

# Alias George Wood

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
22 SEPT 93

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

*Case history of a determined, idealistic German that British intelligence called "best agent of the war."*

### **Anthony Quibble**

The German diplomatic courier was carrying, when he cleared Swiss customs, a 12-by-18-inch manila envelope with two red wax seals bearing the imprint of the Foreign Office and addressed to the German Legation, Bern. When delivered to the legation its seals were undisturbed, but it had shrunk to a 10-by-15 size and grown thinner. Actually, of course, the smaller envelope had been only a part of the contents of the larger, and the rest was destined not for the Nazi diplomats but for their enemies. This sleight-of-hand was performed a number of times before the spring of 1945, but the first time was on Tuesday 17 August 1943. The courier's name was Fritz Kolbe.

That evening Allen Dulles, chief of the OSS station in Bern, ran into the British military attache, a Colonel Cartwright, who remarked that he had been approached earlier at his office by "a cove with a funny name, has a 'tal' in it; he'll undoubtedly turn up at your shop in due course." (Dulles learned later that Colonel Cartwright was the third person at the British legation who had turned the "cove" away because his only credentials were a bowing acquaintance with Minister Norton and a mimeographed sheet in German purporting to be a Foreign Office telegram.) The next morning at breakfast, sure enough, Dulles' associate Gerald Mayer had a telephone call from his banker friend Paul Dreyfuss in Basel, asking that he receive his friend Dr. Ernesto Kocherthaler, who would come to his office at nine. (Mayer was actually an employee of OSS's sister organization, the Office of War Information, whose offices

were in the same building; but because the sudden closing of the French border at the time of the North Africa landings had caught the OSS station badly understaffed, it did a good deal of borrowing from OWI and other U.S. missions.)

Kocherthaler turned out to be a German-born Spanish citizen who had emigrated to Switzerland after the civil war. He had a German friend, he said, who was as anti-Nazi as himself and had access to important official information. This man was in Bern at the moment and would be willing to meet with the Americans if they desired. He had brought with him these 16 Foreign Office telegrams. As evidence of good faith Kocherthaler would leave them for Mayer to study before deciding to see his friend, who, however, would have to leave again for Germany on Friday, day after tomorrow.

## Visitor from Berlin

The telegrams had nothing about them to suggest a hoax. Mimeographed in double space and addressed to the Foreign Office from the German legations in Dublin, Stockholm, Sofia, Ankara, Rome, and Bern itself, they seemed the usual copies any foreign ministry must make to disseminate incoming messages. A routing stamp showed that these particular copies were intended for "Ambassador Ritter." After consulting Dulles, Mayer set up a meeting at his own home for 10:30 Thursday morning. There Kocherthaler brought Fritz Kolbe.

### Picture

Kolbe, as Dulles later described him for the benefit of the British MI-6, was about five feet seven and had a round head, baldish, with prominent ears and typically Prussian-Slavic features. Frank eyes wide apart, manner unsophisticated but well poised. He was forty-three. He had been with the Foreign Office since 1925, mostly abroad until the war began—ten years in Madrid, two in Cape Town. His son, whose mother had died in 1936, was still in South Africa, in the care of his former housekeeper. So was his second wife, a Swiss girl, from whom he was trying to get a divorce. Since being recalled to Berlin in 1939 he had worked for Minister Rudolf Leitner and then for his boss, Ambassador (for Special Duties) Karl Ritter. Ritter was the liaison channel between

the Foreign Office and OKW, the supreme military command, and was thus concerned with military as well as political matters. Kolbe's job was to screen the German and foreign press and all incoming Foreign Office traffic for him.

The 16 telegrams were a sample of that traffic. Kolbe was able to expand on some of them. Those from Dublin discussing plans to spring "Col. G." from prison referred to Col. Dr. Görtz, a captured German agent.<sup>1</sup> The "Hector" mentioned in the one from Stockholm as source of information about what went on at a conference held by Sir Stafford Cripps in London was another German spy; it should be possible to identify him because so few were privy to the conference.

Aside from telegrams, in four hours of talk that Thursday, Mayer (Dulles joined them later, using the name Douglas) elicited a great deal of miscellaneous information -- changes of personnel and office locations in the Foreign Office, Dublin Legation's possession of a rarely used secret radio transmitter, an aborted plan to evacuate civilians from Berlin, the results of the epochal air raid on Ploesti and of other bombings, the location of a rendezvous for German and Japanese submarines, a spy apparatus in Lourenço Marques to get data on Allied ship movements, the German one-time-pad cipher system, and much else. Kolbe warned that German cryptanalysts had broken many Allied codes;<sup>2</sup> he cited from memory the substance of an OWI cable from Cairo<sup>3</sup> to Washington signed "Parker." He drew a map showing Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg (where Stauffenberg was to plant the bomb almost a year later), Ribbentrop's residence nearby, and the siding for the OKW and Himmler special trains some miles away.

## **The Higher Loyalty**

Kolbe wanted no money for this information or for what he could furnish in the future. He believed the overthrow of the Nazis to be an urgent necessity for Germany's own sake as well as the rest of the world's, and he was doing what he could to bring it about. He lived by a principle his father had drilled into him, always to do what he thought right and never be afraid, and by an ideal of inner integrity which had infused his hiking club, the Wandervogel, in the Youth Movement. In spite of repeated

pressure he had managed to avoid joining the Nazi Party without losing his advantageous job; by diligence he had made himself indispensable to Leitner and then Ritter. Immediately on return from Madrid he had got into touch with some of his old Wandervagel comrades who felt as he did, and they put out leaflets and other covert anti-regime propaganda. Several were caught and put in concentration camps; one paid with his life.

After the war began, Kolbe had made several futile attempts to get assigned abroad again. Then he considered escaping over the Swiss border, but a respected Benedictine friend, Prelate Schreiber, had persuaded him it would be more important to stay and use his position to do as much harm as he could to the Nazis. How to get information to their outside enemies? One of his Wandervagel comrades, Fraulein von Heimerdinger, had the job of assigning Foreign Office courier runs, but several attempts to put him on a run abroad ran into snags.

One center of anti-Nazi sentiment in Berlin was the university hospital, the Chirurgische Universitätsklinik, directed by the famous Dr. Sauerbruch. Kolbe was engaged, pending the divorce, to Sauerbruch's secretary, Maria Fritsch, and so was often there. In the fall of 1942 a young Alsatian doctor whom the Germans had drafted, Prof. Dr. Adolphe Jung, was requisitioned by Sauerbruch and given an office on the third floor. Kolbe had sounded him out and found him a Gaullist eager to do something for Free France. His office could be used for temporary storage of documents filched from the Foreign Office. He also had reason to make occasional trips back to Strassburg, whence his brother or a friend could get information to the French Resistance and so to London. This channel had been put to use, particularly for warnings that such-and-such Frenchmen were about to be arrested.<sup>4</sup> But now this American contact would permit fuller exploitation of the torrent of material that passed through Kolbe's hands.

There was time for a shorter meeting Friday morning, 20 August, before Kolbe had to leave. He passed on some bits of information he had picked up the night before at the German legation. It was arranged that his code name would be Georg Winter (but among the British and Americans he immediately became George Wood; in the cable traffic he was called Wood or 674 or 805). He would find a way to get out again or at least send information somehow. If he got a trip to Stockholm he would call at the legation and introduce himself as Georg Sommer. As a password to new contacts generally he would use a contraction of his

birth date of 25 September 1900 -- 25900. He would address messages to a fictional Georg Mertz or Anita Mertz. Another Alsatian doctor, whose wife's parents lived in Chicago, Albert Bur of Ober-Ehnheim (now Obernai ), did a lot of traveling around Europe and in fact was in Bern at the moment; he might provide one channel of communications. (As it turned out; none of these arrangements was ever used.)

## Too Good To Be True

Early the next week Kocherthaler sent word that "George" got safely home and Dr. Bur was back in Ober-Ehnheim. Meanwhile the British MI-6 man, in Geneva, was informed, and he agreed to send cables paraphrasing the 16 telegrams and giving background on the source to the headquarters of both services in London. Dulles would cable the non-documentary information to London and Washington. (Later, when the "kappa" cable traffic, as Kolbe's reports were code-designated, became extremely heavy, the burden continued to be shared between OSS and MI-6. Communications from Bern were a critical problem. Until late in 1944, when the Swiss dared wink at the operation of a "secret" radio transmitter, only commercial channels were available; the legation's code had proved insecure; OSS had manpower for cipher work only by virtue of being allowed to use interned American airmen; and there was no pouch service at this time, though a slow clandestine system for sending out microfilm was set up later.)

The big question of course was authenticity, and even if authentic whether it was a matter of feeding in known textual material to help break the Allies' codes when it showed up in their communications. "Wood" himself had been convincing, and Dulles' expert on German affairs, Gero von Gaevernitz, could with great confidence vouch for his intermediary Kocherthaler. But from farther away it looked too good to be true. The British in London urged "great caution" and asked for the exact date of the first meeting with Kolbe; they were checking up on him. In OSS London and Washington the case was handled from the inception as an X-2 – counterintelligence -- matter, both because Kolbe might be acting under German intelligence control and because some of his information could be put to counterintelligence use. It was to be

many months before any of it was put to any other use.

After sending to London and Washington the most important of the information, Dulles cabled on 3 September that for security reasons he would hold off with the rest, pending the outcome of the investigations into "Wood's" bona fides and the authenticity of the material. On 14 September he resumed.<sup>5</sup> Thus he had scarcely finished dealing with all of it before more came -- a letter from Kolbe to L[ieber] Dr. K[ocherthaler] written on 16 September and enclosing a few Foreign Office telegrams and a proper professional map of the Rastenburg area to correct a minor error in the sketch he had drawn.

The letter, four pages typed in single space, gave the daily schedule of the special train Berlin-Rastenburg, reported bomb damage to the Schweinfurt ball bearing plant, suggested other air targets, gave the locations of concentration camps, surveyed the loyalties -- to Badoglio or Mussolini -- of Italian missions abroad, paraphrased a Hitler decree on punishment of turncoat Italians, summarized a number of incoming telegrams, including one each from Tangiers and Lisbon giving purported intelligence on Allied invasion plans, and told what was being said about coming to terms with the Russians and about the "fabled secret weapon": according to reliable information it's just bluff. Kolbe apologized for typos and bad construction: "I write these lines in wild haste, scanning the material with one eye and typing it with the other hand." He requested acknowledgement by the phrase "Greetings from Hektor," begged that everything be burned "immediately after reading," and signed with a typed George M.

## **More Documents, More Doubts**

On 9 October Dulles cabled cryptically that he had just got some 200 pages of alpha and since they were no longer sure of beta it would take weeks to handle. He was now fully convinced of delta after yesterday's gamma and from internal evidence. A great deal of value was lost in epsilon but there was no other sure way to preserve zeta. In a separate cable he explained that alpha equals "German two-way secret Foreign Office cables," the beta they were not sure of was "the security of the communications channel," gamma was "Wood's cross-examination"

which had helped convince him of "the particular value and authoritative quality of this material," the regretted epsilon was "the paraphrasing of the cables prior to transmission," and the zeta it would preserve was "this extremely important and valuable line."

"Wood" had arrived two days before, again as courier, with 96 telegrams totaling these 200 pages, as well as oral information that filled a 10-page debriefing report. In the course of three meetings with him he was also warned against being too rash, as in transmitting his September letter to Kocherthaler. It was arranged that he should write a meaningless letter to Kocherthaler's brother-in-law in Bern, Walter Schuepp, and this, communicated through Kocherthaler, would mean that material had been left with Dr. Bur at Unter-Ehnheim. Dulles would send someone for it using the name Herr or Frau Käning. If Bur sent a messenger to the legation he would use the password Adelboden. If Dulles sent one to Berlin he would simply telephone the Foreign Office, ask for Kolbe by his real name, identify himself as Georg Merz, and set a time to see him at his home. From now on the Wood cover name would be replaced by Georg Kaiser. (None of these arrangements was ever quite followed, either.)

It was indeed several weeks before all this batch of information had been cabled. Dulles set up a system of several dozen cryptonyms for recurring names -- colors for countries and five-letter words for cities, offices, and persons; "grand," for example, was the German Foreign Office. (Most of this system was in time abandoned, presumably as confidence grew in the security of the communications.) The cabled reports stretched out until the middle of November. By this time London was convinced of the authenticity of the documentary reports but not fully, like Dulles, of their "particular value and authoritative quality." The British thought them probably a build-up for some grand deception and in this sense "genuine fakes." In 1924 a certain Captain Kolbe had been involved with a German naval lieutenant who passed some false reports. OSS was perhaps less suspicious than MI-5; in an eight-page memorandum of 23 November to European chief David Bruce, the head of X-2 London, Norman Pearson, reviewed all the derogatory arguments that had been brought up but reached a rather positive set of conclusions: a) "Wood" had committed no suspicious act, b) there was no evidence against the genuineness of the documents, c) they were valuable at least for counterintelligence purposes, having actually helped in four German agent cases, and d) "Wood" should be encouraged but a watch should be maintained for deception.

To Washington, however, London recommended that Col. Alfred McCormack, director of the Army's military intelligence service, be consulted before anything was done with the reports. Washington protested mildly, asking why, but apparently felt obliged, because OSS London was working closely with the British, not to act independently. Nevertheless it appears that there was no consultation with McCormack (and no dissemination of the reports) until the end of December, when yet another batch was coming in, and that then the meeting was called on McCormack's initiative.<sup>6</sup>

## Convincing Flood

To a number of particular questions that London and Washington had wanted put to Kolbe, Dulles had replied that he did not expect him back, presumably because of the arrangement to transmit material through Dr. Bur. But shortly before Christmas Walter Schuepp received a not meaningless letter signed Georges: "I'll probably be in there on the 27th, so save a bit of the Christmas goose." (The envelope was postmarked Bern; all Kolbe's impersonal communications were brought out of Germany by trusted but unwitting friends.) On 22 December Kocherthaler dropped a note to the legation for "Herr Meyer." Referring to his need to consult him on a matter, he wrote, "I've heard from a friend abroad that he will probably be in Bern on the 27th. Since I should by no means miss him, I'm going to be there then, at 13:09. If you could be there too we could talk over our pending business." On the 28th Dulles cabled, "... sorting out a vast collection of new material brought by Woods ..." And the next day, "More than 200 documents ... I now firmly believe in his good faith and am ready to stake my reputation that they are genuine."

In addition to hard copy there were several pages of cramped semi-shorthand in which Kolbe had copied other telegrams, and there were 30 items of oral reporting. The first of the latter was on Germany's new supersonic fighter, the second on the secret weapon: although some munitions experts still said it was a great bluff, Sauerbruch had seen in Belgium several emplacements which he was told were for the weapon.



Of the hard documents, one of the most startling was one dated 4 November from Von Papen in Ankara: "... a number of [official British] documents have come to us from a new walk-in with whose further exploitation ... I have charged SD officer Moyzisch. Because of the compass of the material and in order to provide a better evaluation I have sent him to you with the Saturday courier to make a personal report. For the sake of security very few even here are witting of the matter; in future communications I shall designate this source 'Cicero'; request that questions about him be sent eyes only to the ambassador ..."

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This one, along with two reporting the content of some Cicero documents, both because they were of primary concern to the British and because of security considerations, were given to MI-6 to transmit to London. (To judge from the cable traffic, the British reaction was slow. On 25 January, almost a month later, they queried the precise reading of the Cicero reports and rather foolishly asked Dulles to "direct Wood" to bring more of them. After another month, on 29 February, they urgently requested the exact hour on 3 November the first one had been dispatched.) Others that were not susceptible of much paraphrasing, such as a list of Frenchmen the SD was proposing to arrest, Dulles broke up and had alpha, beta, etc. passages transmitted separately. For others where textual fidelity was still more important he sent one cable consisting of every second word and another with the rest.

This batch pouring into Washington effected a slight advance toward credence. A cable to London on 7 January spoke of it as seemingly authentic and "vastly" more interesting, but "in order to guard against a plant and test reliability" requested coordination with the British in getting verifications. On 4 January one report was sent to McCormack of MIS for his judgment of its authenticity; he replied on 7 January with a rather pedantic four-page memorandum saying he was "slightly inclined" to think it spurious but couldn't really determine, especially since he was allowed to see only a paraphrase. Nevertheless OSS began sending one copy of the paraphrases under the code designation "Boston Series" to the top echelon in each of Army, Navy, and State; and on 10 January Donovan forwarded "the first fourteen" to the President.<sup>7</sup> Then sometime before 1 February McCormack got all these stopped except the one to Berle in State. OSS London sent any reports concerning bomb damage and order of battle to the U.S. military commands there but showed

most of the rest only to Ambassador Winant. (McCormack in Washington objected to Winant's seeing them.<sup>8</sup>) With the British MI-5 it worked up a questionnaire about the German foreign ministry and intelligence agencies to test "Wood's" reliability and sent it to Dulles on 28 January. It was never used.

## The World Situation

In February Dr. Sauerbruch was making a trip to Zürich, and Kolbe asked him to take along a letter to give a female family friend (Nenntante) of Kocherthaler there. In the first lines he cautioned Kocherthaler that Sauerbruch "doesn't know what's in the letter. If you should be in contact with him don't give me away. He would be deeply hurt." It is a curious letter of eight crowded pages, seven in tight script and one typed in single space. (Kocherthaler had to be enlisted to transcribe the script.) Not as camouflage but out of literary fancy it is cast in the form of an argument that the outcome of the war was already decided and supports this thesis by a sort of survey of the world situation in which the evidence is drawn from the Foreign Office telegrams and other sources of inside information. Dulles cabled on 21 February that "it is hard to decipher the origin of all the cases as well as to differentiate ... Foreign Office documents or policy from Wood's own opinions." The letter ended hurriedly, "I have to stop. Too bad. What good are these air raids?" and a Madrid telegram referred to was not enclosed.

The world survey contained a number of items interesting from the intelligence-historical viewpoint -- the defection in Ankara that month of Abwehr officers Vermehren and Willi Hamburger, German speculation as to who Cicero was, the deciphered English text of an intercepted Irish cable from the Vatican -- but one that caused commotion in Washington and London at the time was a report that the German command in Italy had ordered Rome electric power plants and all the Tiber bridges blown up if the city had to be evacuated. X-2 Washington and the Special Branch of MIS had recently been holding "evaluation meetings" on the "Wood" material, Special Branch having changed its "spurious" tune about 1 February and started looking, like the British, for the grand deception it was leading up to; and Colonel McCormack pounced on this item. (The dissemination of the reports to MIS must have been rather

slow: Dulles cabled it on 23 February, but McCormack didn't see it until 11 March, when the contents of yet another letter had begun coming in from Bern.) He telephoned X-2 that at last the first piece of bad fish had come in; only Hitler, not the field commander, could make such a decision, and this was obviously an attempt to confuse the issue at the very time that a conference in the Vatican was discussing the possibility of evacuation.<sup>9</sup> This ball was bounced back and forth across the Atlantic for some time.

On Washington's birthday, by coincidence, "Fritz" penned a hasty birthday card to Walter Schuepp with hearty greetings for "you and Ernst." He apologized that some child had run a line of play typing down the side; it was the only card he had. The line of gibberish, deciphered from Kolbe's private code, was a flash warning that "Yolland of OWI in Ankara is discussing defection to Germany with Consul Wolff in Ankara." Although the card was unfortunately delayed in transit for over three weeks, and OWI, moreover, commented openly only that it had no employee named Yolland, this bit of ingenuity was apparently successful. Edgar H. Yolland, whom OWI Ankara had fired the preceding August, was given a German passport on 3 April but could never get an exit permit because of U.S. pressure on the Turks.

Picture

Another envelope reached Walter Schuepp first, one enclosing a smaller envelope well sealed and marked "Please speed securely to Ernesto." Inside were four densely scribbled pages of letter and a small typed slip which suggested that a magnifying glass be used on the script, listed the personnel of the Abwehr station in Switzerland, and gave several other items of information perhaps chosen because they were heavy with names and numbers. The letter proper, dated 6 March, began by specifying acknowledgment signals: on a post card about winter sports a reference to three ski jumps would mean receipt of both this and the February letter as well as the birthday card; a boast that the writer is no longer a beginner would mean that he had deciphered the birthday card; a remark on the fine weather would mean the reports were useful. The information which followed was again cast in the form of a world survey by country.

Picture

Kolbe himself was impressed with its quantity, and perhaps the

difficulty of reading his semi-shorthand; he closed, "Poor fellow who has to read all that! I had real good opportunities, and I didn't waste any of them." For further communication he said he might be sending a friend or even two, or he might send a new or old garment or pair of shoes -- "Please take them apart yourself!" He hoped to get there in person in April.

Kolbe was presumably sent the acknowledgment signal meaning that his reports were very useful; but in Washington, at least, what with severely limited distribution, diluted source description or none at all, and the distortion of paraphrasing, one wonders whether they were. An OSS procedural notice dated 24 March 1944 says that the reports (except those of counterintelligence import) are to be "disseminated with the explanation that they are unconfirmed and that we are desirous of ... comment ... on their authenticity. ... Source will be concealed ..." Moreover, the only dissemination outside OSS (except to Special Branch MIS, which gave them no dissemination) was still to Berle in State, and that only after Special Branch evaluation.

As for the counterintelligence items, one only hopes most of them were better handled than one in this 6 March letter that can be traced through the cable files. Kolbe had typed, "Swedish Lt. Col. Count Bonte has assured the German Abwehr representative that agent Schrott can go on working undisturbed." So on 22 March (at last) X-2 cables OSS Stockholm, "Does the following information have any significance to you? It has been reliably reported that a certain Swedish Lieutenant Colonel Bonte (possibly Bonde) has informed Abwehr that there should be no interference with an agent named Schrott," and Stockholm cables back that Bonde is head of Swedish counterintelligence but the report about him "is completely incomprehensible to me." End of investigation, apparently.

## **Breakthrough**

On Tuesday of Holy Week, 11 April, Dulles cabled that "Wood" had arrived "with more than 200 highly valuable Easter eggs." (Washington cabled back, "What a bunny.") He also brought an oral report that ran to seven pages on subjects ranging from German speculation about the time and

place of invasion (and Kolbe's own recommendations for it) to chrome ore shipments and oil production. On 20 April, while this ocean of information was still being cabled in (it took nearly three weeks), Washington raised for the last time the possibility that the whole thing was "some kind of a plant" in spite of the "increasingly significant character of the data, ... proportionately more damaging to German interests." Dulles in reply reiterated his conviction of the authenticity of the material, Kocherthaler's integrity, and Kolbe's bona fides, and pointed out that if some grand deception had been planned the last batch would have been the time -- with the invasion imminent -- to do it.

The British had just completed an exhaustive survey of all previous reports from Kolbe which concluded that only 4% of them were inaccurate, and they received these latest with enthusiasm.<sup>10</sup> But the real breakthrough of the April material was with Special Branch MIS in Washington, and what did it was telegrams from the German military and air attachés in Tokyo, Generals Kretschmer and Gronau. They had been given an inspection tour all around the southern periphery of Japanese-held territory, and these were the reports of their observations. On 6 May, in a nine-page unsigned memorandum,<sup>11</sup> the Special Branch explained why it had the responsibility for disseminating the Boston Series (cryptanalytic potential), why it had not disseminated any hitherto (stale, second-hand), and why it was disseminating these (authentic); and it graciously promised that "if further reports of the Boston Series prove to be of interest, they will be disseminated." They now went to a "top list" of eleven high officers in Washington. It had taken almost nine months of productive penetration into the enemy's foreign ministry (from our viewpoint; of desperately dangerous activity from Kolbe's) to come so far as this.

Kolbe had suggested that messages could be got to him through the personal columns of the London Times, which he always received a week after publication. In emergency they could be broadcast by the BBC; the 10 p.m. and midnight newscasts were agreed upon, and the code salutation "Peter Peter." But when the need to send a message came, Dulles used another device. On 26 April Washington had cabled "particular felicitations for the Japanese data. The military people involved are most appreciative... . Far Eastern information is the most highly desired next to any hot invasion material." This priority was conveyed to Kolbe by a post card to the effect that a friend who kept a

shop in Bern was having trouble procuring certain Japanese goods which were much in demand and wondered if perhaps they were available in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Kolbe had said that Dr. Bur would arrive shortly and call on Kocherthaler, identifying himself as Dr. Jean. He was doing research on the use of color film for medical purposes, and it would be easy for him to bring in undeveloped rolls of document negatives disguised among his own supply. Somehow this plan fell through, and it was another six months before film became the communications medium. In the meantime Wood sent six letters through the now standard Schuepp-Kocherthaler channel, with slight variations. He had, however, been told that documents proper were much more valuable than the gist of them wrapped in a survey of the world situation, so these letters contained a higher proportion of verbatim texts, either copied (mostly in script, some typed) or clipped from the originals, with his notations on the back and in the margins.

Picture

## **Resistance and Reporting**

The first of these letters, dated 10 May, was brought directly to Kocherthaler by former Consul General Mackeben, now a private businessman. He is more or less of our leaning, Kolbe wrote, it's a question of taking the last step. He doesn't know what's in the letter but is willing to bring back a package. If you're pleased with my work send Nescafé and cigarettes. I'll smoke them myself, so let there be something in them. The package will not be subject to inspection at the border. If you don't want any more material send a pair of shears.

He said the Swiss in Berlin were refusing him further visas and asked whether D&M Co. could help and to let him know. Maybe he could get to Stockholm or Madrid. Or could they use the Unter-Ehnheim contact, sending someone with the password "Strassburg goose liver"?

He declared his resistance circle was making progress, but it was frantic work. "In a few days I may have another chance to send a letter. I'll use it even if, like this, it's in the wee hours of the morning and after an air raid.

Excuse the uneven style ... I'm so busy I don't know what I'm doing. A frightful life. Even my girl friend of many years complains that I don't have time to bother with her; yet I'm very fond of her." Fatigue apparently sharpened his impatience with the lack of evident results from his work: transmitting details on the wolfram smuggling still going on from Spain, he wrote, "When are you going to wake up?"

A reply was drafted, to constitute the "something" in the cigarettes, suggesting that if he used the excuse of having to see his father-in-law, a Dr. Schoop, in Zürich to further his divorce they might be able to help with the Swiss visa. But on 20 May, before it was dispatched, Kocherthaler got a telegram: "PLEASE NO CIGARETTES. GEORG." In the next letter, 27 June, Kolbe apologized for any disquiet the telegram may have caused: "But it looked really dangerous. These haven't been nice days for me. Now suspicion seems to have been dissipated." He again suggested a message in the Times or over the BBC. Then after the 20 July attempt, "... Dr. Sauerbruch has riskily -- but, it seems and I hope, successfully -- interceded on behalf of the condemned former Counselor Kiep. Heads are rolling for fair here now! Von Mum has been executed. Gerdeler is to be arrested at once; I'll try to warn him. Sauerbruch thinks we're all done for and that's especially true for him and me. Perhaps he's right."

In August, immingled with copies of Foreign Office telegrams, he wrote, "I am keeping my resistance movement alive, in spite of 20 July. The thing now is to improvise, not organize... . This is the way I figure it. The Russians will drive to the Oder. At that time the Americans will land parachute troops in Berlin. ... On the critical day I'll be in position with from 30 to 100 men. Can't I get by radio advance word on when and where? Peter, Peter, say on the 9 p.m. cast? I am the only one who knows my plan in detail; I haven't let anyone in on the secret."

When he finally got to Bern again, Dulles and Mayer urged him to give up his participation in resistance schemes. He had just barely missed attending a meeting of the conspirators before 20 July where a list had foolishly been made of those present which afterwards fell into the hands of the Gestapo. What he was doing for the Allies, Dulles told him, was far more important than anything he could personally accomplish directly against Hitler.

# New Departures

For four weeks before 20 September Kolbe was not in Berlin but at OKW headquarters in Rastenburg replacing a sick man in Ritter's representation there. Although this was a good listening post, he was anxious to get back to Berlin where he had means to get information out and the possibility of hearing from D&M Co. The way he managed it was to feign stomach trouble and go without eating long enough to convince the doctor. As soon as he got back he started a letter, expecting to have someone to take it to Switzerland the next day, but that fell through. Finally on 4 October he finished and dispatched it, transmitting a comparatively small number of hard documents but an unusually rich load of grapevine information and, as innovation, 35 undeveloped images of documents on film.<sup>13</sup>

One of the more intriguing pieces of undocumented information he had nevertheless got first hand. At headquarters he had talked to Kleist, director of the East Ministry, whose personal appearance he described in some detail. Kleist had been sent in the first half of September by Ribbentrop, perhaps at Hitler's behest, to Stockholm to get into touch with the Russians about ending the fighting. The Russians there refused to see him, but efforts were still being made, at present through the German embassy there.

An unworthy memorandum in the files gives us a glimpse of how Kolbe's product was still being treated in Washington. Dated 27 October 1944, it is from one OSS headquarters lieutenant to a second giving the views of a third, who did liaison with Special Branch MIS, about some of the October reports:

Report #426 regarding German negotiations with Russia is, according to the MIS, of great importance if it is true. The report is not, however, corroborated by any documentary evidence, and MIS is inclined to doubt its credibility, in view of the fact that the Germans are known to have told Japanese not to make overtures on their behalf to the Russians.

Because of these doubts of MIS, the report has had no distribution other than to Mr. Berle. MIS would not, however, object to having it sent to the President or Mr. Hull, if the General should consider it sufficiently interesting.



Kolbe was anxious for assurance that the man who developed his films would be both technically careful and secure. He also wanted to know how they turned out. Word could be sent by his colleague Pohle who had brought this letter (as well as the one in August) or by Hans Vogel, who was on a courier run and would be at the Hotel Jura the night of 12-13 October. Perhaps he himself, he wrote, could be more useful now in Bern; if so, they should give Pohle or Vogel a message, or send a letter by them, recommending reconciliation with his wife, and he would sneak across the border.

When Vogel arrived, he brought film with shots of 56 more documents. Some of the pictures were somewhat blurred, but instructions were sent enabling Kolbe to correct this trouble, and in early November pictures of more than 100 documents arrived in good shape. Photography now became the regular medium of communication, sent out with Kolbe's unwitting colleagues -- except in late January 1945, when he managed to come himself, and early April, when he came for the last time -- under some such cover as a watch to be repaired.

The photography was done in Adolphe Jung's third-floor office at the UniversitÄtsklinik, and Jung provided a description of the process, and of Kolbe himself, in an account written after the war:

... He had a horror of militarism and uniforms. He was judicious, deliberate, and prudent, although overflowing with ideas and energy ... He was very much aware of all the dangers. Manic perhaps he was at times, but that was his temperament. He was endowed with a lively imagination which enabled him to see, as though revealed in a flash of lightning, the right solution or the right reply in the most difficult situations. ...

There was a period when we saw each other every day, morning or night, and yet no one ever knew of our intimacy beyond the relationship of patient to physician. ... In the air raid shelter we would pass each other without speaking. ...

He would bring with him the most important of the documents. You can easily imagine the great risks he ran. An accident could happen on Berlin's blacked-out streets. Or an alert could force him to take shelter, brief case bulging with documents, in some cellar somewhere. If he were hurt the brief case would be opened, his pockets searched ...

Inside the concrete protection of the Klinik building we worked over the

documents until late at night. Sometimes he would start photographing them right away, fastening them with clips on a piece of cardboard well exposed to the daylight or under several electric lamps. He had an excellent little camera which took 2x2 cm. frames with great precision. I did all I could to help him.

v10i1a06p\_Picture7.jpg

When he had to leave he entrusted to me the documents not yet photographed... . I had only an old secretary equipped with lock and key. I usually put the papers in an envelope marked "manuscript for the Journal of Medicine" and kept them there.

At night when the sirens screamed I went down to the shelter with a brief case containing my own important papers and these documents. Sometimes, though, I had to leave them up there. Often, too, I had to stay in the shelter, busy with the wounded and sick, after the alert was over. I pictured to myself bomb damage to my office and the firemen collecting all the books and papers to save them. What would happen if I were hurt? What if some day they searched the office while I was out?

After a raid we often -- he and his fiance and I -- looked out at the fires raging all around and marvelled that our building once again had not been touched. When would it be?

In March 1945 he came to the Klinik one last time. He had been assigned a trip to Switzerland ... and he was going to stay there. All night long we photographed documents. Everything that could still be of importance to the U.S. embassy we pinned up in front of the camera.

He was tired and nervous. He left us knowing that soon Berlin would be literally wiped out ... His fiance wept. I was upset myself. He promised that he would have D. send a plane for us as soon as possible. ...

The question of when the building would be hit had now been answered. Kolbe brought out a letter to mail for Jung:

... We are trying to keep on with our work, but what difficulty! ... Two weeks ago a large bomb made a direct hit on the Klinik. It tumbled the four upper floors into the basement ... There were wounded and dead. ... All the work now has to be done on the ground floor or in the cellar. ... On a stormy night recently a tall chimney that was still standing in the middle of the ruins fell, and huge pieces of masonry coming through the

ceiling demolished all the equipment in the first-aid room. The electric power and telephone wires are all cut. ...

Earlier, on 6 February, after transmitting the great quantity of hot material Kolbe had brought out, mostly on film, in the last days of January, Dulles cabled Washington concerning an impression he had got during a year's-end visit he had made there -- that the "antagonism" of Bissell at G-2 and the "mysterious methods" of Berle resulted in Kolbe's reports' being treated as museum pieces without getting full operational value from them. Why were they still handled through X-2 channels? Why shouldn't Joe Grew, for example, be given those on the Far East? Why not take military action to prevent the reprovisioning of certain enemy ports by methods described in one of them? Apparently as a result of this inquiry, Washington began on 14 February to cable appropriate reports to OSS Chungking "for Wedemeyer personally." That they were valued in the China theater became evident when, because their great bulk soon overcrowded the OSS cable facilities, Washington asked on 21 March for guidance on how to cut down on them: Chungking replied that "technical reports" -- there had been for example an exchange of German data on the characteristics of different rocket fuels against information on a Japanese method for high-frequency-induction hardening of metal -- could come by fast pouch, but all the rest should continue to be cabled. Thus in one theater, at least, a year and half after the beginning and within a month or two of the end, Kolbe's heroic efforts bore some fruit.

## **Last Exit**

With Berlin in smoking chaos, Ritter asked Kolbe to take his mistress and baby to a safe place in the south. They chose the Ottobeuren monastery near Memmingen where Kolbe's friend Prelate Schreiber was; his nephew was the prior. On 18 March Kolbe left Berlin with his charges in Ritter's Mercedes, but because there was no gasoline the car had to be towed by a charcoal-burning SS truck that Ritter managed to wangle. The trip took three days. After a few days at Ottobeuren he took a train to Weiler, east of Bregenz, to see his friend Mackeben, who had once played unwitting courier for him; he had a mountain cabin there.<sup>14</sup>

Mackeben had been in touch with officers of the General Staff's Fremde Heere Ost<sup>15</sup> who had a project to turn over its voluminous (three to four freight cars full) files on Russia to the Americans. It was agreed that Mackeben should find a safe hiding place thereabouts for this material and get word to Kocherthaler when it had been received. Then Kolbe left by train for Lustenau on the border. He had some difficulty getting across because his pass gave him the option of exiting from Friedrichshafen and such options were no longer permitted; but he talked his way through.

Since Dulles was at this time much preoccupied with the negotiations that led to the surrender of the German forces in Italy, Kocherthaler debriefed Kolbe for him and in general helped make him useful in this period of *GÄrtterdÄmmerung*. Besides the 98 photographs and some hard documents he brought, he had in his head a lot of useful information -- the new location of Hitler's headquarters ninety miles north of Berlin, what was being done to prepare the Alpine redoubt, Ribbentrop's last desperate peace feelers, the state of the Foreign Office, recent movements of the Nazi leaders, the quality of the Volkssturm, the chaos in German industry and transportation. He prepared a list of all Foreign Office personnel, categorizing the reliability of each. He got current information out of Germany from a dissident member of the Bern legation. He tried to get Minister KÄrtcher to come over with the whole legation, and failed.

In May, after the surrender, he was sent back over the border to find leads to where the Nazi bigwigs were hiding and to what happened with the Fremde Heere Ost files; Mackeben had not been heard from. But French forces had overrun the Weiler area, arrested Mackeben, and presumably found the files; and no big Nazi fish were found. With Prelate Schreiber, Kolbe made recommendations about ways to control the countryside. But all this was anticlimax now; his great task, worked at with high purpose and dangerous exhilaration, was done.

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1 The GÄrtz story is told in great detail by Enno Stephan in *Geheimauftrag Irland* (Hamburg, 1961), reviewed in *Studies* VII 1, p. A26.

2 Dulles already knew from his Abwehr source Gisevius that some of the Bern legation's messages had been read.

3 Dulles' cable to Washington has Cairo; Mayer's notes on the meeting,

curiously, say Istanbul.

4 Kolbe did not disclose these details of resistance activity at this time. They are taken from narratives written by Kolbe, Kocherthaler, and Jung in 1945. These, like the Dulles-Mayer notes on the first meeting and most of the subsequent original communications from and about Kolbe, are in Allen Dunes' private files on the "Wood case."

5 Whether in response to some kind of go-ahead from the investigators is not clear. The kappa cables filed in OSS archives under #80829 (Wash-R&C-37 and 77) include no Washington Out messages before 20 October 1943, when the code word was adopted.

6 There are abstract cards on the two cables from and to London in the archives; the cables themselves are missing. No Washington inter-office correspondence on the case dating earlier than January 1944 has been turned up. A 1 February memorandum refers to a meeting with McCormack "following a query from Special Branch [of the Military Intelligence Service] late in December."

7 For a sampling of these and later transmissions see "Memoranda to the President: Boston Series" in Studies XI 1, p. 81 ff.

8 X-2 memorandum 1 February 1944.

9 X-2 memorandum 11 March 1944. This and other X-2 memoranda cited can be found under Central File 32858 Box 6.

10 X-2 London War Diary II p. 94.

11 Filed under Wash-Dir-Int-11.

12 That the card was actually sent at this time is not certain; Wood's subsequent communications do not particularly reflect the priority. The Special Branch memorandum of 6 May said that procurement of the Tokyo attachés' reports had been in response to an earlier request for Far East material; but if this were the case Dulles would not have been likely to cable them in only after almost all the European material had been sent, more than two weeks after receiving them.

13 This letter, in both original script and typed transcript, is not in Dulles' private files but in archives Wash-Dir-Int-11, folder 3, along with the absurd discussion about dissemination cited below.

14 Edward P. Morgan's fictionalized but generally faithful account of the Wood case in True magazine for July 1950, "The Spy the Nazis Missed," for which he used Mayer and Kolbe himself as sources, says that the wife of a doctor at the Universitätsklinik also rode in the Mercedes from Berlin and now accompanied Kolbe as far as Weiler.

15 In particular with a Dr. Schellenberg (not Walter), said to be its director.

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Posted: May 08, 2007 08:05 AM