

The War In The Ether

THE ROTE KAPELLE CASE: Denouement and Exploitation of Successes

~~Confidential~~-Part II

The "Rote Kapelle" was a Russian Spy Ring operating against Germany with a number of agents including a group who maintained a villa in Brussels, whose activities were related in the last issue of the Review. Their radio was monitored, the operators arrested, and the cryptographic system employed solved through the discovery of a key in a novel in the library of the villa; the names of important principals including the chief agent, Kent, and a confidential agent, Coro, were disclosed. Kent was arrested, but Coro, whose real name was Schultz-Boyzen, a relative of the Tirtitz family with entry in top echelon air offices and industrial plants, remained at large. Using masterly disguises, Coro had become head of a widely ramified German resistance organization. He was being watched by the German police, but he persisted in evading them. At this point the following account begins.

Every reader of detective stories knows how in these the strangest accidents and complications, which are obviously dragged in by the hair serve to clear up or to complicate the situation. And every reader probably thinks to himself that these are accidents which can only be invented by the imagination of an author. Real life does not know such accidents.

To this I would like to reply that any author is a bungler at inventing such accidents in comparison to what real life can do.

The cryptanalytic group of the station monitoring agent radios had at that time been reenforced; among the newly engaged gentlemen were two students of the University of Berlin. Henceforth we shall call them A and B.

There are some 80 million Germans. The cryptanalytic section for the monitoring of agents' radio consisted of some 15 men.

These 15 men had been chosen at random. And, sure enough, among them were two who were in contact with Coro!!!

A. was a harmless acquaintance through whom Coro had gotten at the other student, B., and induced him to supply information on the cryptanalytic work. A. knew nothing of the matter. A. had arranged to go on a Saturday afternoon for a sailboat party on the Wannsee with Coro. At the last moment A. was held up by his work, and tried to inform Coro of this. In order to telephone quietly he went to the room of another analyst which was empty, since the man who worked there had already left the office. A. called Coro's number but did not find him at home. He left his name, telephone, and extension with the maid requesting Coro to call immediately when he came home. This did not happen, for Coro had already gone to Wannsee, and did not come back home until Monday. There he found the urgent note of the maid, on

Translated from original German materials by
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which was noted, without giving the name, the telephone number which Coro should call.

The telephone had recently been installed, and the man who normally sat in the room was none other than the analyst who had in the previous weeks worked on and deciphered the entire radiogram material picked up in the Brussels Station! It was Dr. V., who knew about Coro from the deciphered messages, and who also was informed that steps were being taken to trap him.

You can imagine Dr. V's surprise when Coro called him that Monday and said he had been instructed to telephone there because someone wanted to talk with him urgently. This call was interpreted as a trial balloon by Coro who must have gotten wind of something. In reality it was a perfectly harmless coincidence.

They now decided to act. Coro was arrested. And gradually they arrested the whole circle with whom he had been in contact.

Schultz-Boysen (Coro) was a man of exceptionally high mentality, great initiative and energy, and of such an amazing intellect that his collaborators were only slightly disturbed at the arrest; they were convinced that this man would betray nothing and that the Gestapo, on the other hand, could easily be convinced of his innocence.

After a hearing lasting eight days they had not gotten the slightest thing out of him; he had a credible explanation for everything, and he maintained his composure and mental alertness so that he never became entangled in contradictions. In spite of the fact that the man was proved guilty of the radio messages, the experienced criminologists repeatedly doubted his guilt, especially as he was regarded very favorably by his office and his comrades. He himself said nothing, but some of the others arrested talked out of school. More than 120 persons now became involved, including a very high official of the Foreign Office.

Little by little the entire organization was unravelled. There was a gigantic trial which ended in the execution of some 60 persons. This happened in December 1942.

In this way the Russian Intelligence Service was dealt a serious blow. German agencies succeeded in crippling the Russian Intelligence Service for a time by injecting themselves into the espionage and radio net thus revealed. Agents who were newly dispatched were arrested at once. By deceptive traffic the entire radio net was kept in operation. However, it is a question of how far, or how long, this deceptive traffic was really able to mislead the Russians. For at that time the organization of the "Rote Drei" was already working at top efficiency. In my opinion, the Russians did not allow themselves to be deceived very long but then cleverly continued playing the radio game with Germany in order to give the impression that the trick was a success. In reality they set up a new spy net unnoticed, with reports passing to Moscow mainly via the "Rote Drei."

From the statements of those arrested leads had been secured regarding people who belonged to the third Berlin address. In this way they got on the trace of a second Russian agent radio station in Brussels, which the Germans were able to pick up by surprise. There several people were arrested, including a certain Hermann Wenzel, who in his day had played a certain role in connection with the burning of the Reichstag Building. By force and threats the man was rendered submissive and continued for a full year down to the summer of 1943 to work in the radio deception with Moscow under German control and guidance. The game might have continued until the end of the war if Hermann Wenzel had not succeeded in the summer of 1943 in escaping by a daring trick. He reappeared later in Holland, made contact with the English secret service, and through London established his identity in Moscow. However, they declined to use him any further since they no longer really trusted him.

Meanwhile in Paris in June 1942 another Russian agent transmitter had been picked up. At the hearing nothing worth-while could be elicited from the operator and his wife. However, it could be established that the messages of this transmitter were composed with the same agent key as those emanating from the Brussels station. This led to further revealing connections. A special detachment was sent to Brussels to try to penetrate into the Belgian, Dutch,

and French groups. Gradually this succeeded so well that finally five radio stations could be surprised in Belgium and used in the radio deception with Moscow.

But despite time consuming enterprise it had hitherto been impossible to clear up two matters. The guiding principal agent in Brussels had thus far been able to avoid seizure; no one knew who he was but merely knew from his deciphered radiograms his cover name "Kent." In the second place it had not been possible thus far to establish connections with the Paris group and to penetrate it.

In August 1942 the Germans seized and interrogated very thoroughly an agent who maintained the contact between the Dutch and the Belgian group. When cornered, a remark escaped him that he had once been in the dwelling of the principal agent Kent which he also revealed.

Investigation which was started at once revealed that Kent actually had lived in the dwelling indicated. However, he had fled immediately after the raid on the radio station in Brussels. Kent had been active as a part owner of the Simex Company in Brussels and had been able in this way to make a great many connections and to take extended trips. The Simex Company was a commission house which did business on a very large scale with various agencies of the German armed forces and also those of the Organization Todt. From here the trail led to a similar business in Paris; this was the seat of the French group.

Kent had as a lady friend the widow of a Hungarian; she lived with him along with her child. Under no circumstances did he wish to separate himself from this woman, and that turned out fateful for him. Since his friend was a striking person, it became possible to follow his trail and finally learn his address in Marseilles - at that time still unoccupied territory. After negotiations with the French Government Kent, who traveled with a Uruguayan passport, was turned over for arrest and picked up in Marseilles in October 1942.

In spite of close watching of the Paris firm and in spite of efforts to enter into negotiations with the firm for big deals through the Organization Todt, the German agencies did not at first succeed in coax-

ing the cautious head of the French group (cover name Gilbert) out of hiding. Finally they succeeded in arresting several intermediary agents who were picked up so quietly outside of Paris that the firm noticed nothing; in this way they discovered the dentist of Chief Gilbert and the latter was arrested there one day in the dentist chair. Soon there followed the arrest of several of his collaborators who had been under surveillance for some time.

Further investigations showed that the transmitter picked up in June belonged to Gilbert's group of agents. It could be ascertained that Gilbert's group of agents was in contact with the Communist Party in France.

Gilbert had made preparations for inaugurating four additional radio circuits. Moscow had likewise sent through a radio key for another important agent with the cover name "Harry." With the cooperation of the French Communist Party, new operators had already been provided for the Gilbert group, two of whom were Spanish Reds. Of course the radio schedule for Gilbert had not yet arrived; it had been lost somehow along the very circuitous route. On the other hand, Gilbert's secretary, who had decoded the radio schedule for "Harry" four weeks earlier, was able to give some information from memory regarding the call signs employed.

It chanced that the German monitors had been listening to a Russian transmitter at this time, which regularly gave its calls and waited for an answer. An attempt was immediately made to get into contact with this transmitter since the German agencies were very anxious to use Agent Gilbert, who was highly regarded in Moscow, to carry out a deceptive game with Moscow in order to get further clues respecting persons in the Russian Intelligence Service who might be located in areas controlled by Germany and also of learning their connections with the French Communist Party.

The attempt to enter into radio traffic with Moscow appeared for the moment almost hopeless because the wave lengths, on which transmission was to be effective, were not known; the wave lengths which Gilbert's secretary thought he remembered had proved false.

But to everyone's surprise the improbable succeeded at the second attempt and, to be sure, by chance. The Moscow central office, whose calls were heard and followed, suddenly ordered a change of wave and gave the new wave. Normally, the number is enciphered in such cases but in this case it clicked. The agent transmitter put into operation by the Germans was heard in Moscow, whereupon a message was dispatched to Moscow saying that the radio schedule had arrived in garbled condition and requesting a repetition. Even now it was questionable whether traffic would ever come about again, but in the very next traffic period Moscow ordered a new alternate wave, again using the plain number, whereupon a radiogram was put through with the new schedule for traffic to Moscow and another for traffic via London. In this way the connection was definitely assured.

Now it was possible to work in a new connection for agent Kent who had been arrested. This was very important because the Germans had to keep Moscow from building up a new secret spy net.

By typing it to the Gilbert transmitter northern France was henceforth protected against the Russian Intelligence Service; the same thing happened with southern France by using the Kent transmitter with German operators.

The reports which now went to Moscow revealed Kent - who had long since been sitting in the safe custody - as a man with good connections in France. In the intelligence outfit guided by him was incorporated among other things, a "spy organization" under a former Latvian general. This general was won over by disguised middlemen and was made to believe that he was working for a French resistance movement. He set up a spy ring which was directed against Germany, without knowing that all his work was guided and financed by the Germans. His reports were valuable and interesting, since they gave insight into the weaknesses of German security and secrecy and could be used in part to provide the Central Office of Moscow with credible reports and so to string it along. In this way the German Intelligence Service succeeded in penetrating further into the organization of the French Communist Party and in recognizing the goals and reports which were particularly important

for Moscow; since Moscow had to believe that the Kent Organization was still at work unchanged, the Germans kept the Russians from setting up a new and stronger intelligence service.

The time when this was going on was the time when the great German offensive on the eastern front before Stalingrad and in the foothills of the Caucasus had bogged down hopelessly, it was the time when it became clear to every rational person that this war could never result in a military decision favorable to Germany. It was precisely the time to try to sound out skillfully the political situation so that the foundation might be laid for a tolerable conclusion of the war. And for Germany it was a very favorable moment because the German armed forces were still an important factor; Germany was still able to strike powerful blows by land, by sea, and in the air; and there were certain frictions between the Soviet Union on the one hand, and England and the USA on the other.

The captured Kent transmitter afforded the most favorable opportunity imaginable for cleverly touching on questions, the clarification of which was necessarily of importance to Germany. What were the conditions under which the Soviet Union was ready to enter into negotiations? On which questions was there antagonism between it and the Western Allies? Were its political goals directed at a penetration of Central and Western Europe or not? And other questions of like kind.

In view of the character of the Kent transmitter, such leading questions could be undertaken very easily in a completely innocent and unobtrusive manner, because in view of his numerous connections Kent had discussed and brought up all manner of questions.

Some experts of the German radio defense promptly made such propositions. But in Berlin they had cold feet. They considered the idea original and not without some attractiveness, but they did not find the courage to do anything in this direction. "What would the Fuehrer say if he should find out that we are in communication with Moscow? He will have us all hanged!" That was the general attitude. The utter lack

(Continued on page 21)

WAR IN THE ETHER

(Continued from page 14)

of freedom on the part of the German authorities - even though they might be the very highest - , the pettiness of their thinking, and their fear of responsibility found expression here.

The "Rote Kapelle" case remained one of the most interesting of the entire war.

The principal agents had been quietly introduced and established in the countries concerned long before the war without arousing the slightest suspicion. Through their position as manager of important commercial enterprises they had excellent connections with leading persons in industry and trade, with the political parties, and even with the German armed forces, the entire situation. The principal agent, Gilbert, had exact information regarding the impending landing of Allied troops in Algeria three weeks before it took place, whereas the Germans were taken completely by surprise.