

Preface

In the summer of 1943, a genteel and soft-spoken intelligence officer, wearing tartan trousers and smoking a pipe, put the finishing touches to a secret weapon he had been working on for more than three years. This weapon – unique in its power and unlimited in its range – was quite different from any built before or since. It was so shrouded in secrecy that its inventors were, for some time, unaware that they possessed it, and unsure how to use it. This weapon did not kill or maim. It did not rely on science, engineering or force. It did not destroy cities, sink U-boats or pierce the armour of Panzers. It did something far more subtle. Instead of killing the enemy, it could get inside his head. It could make the Nazis think what the British wanted them to think, and therefore do what the British wanted them to do.

Tar Robertson of MI5 had built a weapon that could lie to Hitler, and at the most critical juncture of the Second World War, he urged Winston Churchill to use it.

Allied military planners were already working on plans for the great assault on Nazi-occupied Europe. The D-Day invasion, so long awaited, would decide the outcome of the war, and both sides knew it. If the Allies could sweep across the English Channel and break through the massive German coastal defences known as the ‘Atlantic Wall’, then the Nazis might be rolled back out of Paris, Brussels, and then across the Rhine

all the way to Berlin. Hitler, however, was convinced that if the invaders could be successfully resisted in the early stages of an assault, even for one day, then the attack would fail; Allied morale would slump, and it would take many months before another invasion could be attempted. In that time, Hitler could concentrate on destroying the Red Army on the Eastern Front. The first twenty-four hours would be, in Erwin Rommel's famous words, the 'longest day': how that day would end was far from certain.

D-Day stands today as a monumental victory and, with hindsight, historically inevitable. It did not look that way in prospect. Amphibious assaults are among the most difficult operations in warfare. The Germans had constructed a 'zone of death' along the French coast more than five miles deep, a lethal obstacle course of barbed wire, concrete and over 6 million mines, behind which lay heavy gun emplacements, machine-gun posts and bunkers. As Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, observed in a gloomy diary entry just before D-Day: 'It may well be the most ghastly disaster of the whole war.'

In war, no variable is more important, and less easy to control, than the element of surprise. If the Germans could be confused or, even better, actively misled as to where and when the landings would take place, then the odds on success improved dramatically. German forces in occupied France greatly outnumbered the invaders, but if they could be kept in the wrong place, at the right time, then the numerical equation appeared less daunting. By 1944, the war was claiming the lives of 10 million people a year. The stakes could not have been higher, or the margin for error smaller.

At the Tehran Conference in November of 1943, the first of the 'Big Three' meetings bringing together Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, the Allies laid plans for the invasion of Europe, codenamed 'Operation Overlord', that would take place in May 1944 (later delayed by a month), with

General Dwight Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander, and General Bernard Montgomery as Allied ground forces commander, for the assault across the Channel. During the conference, Winston Churchill turned to Josef Stalin and uttered a typically Churchillian remark that has since become a sort of myth: 'In wartime, the truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.' Stalin, who had little time for literary metaphor, replied: 'This is what we call military cunning.' The D-Day invasion would be protected and supported by a comprehensive, worldwide deception campaign, a body of lies to shield the truth: in a tip of the hat to Churchill's remark, it was codenamed 'Bodyguard'.

The central aim of Operation Bodyguard was to fool the Germans into believing the invasion was coming at a point where it was not, and that it was not coming in the place where it was. More than that, to ensure that those troops preparing to fight off the bogus invasion were not redeployed to repel the real one, the deception must be maintained *after* D-Day. Goliath could be cut down to size only if he didn't know which direction David's sling-shot was coming from, and was kept guessing. The target range for a cross-Channel invasion, however, was extremely narrow. The Germans were sure to spot the build-up of troops in Britain, and since the assault had to take place within fighter range, there were only a handful of suitable spots for a massed landing. In the words of one planner, it was 'utterly impossible to disguise the fact that the major attack would come somewhere between the Cherbourg Peninsula and Dunkirk'.

The most obvious target was the Pas de Calais in the northeast, the region nearest the British coast. Deep-water ports at Calais and Boulogne could easily be resupplied and reinforced once they were in Allied hands, and a bridgehead in Calais would offer the most direct route for a march on Paris and the German industrial heartland in the Ruhr. The logic of attacking Calais was not lost on German tacticians. Hitler himself identified Calais as the likeliest target: 'It is here that the enemy must

and will attack, and it is here – unless all the indications are misleading – that the decisive battle against the landing forces will be fought.’ Hitler was fully alert to the possibility of being misled: he had been wrong-footed over the invasions of North Africa and Sicily. He would be far harder to dupe this time.

By July 1943, Allied military planners had concluded that, ‘in spite of the obvious advantages of the Pas de Calais provided by its proximity to our coasts’, the coast of Normandy north of Caen represented a better target. The Normandy beaches were long, wide and gently sloping, with suitable gaps in the dunes through which an invading force could spread quickly inland. The lack of a deep-water anchorage would be ingeniously solved by constructing vast artificial ports, codenamed ‘Mulberry harbours’.

The successful deception surrounding the Sicilian landings in 1943 had persuaded the Germans that the most likely target was *not* the real target. Now, the aim was reversed: Hitler must be made to think that the most plausible target really *was* the target. Along the mighty Atlantic Wall the brickwork was thinnest in Normandy. That was where the wrecking ball would hit. But in order to strike with maximum effect, the truth would need to be protected by a bodyguard of liars, which is precisely what Tar Robertson had created.

Robertson and the small team of intelligence officers under his command specialised in turning German spies into double agents. This was the ‘Double Cross System’, coordinated by the intensely secret Twenty Committee, so named because the number twenty in Roman numerals, XX, forms a double cross. Hitherto these double agents – several dozen in number – had been used defensively: to catch more spies, obtain information about German military intelligence, and lull the enemy into believing he was running a large and efficient espionage network in Britain, when he was running nothing of the sort. In June 1943, Robertson reached the startling conclusion that every single German agent in Britain was actually under his control. Not some, not most, but *all* of them – which meant that

Robertson's team of double agents could now begin feeding the Germans not just snippets of falsehood, but a gigantic, war-changing lie.

The D-Day deception plot involved every branch of the secret war machine: scientists laid false trails, engineers built dummy tanks, radio operators put up a barrage of fake signals, and counterfeit generals led non-existent armies towards targets that were never in danger. While the overall, global deception campaign was codenamed Bodyguard, the plan specifically covering the cross-Channel invasion, the pivotal element in the deception, was named 'Fortitude', the quality most essential to its success. Operation Fortitude, the ruse to bottle up German troops in the Pas de Calais and keep them there, was an extraordinary collective effort, but at its core it depended on Robertson's spies, and a web of deception so intricate and strong that it would snare Hitler's armies, and help to carry thousands of soldiers across the Channel in safety.

The military saga of D-Day has been described many times, and the role of Operation Fortitude in that victory, though long shrouded in secrecy, has slowly emerged since the war. But the story of the five spies who formed the nucleus of the Double Cross system, Robertson's secret weapons, has never been fully told before. The spies themselves expected their story to remain hidden, as it would have done had the Security Service (better known as MI5) not chosen, in recent years, to declassify its wartime intelligence files. Indeed, if their stories had been told at the time, no one would have believed them.

For the D-Day spies were, without question, one of the oddest military units ever assembled. They included a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a tiny Polish fighter pilot, a mercurial Frenchwoman, a Serbian seducer and a deeply eccentric Spaniard with a diploma in chicken farming. Together, under Robertson's guidance, they delivered all the little lies that together made up the big lie. Their success depended on the delicate, dubious relationship between spy and spymaster, both German and British.

This is a story of war, but it is also about the nuanced qualities of psychology, character and personality, the thin line between fidelity and treachery, truth and falsehood, and the strange impulsion of the spy. The Double Cross spies were, variously, courageous, treacherous, capricious, greedy and inspired. They were not obvious heroes, and their organisation was betrayed from within by a Soviet spy. One was so obsessed with her pet dog that she came close to derailing the entire invasion. All were, to some extent, fantasists, for that is the very essence of espionage. Two were of dubious moral character. One was a triple, and possibly a quadruple, agent. For another, the game ended in torture, imprisonment and death.

All weapons, including secret ones, are liable to backfire. Robertson and his spies knew only too keenly that if their deception was rumbled, then rather than diverting attention from Normandy and tying up German forces in the Pas de Calais, they would lead the Germans to the truth, with catastrophic consequences.

The D-Day spies were not traditional warriors. None carried weapons, yet the soldiers who did owed the spies a huge and unconscious debt as they stormed the beaches of Normandy in June 1944. These secret agents fought exclusively with words and make-believe. Their tales begin before the outbreak of war, but then overlap, interconnect, and finally interlock on D-Day, in the greatest deception operation ever attempted. Their real names are a mouthful, a sort of European *mélange* that might have sprung from a period novel: Elvira Concepcion Josefina de la Fuente Chaudoir, Roman Czerniawski, Lily Sergejev, Dusko Popov and Juan Pujol García. Their codenames are blunter and, in each case, deliberately chosen: Bronx, Brutus, Treasure, Tricycle and Garbo.

This is their story.

Raw Recruits

Dusko and Johnny were friends. Their friendship was founded on a shared appreciation of money, cars, parties and women, in no particular order, and preferably all at the same time. Their relationship, based almost entirely on frivolity, would have a profound impact on world history.

Dusan 'Dusko' Popov and Johann 'Johnny' Jebsen met in 1936, at the University of Freiburg in southern Germany. Popov, the son of a wealthy industrialist from Dubrovnik, was twenty-five. Jebsen, the heir to a large shipping company, was two years older. Both were spoilt, charming and feckless. Popov drove a BMW; Jebsen, a supercharged Mercedes 540K convertible. This inseparable pair of international playboys roistered around Freiburg, behaving badly. Popov was a law student, while Jebsen was taking an economics degree, the better to manage the family firm. Neither did any studying at all. 'We both had some intellectual pretensions,' wrote Popov, but we were 'addicted to sports cars and sporting girls and had enough money to keep them both running'.

Popov had a round, open face, with hair brushed back from a high forehead. Opinion was divided on his looks: 'He smiles freely showing all his teeth and in repose his face is not unpleasant, though certainly not handsome,' wrote one male contemporary. 'A well-flattened, typically Slav nose, complexion sallow, broad shoulders, athletic carriage, but rather podgy, white and



Dusko Popov

well-kept hands,' which he waved in wild gesticulation. Women frequently found him irresistible, with his easy manners, 'loose, sensual mouth' and green eyes behind heavy lids. He had what were then known as 'bedroom eyes'; indeed, the bedroom was his main focus of interest. Popov was an unstoppable womaniser. Jebsen cut a rather different figure. He was slight and thin, with dark blond hair, high cheekbones and a turned-up nose. Where Popov

was noisily gregarious, Jebsen was watchful. 'His coldness, aloofness, could be forbidding, yet everyone was under his spell,' Popov wrote. 'He had much warmth too, and his intelligence was reflected in his face, in the alertness of his steel-blue eyes. He spoke abruptly, in short phrases, hardly ever used an adjective and was, above all, ironic.' Jebsen walked with a limp, and hinted that this was an injury sustained in some wild escapade: in truth it was caused by the pain of varicose veins, to which he was a secret martyr. He loved to spin a story, to 'deliberately stir up situations to see what would happen'. But he also liked to broker deals. When Popov was challenged to a sword duel over a girl, it was Jebsen, as his second, who quietly arranged a peaceful solution, to Popov's relief, 'not thinking my looks would be improved by a bright red cicatrix'.

Jebsen's parents, both dead by the time he arrived in Freiburg, had been born in Denmark, but adopted German citizenship when the shipping firm of Jebsen & Jebsen moved to Hamburg. Jebsen was born in that city in 1917, but liked to joke that he was really Danish, his German citizenship being a 'flag of convenience' for

business purposes: 'Some of my love of my country has to do with so much of it actually belonging to me.' A rich, rootless orphan, Jebsen had visited Britain as a teenager, and returned a committed Anglophile: he affected English manners, spoke English in preference to German, and dressed, he thought, 'like a young Anthony Eden, conservatively elegant'. Popov remarked: 'He would no more go without an umbrella than without his trousers.'



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Johnny Jebsen

Preoccupied as they were with having fun, the two student friends could not entirely ignore the menacing political changes taking place around them in the Germany of the 1930s. They made a point of teasing the 'pro-Nazi student intelligentsia'. The mockery, however, had a metal strand to it. 'Under that mask of a snob and cynic and under his playboy manners', Jebsen was developing a deep distaste for Nazism. Popov found the posturing Nazi Brownshirts ridiculous, and repulsive.

After graduation, Popov returned to Yugoslavia, and set himself up in the import-export business, travelling widely. Jebsen headed to England, announcing that he intended to study at Oxford University and write books on philosophy. He did neither (though he would later claim to have done both). They would not meet again for three years, by which time the world was at war.

In early 1940, Popov was living in Dubrovnik, where he had opened his own law firm, and conducting affairs with at least four women, when he received a telegram from his old friend, summoning him to Belgrade: 'Need to meet you urgently'.

Their reunion was joyful, and spectacularly bibulous. They went on a bender through Belgrade's nightspots, having enlisted 'two girls from the chorus of one of the clubs'. At dawn, all four sat down to a breakfast of steak and champagne. Jebsen told Popov that in the intervening years, he had become acquainted with the great English writer, P. G. Wodehouse. With his monocle and silk cravat, Jebsen now looked like an oddly Germanic version of Bertie Wooster. Popov studied his old friend. Jebsen wore the same expression of 'sharp intelligence, cynicism and dark humour', but he also seemed tense, as if there was something weighing on his mind. He chain-smoked, and 'ordered his whiskies double, neat, and frequently. In style, his clothes still rivalled Eden's, but his blond hair was no longer so closely trimmed and he had a neglected moustache, reddened by tobacco.'

A few days later, the friends were alone, at the bar of a Belgrade hotel, when Jebsen lowered his voice, looked around in a ludicrously conspiratorial manner, and confided that he had joined the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, 'because it saved him from soldiering, of which he was very much afraid as he is a heavy sufferer from varicose veins'. Jebsen's recruiter was a family friend, Colonel Hans Oster, deputy to Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Abwehr. He now had the formal but vague Abwehr title of *Forscher*, meaning researcher, or talent scout, with the technical rank of private, attached to a 400-strong special detachment of the Brandenburg Regiment. This unit was in reality 'a wangle by Canaris to keep a number of young men out of the clutches of compulsory service'. Jebsen was a freelance spy, on permanent leave from the army, with a personal assurance from Canaris that he would never wear uniform, never undergo military training, and never be sent to war. He was free to spend his 'time travelling throughout Europe on his private business and financial affairs, so long as he held himself available to help the Abwehr when called upon to do so'.

'Hitler is the undisputed master of Europe,' Jebsen declared. 'In a few months' time, he'll probably finish off England, and

then America and Russia will be glad to come to terms with him.’ This was pure Nazi propaganda, but Jebsen’s expression, as usual, was glintingly ironic. ‘Would you dine with a friend of mine,’ Jebsen asked suddenly, ‘a member of the German Embassy?’ The friend turned out to be one Major Müntzinger, a corpulent Bavarian and the most senior Abwehr officer in the Balkans. Over brandy and cigars, Müntzinger made his pitch to Popov, as subtle as a sledgehammer. ‘No country can resist the German army. In a couple of months, England will be invaded. To facilitate the German task and to make an eventual invasion less bloody, you could help.’ Müntzinger shifted to flattery. Popov was well connected. His business was the ideal cover for travelling to Britain, where he must know many important and influential people. Why, did he not know the Duke of Kent himself? Popov nodded. (He did not admit that he had visited Britain only once in his life, and had met the Duke for a matter of minutes at Dubrovnik’s Argosy Yacht Club.) Müntzinger continued: ‘We have many agents in England, quite a number of them excellent. But your connections would open many doors. You could render us great service. And we could do the same for you. The Reich knows how to show its appreciation.’ Jebsen drank his whisky and said nothing. Müntzinger was somewhat vague about the kind of information Popov might gather: ‘General. Political.’ And then, after a pause: ‘Military. Johnny will introduce you to the proper people when and if you accept.’ Popov asked for time to think the offer over, and in the morning, he accepted. Jebsen had recruited his first spy for German intelligence. He would never recruit another.

Popov, meanwhile, had begun to develop what he called ‘a little idea of my own’.

In 1941, the Interallié was the most important spy network in Nazi-occupied France. Indeed, as one British intelligence officer remarked, it was virtually the only one, ‘our sole source of information from France’ in the early part of the war. The

network consisted of scores of informers, agents and sub-agents, but ultimately the Interallié was the creation of one spy, a man to whom conspiracy and subterfuge were second nature, who regarded espionage as a vocation. His French collaborators knew him as Armand Borni; he also used the codename 'Walenty', or 'Valentine'. His real name was Roman Czerniawski, and in a very short time, through sheer energy, conviction and a soaring sense of his own worth, he had become the most valuable British spy in France.

Czerniawski was a Polish patriot, but that phrase cannot do justice to his essential Polishness, and the depths of his attachment to his motherland. He lived for Poland, and was perfectly prepared (at times, almost anxious) to die for it. 'His loyalty is entirely to his own country, and every problem he sees is bound up with the destiny of the Polish people,' wrote one of his fellow spies. He loathed the Germans and Russians with equal intensity for carving up his country, and dreamed only of restoring the Polish nation. Every other loyalty, every other consideration, was secondary. He stood just five foot six inches tall, with a thin face and intense, close-set eyes. He smiled readily, and spoke at machine-gun speed.

The son of a well-to-do Warsaw financier, Czerniawski had trained as a fighter pilot before the war, but a serious crash had left him partially sighted and deskbound. The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 found Captain Czerniawski at air force headquarters in Warsaw, a specialist in military intelligence and the author of a well-received treatise on counter-intelligence. Czerniawski was a professional, 'a man who lives and thinks spying', as one colleague put it. He regarded the spy trade as an honourable calling 'based on the highest ideals of human endeavour'. As the Polish army crumbled beneath the German onslaught, Czerniawski escaped to Romania, and then, using forged documents, made his way to France, where Polish forces were regrouping. When France fell in 1940, his division was disbanded, but rather than join his compatriots in

Britain to continue the fight from there, Czerniawski went underground. He persuaded a young French widow, Renée Borni, to lend him her late husband's identity. As German began their occupation, a peasant whose papers identified him as Armand Borni wobbled along beside them on a borrowed bicycle, taking mental notes, and already congratulating himself. 'Every signpost, every sign on a truck, every distinguishing mark of any sort, meant far more to me than to anybody else.' Here were the seeds of what he would grandly refer to as his 'vision'. While the Polish government-in-exile in London fought one kind of war, he would mount another. He imagined 'small cells of resistance, multiplying with great speed, joining together and forming one screen of eyes'.

Czerniawski made his way to the unoccupied South of France, where he made contact with the Polish secret service and obtained formal approval for his plan to establish a network in the occupied zone. A few nights later, he was dining alone at La Frégate, a restaurant in Toulouse, when a young woman asked if she might occupy the empty seat at his table. 'She was small, in her thirties. Her pale, thin face, with thin lips, was animated by very vivid eyes.' Mathilde Carré simultaneously sized up her diminutive and accidental dining companion: 'Thin and muscular, with a long narrow face, rather large nose and green eyes which must originally have been clear and attractive but were now flecked with contusions as the result of a flying



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Roman Czerniawski

accident.’ Czerniawski introduced himself ‘in an appalling French accent’. They fell into conversation. After dinner he walked her home.

Mathilde Carré was highly intelligent, overwrought and, at the moment she met Czerniawski, teetering on the edge of a nervous breakdown. The child of bourgeois Parisian parents, she had studied at the Sorbonne, worked briefly in an insurance company, trained as a teacher, and then married a childhood friend, before swiftly discovering she could not stand him. The war was the excuse she needed to leave her husband. With the French army in retreat, she found work in a dressing station, treating the wounded. There she met a lieutenant in the French Foreign Legion, and made love to him ‘under the eyes of an enormous crucifix’ in the bishop’s cell of a seminary at Cazères sur Garonne. He was gone in the morning, and she was pregnant. She decided to keep the baby, and then miscarried. One night, she stood on a high bridge, about to kill herself, but then changed her mind: ‘Instead of throwing myself into the Garonne, I would fling myself into the war. If I really intended to commit suicide, it would be more intelligent to commit a useful suicide.’ To celebrate this decision, she had taken herself out to dinner at La Frégate.

Czerniawski’s abundant self-assurance made Mathilde feel instantly secure. ‘Every time he spoke of the war his eyes flashed. He would not accept that Poland had been defeated. He radiated a kind of confidence and the enthusiasm of youth, an intelligence and willpower which would alternately give place to the airs of a spoilt, affectionate child.’ They met again the next night, and the next. ‘A great bond of friendship was swiftly forged.’ Both would later deny they had ever been lovers with such vehemence that the denials were almost certainly untrue.

Three weeks after their first meeting, Czerniawski confessed that he was a spy, and asked Mathilde to help him realise his ‘vision’ of a multi-celled intelligence network. She said he could count on her; together they would ‘do great things’. The

theatricality of the moment was compounded by Czerniawski's announcement that he had already selected a codename for his new accomplice: she would be 'La Chatte', the She-Cat, because 'you walk so quietly, in your soft shoes, like a cat'. She raised the slim fingers of one hand in a claw: 'And I can scratch as well if I wish.' Perhaps it was a warning.

Roman Czerniawski and Mathilde Carré formed a most effective spy partnership. In Paris, they rented a room in Montmartre, and set about constructing an entire espionage network. 'It will be inter-Allied,' Czerniawski announced. 'The boss will be a Pole, the agents mostly French, and all working for the Allies.' The Interallié network was born.

Mathilde acted as chief recruiter (since some Frenchmen declined to work for a Pole), while Roman gathered, collated, typed and dispatched intelligence material to London. The first recruits were Monique Deschamps, codenamed 'Moustique' (Mosquito), a tiny, chain-smoking firebrand of a woman, and René Aubertin, a former French army tank commander. Gradually the network expanded to include railway workers, police, fishermen, criminals and housewives. They sent whatever intelligence they had gathered to one of numerous 'post boxes' across Paris: the lavatory attendant at La Palette, the Berlitz language school by the Opéra, and a concierge on Rue Lamarck 'who had received a bayonet thrust in the buttocks when the Germans entered Paris, so it was only natural that he should hate them'. Mathilde gathered up their intelligence. 'In her black fur coat, red hat and small, flat, red shoes she moved swiftly from one appointment to another,' wrote Czerniawski, 'bringing new contacts, new possibilities, leaving me free to concentrate on studying the news from our agents and condensing it into our reports.'

Czerniawski's aim was to build up a complete picture of German forces in occupied France, the Order of Battle: troop positions and movements, ammunition dumps, aerodromes, naval and radar installations. 'To defeat the enemy you have

to know where he is; the more exactly you know where he is, the easier it can be,' he wrote. He typed up the condensed reports on tissue paper. Every few weeks, a courier codenamed 'Rapide', 'a tall, thin Pole of indeterminate age with a muddy complexion and a small black moustache', boarded the 11 a.m. Marseille train for Bordeaux at the Gare de Lyon. Ten minutes before departure, he locked himself in the first-class toilet. Over the toilet bowl was a metal sign reading: '*Remplacez le couvercle après l'usage*'. Inserting a handkerchief between screwdriver and screw to avoid tell-tale scratching, Rapide carefully loosened the sign-plate, inserted the tissue-paper report behind, and then screwed it back on. After the train had crossed the border into unoccupied France, an agent of Polish intelligence would perform the procedure in reverse, retrieving the report and inserting a reply to be picked up when the train arrived back in Paris. From unoccupied France, Polish intelligence relayed the message via courier through the neutral Iberian Peninsula to the Polish government in exile in London, which passed it on to the British Secret Services. Every one of Czerniawski's reports ended up with MI6, Britain's foreign intelligence organisation, more formally known as the Secret Intelligence Service, or SIS.

The network, or La Famille as they called it, expanded swiftly. A radio the size of a portable typewriter was smuggled across the border from Vichy France, installed in a top-floor flat near the Trocadero and used to send coded information. Renée Borni, the widow who had furnished Czerniawski's false identity, moved to Paris to work on coding and decoding the wireless messages. Czerniawski gave her the codename 'Violette'. She became his lover. By the middle of 1941, Czerniawski could boast that his 'Big Network composed of French patriots, directed by a Pole and working for England, was now the last stronghold of Allied resistance against Germany'. Three more underground wireless stations were established. Some reports were 400 pages long, including maps and diagrams. Impossible to send by radio, these were photographed, and the undeveloped

film smuggled across the Spanish border, 'packed in such a way that, opened by an unauthorised person, it would be exposed to the light and so made useless'.

Interallié intelligence poured into London in a swelling torrent, ever more detailed and precise, and sometimes so fast that its recipients could not keep up. When a spy discovered the route intended for the personal train of Hermann Goering, the Luftwaffe chief, Czerniawski immediately radioed the information to London, and was dismayed when the train was not attacked. A message arrived the next day. 'RE: GOERING TRAIN SORRY WE GOT THE NEWS TOO LATE TO USE IT FOR THE RAF STOP.'

Inevitably, there were tensions within the group. Mathilde loathed Renée, considering her 'a typical little provincial woman, and badly dressed'. Czerniawski insisted there was 'no question of any jealousy', but he reflected that Mathilde was a 'strange woman, idealistic but ruthless, ambitious, very nervous and highly strung'.

In the autumn of 1941, Czerniawski was told to report to an airfield near Compiègne, where a plane would pick him up to bring him to London for a debriefing. On 1 October, an RAF Lysander glided out of the sky, piloted by a man with a moustache, Squadron Leader J. 'Whippy' Nesbitt-Dufort, whose only French, by way of greeting, was '*C'est la vie*'. On arrival in England, Czerniawski was met by Colonel Stanislaw Gano, the head of Polish intelligence. 'You've kept us all busy on this side,' said Gano, who looked, Czerniawski thought, like 'the head of some business firm'. For twenty-four hours he was quizzed on every aspect of his network. Gano seemed particularly interested in Mathilde Carré. 'We are perfect partners,' Czerniawski assured him. Finally, to his amazement, he was ushered into the presence of General Wladislaw Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister. Sikorski gravely declared that Czerniawski had been awarded the *Virtuti Militari*, the highest Polish military decoration. 'I was petrified by the suddenness, unexpectedness

and solemnity of the moment,' Czerniawski later wrote. He would soon be dropped by parachute back into France to continue his work. The little Polish spy was proud, but with gratification came a niggling doubt, a small premonitory stab of anxiety: 'Subconsciously I felt a disturbing uneasiness.'

Elvira de la Fuente Chaudoir spent night after night at the gaming tables in Hamilton's Club or Crockford's Casino in Mayfair, and though she sometimes won, she always lost in the end. It was most frustrating. But when Elvira wasn't gambling, she was bored to death; which was why she had agreed to have lunch with a man who, she had been told, might offer her a most interesting and well-paid job.

Boredom stalked Elvira Chaudoir like a curse. Her father, a Peruvian diplomat, had made a fortune from guano, the excrement of seabirds, bats and seals, collected off the coast of Peru and exported as fertiliser. Elvira grew up in Paris, where she was expensively educated, and tremendously spoilt. In 1934, at the age of twenty-three, to escape the tedium, she had fled into the arms of Jean Chaudoir, a Belgian stock exchange representative for a gold-mining firm. Jean turned out to be a crashing bore, and life in Brussels was 'exceedingly dull'. After four years of marriage, and a number of unsatisfactory love affairs with both men and women, she came to the conclusion that 'she had nothing in common with her husband' and ran away to Cannes with her best friend, Romy Gilbey, who was married to a scion of the Gilbey gin dynasty, and very rich. Elvira and Mrs Gilbey were happily losing money made from gin in a casino in Cannes when the Germans invaded France; they fled, in an open-top Renault, to St Malo, before taking a boat for England.

In London, Elvira moved into a flat on Sloane Street, but the tedium of life swiftly descended once more. She spent her evenings shuttling between the bar at the Ritz and the bridge tables, losing money she did not have. She would have borrowed from her parents,

but they were stuck in France. She tried to join the Free French forces gathering around the exiled Charles de Gaulle, but was told she was unsuitable. She did a little translating for the BBC, and found it dreary. She complained, to anyone who would listen, that she could not get an interesting job because she was Peruvian. One



PRIVATE COLLECTION

Elvira de la Fuente Chaudoir

of those who happened to be listening, one night at Hamilton's, was an RAF officer, who told a friend in military intelligence, who passed her name on to someone in MI6. And so it was that Elvira Chaudoir now found herself, at the age of twenty-nine, in the grill room of the Connaught Hotel, sitting across the table from a middle-aged man in a rumpled suit with a bristling white moustache and the eyes of a hyperactive ferret. He had introduced himself as 'Mr Masefield'. His real name was Lieutenant Colonel Claude Edward Marjoribanks Dansey, also known as 'Haywood', 'Uncle Claude' and 'Colonel Z'. He was assistant chief of MI6.

Claude Dansey was witty, spiteful and widely disliked by his fellow spies. Hugh Trevor-Roper, the waspish historian who worked in wartime intelligence, considered him to be 'an utter shit, corrupt, incompetent, but with a certain low cunning'. Dansey was a most unpleasant man, and a most experienced spy. They made an odd couple: Elvira, tall and over-dressed, with a sweet, rather innocent face, her auburn hair arranged into a question mark over her forehead; Dansey, small, bald,

bespectacled and intense. Elvira rather liked this fizzing little man, and as the conversation unfolded it became clear that he knew a great deal about her. He knew about Mrs Gilbey and the unsuccessful evenings at the bridge table; he knew her father had been appointed Peruvian chargé d'affaires to the collaborationist Vichy government in France; he knew what was, or rather what was not, in her bank account. 'I realised he must have been tapping my telephone. There was no other way he could have learned so much about me and my friends,' she later reflected.

Dansey offered her a job. Her Peruvian passport, he explained, meant that she could travel with comparative ease in occupied Europe, and her father's diplomatic status would provide cover for an extended visit to Vichy France. She could report on political matters, but more importantly she might get herself recruited as an agent by the Germans. This is the intelligence technique known as 'coat-trailing', dangling a potential recruit before the opposition in the hope that, if recruited, they can then be put to work as a double agent. She would be well paid for her efforts. Elvira did not hesitate.

The MI6 assessment of their new recruit was blunt: 'Attractive in appearance. She speaks fluent French, English and Spanish. She is intelligent and has a quick brain but is probably rather lazy about using it. A member of the international smart gambling set, her friends are to be found in any of the smart bridge clubs in London.' Surveillance revealed that her 'tastes appear to be in the direction of the "high spots"'. Police reported 'hilarious parties' at the Sloane Street flat, with 'rowdy behaviour, singing and shouting late at night, and the arrival of drunken men and women in the small hours'. Deputy Chief Constable Joseph Goulder noted, with disapproval and some understatement, that Mrs Chaudoir 'favours the companionship of women who may not be careful of their virginity'. Though Elvira might have come across as some dizzy-headed socialite, in reality she was bright and resourceful, and with a cast-iron cover: a good-time girl with no interests beyond the next cocktail, the next bed

partner and the next bet. She was also attractive to both sexes and hungry for cash, qualities which might come in useful. As Dansey knew from a lifetime of espionage, even the most intelligent and discreet of people will tend to indiscretion if they think they are talking to a foolish and beddable woman.

In a flat in Knightsbridge, Elvira was taught how to use secret ink using a match head impregnated with a chemical powder. Once in France, she would write 'apparently innocuous letters' to a cover address in Lisbon. 'Between the lines of those letters I was to insert my intelligence reports penned in an undetectable fluid that could be developed by Dansey's technicians.' Elvira was a swift learner. 'She is very intelligent and quick to grasp essentials,' her instructor reported.

Her budding spy career very nearly came to an early end when a certain Sub-Lieutenant Burnett of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve reported that, one night at Crockford's, he had overheard Elvira Chaudoir boasting 'she was being taught a secret service code in the neighbourhood of St James's and that shortly she was to be sent to Vichy'. Elvira was given a severe scolding, and told 'she must abstain from divulging information which may have come to her knowledge'. Chastened, she promised to be more discreet, but the incident had demonstrated one of her more aggravating (and endearing) traits: like many spies, she found it hard to keep a secret.

Elvira was given the oddly masculine codename 'Cyril', and told to stand ready to go to France. Her war was about to become very interesting indeed.

Juan Pujol García had been many things in his short life: cinema proprietor, businessman, cavalry officer (though he feared horses) and reluctant soldier. He had spent most of the Spanish Civil War in hiding from Francoist forces. A graduate of the Royal Poultry School at Arenys de Mar, Spain's most prestigious college for chicken farmers, he ran a poultry farm outside Barcelona, though he hated chickens. Pujol had no

head for figures and the business went bust. Stocky and spry, with a high forehead and 'warm brown eyes with a slightly mischievous tint', he looked like a fighting bantam. When the Second World War broke out, Pujol decided he wanted to spy for the British. 'I must do something,' he told himself. 'Something practical; I must make my contribution towards the good of humanity.' Hitler was 'a psychopath', Pujol concluded, and so he must support the Allies. 'I wanted to work for them, to supply them with confidential information which would be of interest to the Allied cause, politically or militarily.'

Quite where and how he would obtain such information, he had yet to work out. 'My plans were fairly confused,' he later admitted. His memoirs, written many years later, suggest that his quixotic, deeply held determination to fight Hitler sprang from an aggressive form of pacifism, and an abiding distrust of political extremism in any form. He was a supremely gentle soul, proud never to have fired a gun; he planned to fight Nazism in a different way. 'I was fascinated by the origin of words,' he wrote many years later. 'The pen is mightier than the sword. I believe this sincerely and absolutely. I have devoted the greater part of my life to this ideal, using all my talents, all my convictions, all possible schemes, machinations and stratagems.' Pujol would fight a unique sort of war, with words as his only weapons.

In January 1941, the twenty-nine-year-old Catalan approached the British Embassy in Madrid, with an offer to spy against the Germans. He was politely but firmly told to go away. In a variant of Groucho Marx's dictum, the British did not want anyone in the club who wanted to be a member. Pujol next tried the Germans, pretending to be a keen fascist willing to spy against the British – in the hope that, once recruited, he could then betray them. The Germans told him they were 'extremely busy'. But the little Catalan with the oddly intense eyes continued to badger the Germans in Spain, schooling himself in National Socialism until he could 'rant away as befitted a staunch Nazi'. Finally (mostly to get him to shut up),

the Germans said that if he could get to Britain, via Lisbon, he would be considered for intelligence work. This was enough for Pujol. From that point on, he began to worm his way into German confidences, and in particular those of Major Karl-Erich Kuhlenthal of the Madrid Abwehr station.

Kuhlenthal would be comprehensively duped in the course of Operation Mincemeat, the deception in which a dead body was floated ashore in Spain, carrying forged documents indicating an Allied landing in Greece rather than Sicily. The German officer was efficient, paranoid and stupendously gullible. From Pujol's point of view, he was the ideal case officer. Kuhlenthal duly equipped Pujol with secret ink, cash, the codename 'Agent Arabel', and some advice: 'He should be careful not to underestimate the British, as they were a formidable enemy.' On his arrival in Lisbon, Pujol once more contacted the British, and once more was rejected. This left him in something of a quandary, since he needed to start feeding information to the Germans as soon as possible. On 19 July 1941, he sent a telegram to Kuhlenthal announcing his safe arrival in Britain.

But he was not in Britain. Pujol was still in Portugal. Denied the opportunity to gather real intelligence, for either side, he decided to invent it, with the help of the Lisbon public library, second-hand books and whatever he could glean from newsreels. He dug out the names and addresses of real British



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Juan Pujol

munitions companies, consulted a *Blue Guide to England* for relevant place names, and a Portuguese publication entitled *The British Fleet* as a primer on naval matters. Pujol had never been to Britain. He simply imagined it, sending back detailed, long-winded reports about things he thought he might have seen had he been there. Pujol's style was exhaustingly verbose, a thicket of clauses and sub-clauses, adjectival swamps and overwrought sentences that stretched to a distant grammatical horizon. He would later claim that this extraordinary writing style was a way of filling up the page without saying very much. Though he loved to play with words, his reports were full of glaring errors. He could never get to grips with British military nomenclature or culture. He imagined that Glaswegian drinking habits must be similar to those in Spain; he wrote: 'There are men here who would do anything for a litre of wine.' His German controllers not only failed to spot his mistakes, but heaped praise on Agent Arabel, particularly when he claimed to have recruited two sub-agents in Britain who were, of course, entirely fictional. For nine months, Pujol remained in Lisbon, doing what spies, when stuck for real information, have always done: he invented what he thought his spymasters wanted to hear. He would continue to make it up, magnificently, for the rest of the war.

Major Emile Kliemann of the German Abwehr was having a most agreeable war. Occupied Paris was an exceptionally pleasant place to be, if you happened to be one of the occupiers. He had an office on the Champs-Élysées, a comfortable apartment near the Bois de Boulogne, plenty of disposable cash and very little to do. Most importantly, he had a new mistress, named Yvonne Delidaise. A French woman with a German mother, Yvonne was demanding, expensive, and twenty years his junior. His dumpy Austrian wife was still in Vienna, and certain to remain there. This was also a source of satisfaction. Kliemann's job was recruiting informers and ferreting out French spies, but his indefatigable colleague Hugo Bleicher seemed happy

to do the hard work, which was just fine with Kliemann. A Viennese businessman, posted to Paris in June 1940, Kliemann had little time for Nazism. Indeed, he 'did not particularly like Germans', and rather hoped that Germany would not win the war too quickly as he wanted nothing more than to continue his newfound Parisian life, making love to Yvonne and meeting the odd dodgy character in his favourite café, Chez Valerie. Portly and broad-shouldered, Kliemann wore a neatly clipped moustache, and a gold signet ring on the third finger of his left hand with the initials 'EK'. He dressed with what he considered understated elegance, dyed his sideburns, and wore his hair carefully parted and greased down. He played the violin and collected antique porcelain. At forty-three, Major Emile Kliemann was vain, romantic, clever, staggeringly lazy and consistently unpunctual. As befits a spy chief, he had assembled an impressive number of aliases – 'Killberg', 'von Carstaedt', 'Polo', 'Octave' and 'Monsieur Jean' – though not a single workable spy.

On 13 October 1941, Kliemann reluctantly arranged to meet a potential recruit, a twenty-nine-year-old Frenchwoman of Russian origin, recommended by one of his colleagues. Her name was Lily Sergeyev.

Kliemann was two hours late for their rendezvous at the Café du Rond-Point. The young woman waiting at the corner table was handsome, without being beautiful. She had curly brown hair, bright blue eyes and a square chin. In fluent German, Lily Sergeyev explained that she was a journalist and painter. Her father had been a Tsarist government official but after the Revolution, when Lily was five, the family had emigrated to Paris. Her grandfather, she announced with pride, had been the last Imperial Russian Ambassador to Serbia. Her uncle, General Yevgeni Miller, had commanded the Fifth Russian Army in the First World War and then vanished in 1937, and was executed in Moscow two years later. Her father now sold cars. Her mother was a dressmaker. She considered herself French. She wanted to spy for Germany.



Lily Sergeyev

Kliemann was intrigued. Lily seemed vivacious, intelligent and, most importantly, interested in Kliemann. He invited her to dinner at the Cascade restaurant, near the Bois de Boulogne, explaining that Yvonne, his 'secretary', would meet them there. The young woman insisted on bringing her dog, a small, white, male terrier-poodle cross named Babs, to which she was obviously devoted.

Once they were seated in the restaurant, Lily told her

story. A restless spirit, she had made a number of epic journeys across Europe by bicycle and on foot, including one that had taken her through Hitler's Germany. There she had been impressed by the efficiency of the Nazi regime, and had written a series of admiring articles for the French press. She had even interviewed Goering, who had 'promised to obtain for her a personal interview with Hitler'. This had not materialised. In 1937, a German journalist named Felix Dassel, whom she had met on her travels, told her he was working for German intelligence, and asked Lily if she wanted a job. She had declined, but when the Germans marched into Paris, Dassel had reappeared. Over dinner at Maxim's, she told him that the British had 'let the French down badly and that she had no love for them'. Dassel asked her again if she was prepared to work for the Germans; this time, she accepted. It was Dassel who had recommended that Kliemann arrange this meeting.

Yvonne was yawning by this point in Lily's story, but Kliemann was curious. She seemed genuine enough, and enthusiastic, though nervous. 'It might be quite easy for me to get to Portugal, to

Australia, or to England,' she said. 'I have relatives in all those places and nobody would be surprised if I wanted to get out of France.'

Kliemann pondered. 'I am interested in your project,' he said finally. 'I think we will send you to Portugal. I very much doubt that you will be allowed to go to England.'

Then, suddenly, Kliemann caught Lily's wrist, and fixed her with what he plainly believed was a penetrating, spy-masterly stare: '*Why* do you want to work for us?'

There was a long and uncomfortable pause. Her reply, when it came, was an odd one.

'Major, you are an intelligent man: how much can my answer be worth to you? I can tell you that it is from conviction, a matter of principle, or because I love Germany, or else I hate the British. But if you were the enemy, if I were here to spy on you, to betray you, do you think that my answer would be any different? So will you allow me not to answer?'

He smiled and replied that 'of course, she was right'.

Kliemann dropped off Lily and her little dog at her parents' flat near the Trocadero. 'I will make contact again soon,' said the Major. Then, as usual, he did nothing at all.

In her diary, Lily wrote: 'Babs lifts up his shaggy, truffle-like nose and looks at me inquiringly.' (The diary is written entirely in the present tense, and much of it is devoted to her dog.) 'I take Babs on my knees, on the drawing-room sofa, and say in his pink ear: "It's a fine game, it's a grand game, but, you know, if we lose it, we'll lose our lives . . . or mine, at any rate.'" Babs would be the first to perish in the game.