5.

DECEIVING HITLER

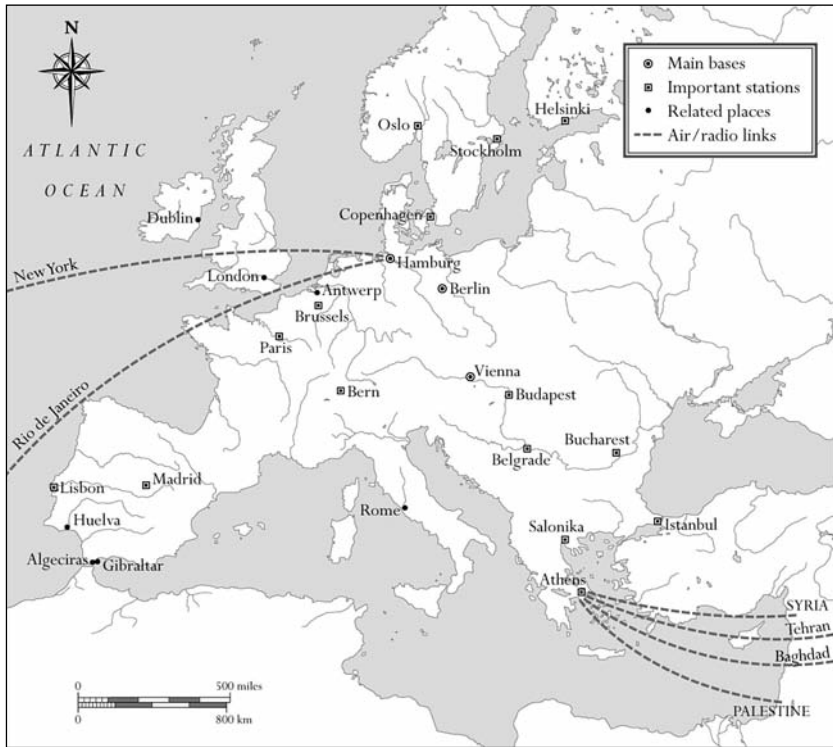
After Owens' visit, Robertson paid the German spy a call. Eschborn turned out to be one of three brothers recruited by the Abwehr in Cologne the previous year (1938). Eschborn was a Manchester businessman of German–English parentage but entirely sympathetic to the British cause. Suspecting this, the Germans coerced him and one of his younger brothers into working for them by threatening reprisals against the third brother who remained in Germany. What made him so valuable to the Abwehr was his expertise in microphotography. It was hoped that he could photograph and reduce the reports of other agents working in Britain to help get them back to Germany undetected.²³

Interestingly enough, following a different enquiry into German activity, Eschborn had already been brought in for questioning by MI5 at the beginning of the war. However, despite having virtually confessed that he was a spy, he had been left at large.²⁴ This time Robertson enrolled Eschborn as a very willing double agent, dubbing him *Charlie*. Robertson decided not to tell *Charlie* about the *Snow* case, hoping that he and Owens would each check up on one another's bonafides. *Charlie's* brother, Agent 3528, was also at large in the United Kingdom. When he was brought in for questioning he turned out to be far less trustworthy. He was classified Category A and detained for the duration.

It is important to note that Owens' cooperative spirit towards MI5 at this stage did not mark something of a turnaround in his loyalties. Owens was coldly trading information to MI5 solely to keep his liberty. If other German spies were captured – well, too bad for them. Owens was making a tidy profit out of his illicit trade and nothing could be allowed to get in the way of that.

Not only had Owens sold out the Abwehr's three last remaining independent spies in the United Kingdom, he was to cause untold damage to the Abwehr's cypher security. While Owens was gallivanting off on his missions, he had been given a code by the Germans. This was passed to the trusty prison warder operating his wireless set, who began to get a feel for the hand of the German radio operator in Hamburg. The warder then began to distinguish between the operator dealing with Owens and those dealing with other communications. From the clues provided by the operation of Owens' radio set the British intercept organization, the Radio Security Service (RSS) based at Hanslope Park near Bletchley was able to make a number of important breakthroughs in the whereabouts of German spies and the codes they were using. The chief among these was traffic between the Abwehr's Hamburg station and a ship called the *Theseus* in the North Sea.

ABWEHR STATIONS AND AREAS OF INFLUENCE



Posing as the Swedish ship *Hese*, the Nazi vessel was working off the Norwegian coast, transmitting weather reports and making contact with agents in Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. In April 1940, there was also traffic detected between it and a transmitter somewhere in Eire.²⁵

The Abwehr relied on two principal types of codes. Agents in the field like Owens enciphered their own messages by hand; however, messages from Hamburg relayed to Abwehr HQ at 76/78 Tirpitzufer, Berlin, were enciphered by machine – this was the so-called Enigma traffic.

The codes provided by the Abwehr for Owens' use were passed to the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) at Bletchley Park. There they were attacked by a group under veteran code breaker Oliver Strachley until the first decrypts were issued on 14 April 1940. From that point on, any German spy working in the United Kingdom was liable to be intercepted by RSS and have their messages read by Strachley's group. The intelligence derived from this source – known as ISOS (Intelligence Section, Oliver Strachley) – could then be passed to the Security Service to help track down the spy.

DECEIVING HITLER

Later, a separate group under Bletchley's Dillwyn Knox attacked the Abwehr's Enigma traffic between the various Abwehr outstations and Berlin. On several occasions Knox's group – which was codenamed ISK (Intelligence Service Knox) – was able to follow a message sent to Hamburg and then on to Berlin. By comparing the original message sent to Hamburg against the one arriving in Berlin, ISK was helped in its quest to understand the operation of the German cipher machine, allowing the first ISK transcript to be released on Christmas Day 1941.²⁶

XX

In January 1940 the Abwehr recruited a new agent in Britain – or at least they thought they did. In fact MI5 had beaten them to it again, and a new double agent was added to the books of the British Security Service. This time the culprit was Bernie Kiener. A student born in Britain to a German mother, Kiener had grown up in Germany then returned to England in 1938. There he lodged with a German, who was in Britain as the representative of a Hamburg chemical firm. Günter Schutz was in fact representing the Hamburg branch of the Abwehr, and was involved in what he called 'commercial intelligence' – in other words industrial espionage. During his weekend breaks, Schutz would go up and down the country photographing various industrial sites, often accompanied by Kiener.

A week before the war broke out Schutz mysteriously packed his bags and quit England for pastures new. Kiener heard nothing more from his former flatmate until January 1940 when he received a letter from Schutz, inviting him to the Continent where he had a little proposition for him. Suspecting that Schutz's proposal would involve recruiting him as a spy, Kiener went to the police and explained everything to them. The police put him in touch with MI5 who asked Kiener to go to Antwerp and see what Schutz actually wanted. Kiener agreed and found himself recruited into the Abwehr with orders to report on developments in aviation, air defence and air raid damage using high-quality secret ink. Further instructions would be sent to him in microphotographs hidden in the punctuation marks of official letters from a Belgian firm by which he was supposedly engaged.

Kiener returned to the United Kingdom and dutifully reported back to MI5. He was engaged by Tommy Robertson as a double agent and given the codename *Rainbow*. In April *Rainbow* was called back to the Continent again, and this time was given new emergency cover addresses in Switzerland and

Yugoslavia. Clearly something was about to happen that would rule Antwerp out of the equation as a safe meeting point for spies.²⁷

The advice given to *Rainbow* confirmed similar warnings given to *Snow*. In February of that year the Welshman had been warned not to be on the Continent in April. MI5 took this to mean that something was going to happen that would affect Holland and Belgium's neutrality – as these were Owens' cover addresses on the Continent. In order to force the Germans' hand, MI5 instructed Owens to insist on meeting Ritter in Brussels on 6 April.

The meeting took place as agreed and removed any doubt that something big was about to occur. At the meeting Ritter asked Owens to procure for him another recruit to be trained in sabotage. There was, however, one small problem. Ritter hinted at a coming offensive and said that there would be no more *treffs* in Holland or Belgium. Owens suggested neutral Lisbon, but Ritter had other ideas. He suggested that the ever-resourceful Owens should get his hands on a boat and make arrangements to meet him in future out on the North Sea.

Owens returned to London and passed on the news. Robertson authorized the sea meeting to go ahead and managed to procure the trawler *Barbados* from the Fisheries Board. The sabotage recruit was another stooge out of MI5's stable. Codenamed *Biscuit*, Sam McCarthy was a conman with a long history of drug smuggling and petty larceny. He had worked for MI5 for some time as an informant and was viewed by the Security Service as being quite honest in his dealings with them. *Biscuit* was introduced to Owens in such a way that the Welshman had no idea he was an MI5 plant – something that led to an almighty mess.²⁸

On 19 May 1940 the trawler left Grimsby and headed out for the agreed rendezvous point just south of the Dogger Bank fishing area of the North Sea. What occurred onboard the ship is still uncertain, but according to *Biscuit* Owens got drunk and told him he really was a German spy and had been fooling the British all the time. *Biscuit* also got the impression that Owens knew he was a plant by MI5 and that made him panic.

On the evening of 21 May, two days before the rendezvous with Ritter was to take place, a German seaplane circled the trawler and flashed the agreed recognition signal. *Biscuit* saw this and was mortified. How on earth could the aircraft be two days ahead of schedule unless Owens had double crossed MI5?

In his mind the rules had changed. If Owens knew he was a British agent, he might hand him over to the Nazis to increase his own standing with them. Faced with the potential of torture and execution, *Biscuit* made an

DECEIVING HITLER

executive decision. He locked a hung-over Owens in his cabin and ordered the skipper of the boat to douse the lights and head back to Grimsby.

In the debriefing that followed, Owens had some very fast talking to do. He claimed that he had no idea that *Biscuit* was a plant and that he believed him to be a genuine German spy. Therefore he had played along with this idea, telling *Biscuit* that he was a real German spy too in order to protect himself. *Biscuit* on the other hand was entirely convinced that Owens was a German spy.

Had *Snow* triple-crossed MI5?

This option became increasingly likely as Owens was found in possession of certain documents that had not been given to him by his case officer. This really did call for some explaining by the Welshman. Again, Owens said he had procured some extra information on the side in order to convince *Biscuit* he was a genuine spy.²⁹

With the case seemingly blown, a submarine was sent out to the rendezvous point on 23 May. If Ritter appeared in a submarine, the British crew were to sink it; if a trawler appeared, they were to board it and try and capture Ritter. Unfortunately it was foggy and no one showed up.³⁰

In order to try and salvage something out of this mess, and to keep the radio channel to Hamburg alive, MI5 decided to give Owens the benefit of the doubt. The Welshman told Ritter that he had been at the agreed meeting point, but there had been too much fog – that at least was true. This was accepted by Ritter, who suggested meeting in Lisbon.

MI5 decided to send *Biscuit* alone to Lisbon to meet Ritter. Clearly they did not think the *Snow–Biscuit* double-act was ever going to work again. Arriving in the Portuguese capital posing as a wine importer, *Biscuit* gave a much changed account of the trawler fiasco, defending Owens, whom the Germans accused of being inefficient, and blaming the heavy fog for the failure. The Germans swallowed the story and got on with indoctrinating *Biscuit* into the ways of a spy. He was given an intelligence questionnaire, a radio set and \$3,000 in cash. In return, *Biscuit* handed over his identity card and a traveller ration book. These had been doctored by MI5 to include a certain flaw which would be noticeable to the eye of a trained policeman, should the Germans use *Biscuit's* documents as a specimen for other spies. According to MI5's Joan Miller, the flaw was that ID cards were folded by hand but through these doctored documents the Germans were led to believe they were machine-folded.³¹ The Germans jumped at the bait, copied the flaw and thus sealed the fate of many of their future spies.

In the meantime Owens had to restore trust with Robertson and explain where he had got hold of the unauthorized documents he was intending to give to Ritter. Again Owens dropped others in the soup in order to protect himself.

The information had been provided by a London restaurateur named William Rolph, a former MI5 officer during World War I. Owens had secretly recruited Rolph before his last *treff* with Ritter. Robertson and Stopford interviewed Rolph, who admitted his treachery but pleaded that he would cooperate fully. Robertson was not sure what to do about Rolph. If he arrested the spy and the Germans learned of this, they might think Owens was also blown. Alas, the question became academic when Rolph stuck his head inside the gas oven in his Dover Street flat. Rather than a verdict of suicide, which the Abwehr might find suspicious, MI5 had the coroner record that Rolph had died of a heart attack.³²

Snow had just had another close call ... but he was beginning to run out of lives.

XX

Increasing the tension at that time, dramatic events had been occurring as a backdrop to the botched trawler mission. The so-called Phoney War finally came to an end when Germany invaded Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940 – three days after Owens had last met Ritter in Brussels. On 10 May the British government collapsed after a no-confidence vote and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was replaced by Winston Churchill. Before Churchill had a chance to get his feet under the desk, that same day Germany invaded Luxembourg, Holland and Belgium. The German forces outflanked the Maginot Line and began a drive to the Channel coast, cutting the British Army off from the rest of France on 20 May – the day before *Biscuit* ordered the trawler to turn around.

On 24 May Hitler ordered his panzers to halt outside the port of Dunkirk and allowed the Luftwaffe the glory of annihilating the British and their allies. Quite why Hitler stayed his hand has often been the subject of speculation. Some have pointed out that his panzers had driven so far and so quickly, they needed a breathing space to allow support troops to catch up with them. Perhaps it was the boasting of Luftwaffe head, Hermann Göring, who convinced Hitler to let his aircraft finish the British off. Others have said that Hitler deliberately held back so as not to humiliate the British, with whom he hoped to negotiate a peace settlement once Europe was his.

DECEIVING HITLER

Regardless of the reason, the pause allowed more than 330,000 British, French and Allied troops to be rescued.

This small success in the face of so much gloom lifted spirits in the United Kingdom temporarily. Churchill had to remind the country on 4 June that ‘wars are not won by evacuations’. After Dunkirk the German offensive pressed on to Paris, which was occupied on 14 June. The rest of France fell 11 days later on 25 June – it was humiliated and dismembered by the victorious Nazi leader.

The loss of France marked perhaps the lowest point in the war for British morale. American journalist Mollie Panter-Downes reported the reaction to the news in the *New Yorker* describing London as ‘quiet as a village’.³³

Better informed than most on the developing crisis was Guy Liddell, of MI5’s B Division. On the evening of 22 May he dictated a diary entry to his secretary Margot Huggins that the news was ‘so bad it made me feel physically sick’. In the period between the opening of the German offensive and the fall of France his diary entries – once one of the most closely guarded secrets in the MI5 archive – reveal that MI5 was in utter confusion and turmoil. With thousands of refugees landing in Britain from France and elsewhere, the internment of Italians after Mussolini belatedly declared war on 10 June, and the continued internment of British fascists and right-wing sympathizers, MI5 was swamped with work. Things were not made easier by suspected ‘Fifth Column’ activities being reported by thousands of jumpy citizens. Everything – suspected parachutists, mysterious messages chalked onto telegraph poles, strange shapes appearing in the countryside to guide German bombers – was reported, almost all of which proved unfounded on investigation.

The jitters quickly spread to the Cabinet, who perceived that Britain’s secret services were in need of a big shake-up. On 10 June 1940 Churchill forced Sir Vernon Kell, the Director General and founder of MI5, into retirement. He was replaced nominally by the Head of B Division, Brigadier Jasper Harker, until Churchill appointed Sir David Petrie to the post in March 1941. In the meantime effective control of MI5 was given to the somewhat ‘abrasive’ former Cabinet minister Lord Swinton, the chairman of the Home Defence (Security) Executive. This had been formed primarily as a control measure against suspected ‘Fifth Columnist’ activity and was composed of representatives from the Home Office, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, MI5 and MI6.

In the shake-up Guy Liddell was promoted to head of B Division, becoming responsible for investigating espionage and counter-espionage

and for running the double agents. Born in 1892, Liddell was a veteran of the Great War and winner of the Military Cross. At the end of the war he joined Special Branch and concentrated on anti-communist subversion. In 1931 he moved to MI5's B Branch under Harker, where he became the acknowledged expert in Soviet and Nazi subversion.

An intensely private man, he was described by one MI5 employee, Joan Miller, as being one of the 'grey men' about the office. Miller remembered that he only ever seemed interested in music and was an accomplished cellist, having studied the instrument in Germany. She wondered if his manner was an act to put people off guard. Liddell apparently once told MI6 officer Kim Philby, 'I was born in an Irish fog and sometimes I think I have never emerged from it.' Philby was not taken in by this nebulous nonsense. He recorded that Liddell had a 'deceptively ruminative manner' and that 'from behind the façade of laziness his subtle and reflective mind played over a storehouse of photographic memories'. Such views of course may have been clouded by the passage of time and events. However Liddell may have come across to others, it is certainly true that in his promotion he became one of the most important figures in the secret war against the Nazis.³⁴

THE INVASION SPIES

FROM THE OUTBREAK OF EUROPEAN war in September 1939, when Germany attacked Poland, Hitler had gone on to conquer Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Holland and Belgium. On 25 June 1940 France surrendered, allowing itself to be partitioned, retaining only the southern portion of the country, which was governed by a puppet government. With the United States still maintaining its neutrality and the Soviet Union actively in league with Hitler over Poland, by July 1940 Britain stood truly alone with its empire against the bloated Nazi Reich.

The question on everyone's lips was, when would the invasion of Britain begin? If the British had transported over 300,000 men across the Channel at Dunkirk under attack from the Luftwaffe, what was to stop the Germans moving a similar number of men across under the eyes of the RAF? British troops had left all their equipment in France, and the fledgling Home Guard was preparing to contest the landing of German parachutists armed with little more than kitchen knives and hastily improvised spears ... or at least that was the common view of the situation around the world.

On 16 July Hitler had issued a directive to prepare for the invasion of the British Isles, which was to be codenamed *Seelöwe* (*Sealion*). On the evening of 19 July 1940, American CBS journalist William L. Shirer attended a session of the German Reichstag, during which Hitler gave a speech. In Shirer's opinion it was one of the Führer's finest – a dramatic final peace offer to the British people. It concluded:

In this hour I feel it to be my duty before my own conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain as much as elsewhere. I consider myself in a position to make this appeal since I am not the vanquished begging favours, but the victor speaking in the name of reason. *I can see no reason why this war must go on.*¹

Shirer left the session and drove to the radio studio in Berlin from where he planned to report the speech in his broadcast back to the United States.

While he was driving to the studio, in London another journalist was preparing to make a broadcast, this time on the BBC German Service. Denis

THE INVASION SPIES

Sefton Delmer was a journalist for the British *Daily Express* newspaper. Born to an Australian father in Berlin, Delmer had grown up in the German capital and had unique understanding of the German character and mentality. Working for the *Daily Express*, Delmer was the first British journalist to interview Hitler and was also acquainted with the likes of Göring, Goebbels and Himmler, having charted their rise to power through the 1930s.

As the war broke out, Delmer moved to Paris and then, as France began to fall, moved with the French government to Bordeaux. From there he managed to get on a liner bound for Britain. Looking for a job, the 36-year-old Delmer considered that he was too unfit for active service but might make himself useful in the secret service, in view of his background in Germany and his understanding of the German language and people. However, the very credentials that made him suitable for such a post led many to wonder if he was not a Nazi stooge himself and so the secret services kept their distance. Instead he was invited to work on the BBC's German broadcasts by Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information. His first broadcast was scheduled for the evening of Friday 19 July.

It thus became Delmer's first duty to respond to Hitler's triumphant Reichstag speech. This was a daunting prospect. Delmer had never spoken on the radio before, but he had a good idea how to put Hitler's nose out of joint – which was the agreed intention of the broadcast. Delmer sat before the microphone and, using his best deferential German, addressed the German nation:

Herr Hitler, you have on occasion in the past consulted me as to the mood of the British public. So permit me to render your Excellency this little service once again tonight. Let me tell you what we here in Britain think of this appeal of yours to what you are pleased to call our reason and common sense. *Herr Führer* and *Reichskanzler*, we hurl it right back at you, right in your evil-smelling teeth ...²

In Berlin various Nazi officers and officials were listening to the BBC broadcast intently. When they heard what Delmer said, Shirer recorded how their expressions drooped and that they could not believe their ears. One of the Germans shouted at Shirer in disbelief 'To turn down peace now? They're crazy.'

Delmer's speech caused quite a stir in Britain too, especially among the pacifists. The Socialist MP for Ipswich, Richard Stokes, was outraged at Delmer's broadcast, asking how an answer to Hitler could be made so

DECEIVING HITLER

quickly and without consultation with the Prime Minister. To Delmer's rescue came the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, who told Parliament that Delmer had the Cabinet's full backing. If he did, it was only with hindsight, for as Churchill noted in his history of World War II, the rejection of Hitler's offer was given by the BBC 'without any prompting from His Majesty's Government'.³

XX

The rejection of a peace offer was bad news for Hitler and his generals. By preference they would rather have done a deal with Britain in the summer of 1940 – one that would no doubt have allowed them, in the fullness of time, to take stock of their victories, re-arm and, above all, build a navy capable of matching Britain on the high seas.

In the back of their minds, those called upon to draw up the invasion plans knew that the United Kingdom's position in 1940 was perhaps not as perilous as at first it seemed. Certainly, if the Germans had been able to get across the Channel, land in large enough numbers and find a means of bringing over their tanks, they might have had a chance of establishing themselves. But Churchill was determined to contest every brick and blade of grass. On 14 July he made a radio broadcast designed as much for the ears of German planners as for his own population:

Should the invader come to Britain, there will be no placid lying down of the people in submission before him, as we have seen, alas, in other countries. We shall defend every village, every town, and every city. The vast mass of London itself, fought street by street, could easily devour an entire hostile army; and we would rather see London laid in ruins and ashes than that it should be tamely and abjectly enslaved.⁴

Undoubtedly the biggest problem facing the Germans was the Channel. The fall of France had been so swift that there had not been the time or the foresight to consider how to mount an invasion across the English Channel. If one considers the planning and resources that went into the Allied cross-Channel invasion in 1944, it is evident that the Nazis in 1940 could not match that commitment of resources.

Although it is possible to see across the Channel to France on a clear day, this famous narrow stretch of water had protected Britain for nearly a thousand years. It is a violent passage. Momentary calm soon gives way to

THE INVASION SPIES

perilous storm as the waters of the Atlantic and North Sea vie with each other for possession of the narrow Strait of Dover.

The ensuing Battle of Britain is famous for its aerial combat, but it should not be forgotten that the British had a 10:1 advantage in ships – the German Navy having been roughly handled during the invasion of Norway. If the Germans thought they could protect their invasion barges by laying a protective screen of sea mines, they were to be disappointed – the British had far more mine-sweepers than the Germans had mine-layers. In any case, in the struggle of life and death that the invasion would provoke, the Royal Navy would simply have sent its ships through the minefields one behind the other. Even if they lost a few destroyers in the process, enough warships would break into the lanes left clear for the invasion barges, where they would have run amok. The barges the Germans were proposing to use were designed for plodding up and down the Rhine, not crossing the open water of the Channel. The Royal Navy would not even have needed to open fire – the wake from its passing ships would have been enough to flood the German vessels and send them to the bottom of the sea.

As for the threat from the Luftwaffe, a swerving warship moving at full speed would be a hard target to hit from the air, in particular if the German pilot was also trying to dodge an oncoming Spitfire. At Dunkirk, those ships hit by German bombs were stationary, picking up soldiers. A battle in the Channel would not present the same opportunities.

The British also had the advantage of the radar network and of the fact that the RAF would be working most closely to its own bases. In the battle for France, the RAF had suffered badly from having to fly fairly long distances to engage the Germans. In fact by knocking France out of the war, Germany had done the RAF a big favour: now it could concentrate on home defence.

Perhaps equally crucially, the intelligence war now swayed heavily in Britain's favour. Like Caesar 2,000 years before him, Hitler's men could see the British Isles from France, but had little idea what was going on there and what was preparing to meet them on the invasion beaches.

The rapid success of the German Army had also left the Abwehr with a problem. At the beginning of May their forward bases for operations against the United Kingdom had been in cities like Copenhagen, Antwerp and Brussels – all of which had been overrun by the Blitzkrieg. Now – and unexpectedly – the Abwehr's supremo Admiral Canaris was told to prepare the way for the invasion by forming a brand new network of spies in the British Isles no later than 15 September. That left less than two months to

DECEIVING HITLER

recruit, train and infiltrate agents across the Channel – agents without whom the invading army would be largely blind.⁵

Canaris put Ritter in charge of Operation *Lena* – what became known as the Abwehr Spy Offensive in Great Britain. Rather than providing the day-to-day intelligence being reported by the likes of *Snow's* Welsh network, the *Lena* spies were to be trained as forward scouts for the invasion troops, locating potential invasion beaches and landing sites for parachutists and gliders. They were then to make contact with the invading forces and act as guides through the countryside.

Ritter set quite a narrow limit on the type of people suitable for this mission. They were to be aged between 20 and 30, in good physical health and possessed of some technical knowledge. The man chosen as talent scout for the mission was Dr Praetorius. Nicknamed the 'Pied Piper,' he trawled his net over the occupied territories looking for suitable candidates among hothead Nazi stooges and disaffected young men who could be blackmailed or otherwise cajoled into undertaking what would be a perilous mission.

The first team recruited consisted of four men: Karl Meier, a German by birth who had been raised in Holland and had been recruited through the Nazi Party earlier in 1940; Charles van den Kieboom, a Dutch YMC receptionist, and Kieboom's friend, Stoerd Pons, a former Dutch Army ambulance driver – both of whom were recruited after being threatened with being sent to a concentration camp for currency offences; and finally Jose Rudolf Waldberg, who had joined the Abwehr in 1937 and was a veteran of espionage missions against France.⁶

These four men were sent to Brussels where they were given a crash course in Morse, radio transmission, cryptology and techniques to help them recognize the various army units, vehicles, emplacements and aircraft they would encounter over the Channel. Of the four, only Meier received any in-depth training, with instruction on British Army structures and what sort of information might reveal the location of individual battalions and so on.

In late August the four men were taken to Boulogne on the Channel coast. On 2 September they were taken for lunch at a restaurant at Le Touquet and given their final instructions by Captain Jules Boeckel. They each had various missions. Waldberg was to report on the divisions and brigades on the south coast, on fortifications and on artillery emplacements, both coastal and anti-aircraft. The other three were given more general tasks, reporting on civilian morale and the RAF.

As they were loaded onto a trawler with their luggage, the four men must have had some sense of foreboding. Waldberg could not speak a word