

Hitler at War : What *Really* Happened ?

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Part 4

Chapter 3: Reinhard Heydrich

"The devotion of the greatest is to encounter risk and danger and play dice for death."

Friedrich Nietzsche, "Of Self-Overcoming", Part Two, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

It may be said that Germany lost World War Two not only before it began, but even as early as 1931, two years' prior to Hitler's election as Chancellor, when he was still struggling for power. During that year, Hans-Thilo Schmidt, a failed soap -factory owner, secured a minor position at the German Army's *Chiffrierstelle*, or "Cypher Office", through his brother, Rudolf, then chief of the signal corps. Cryptographers at the *Chiffrierstelle* had by then perfected, after nearly ten years of intensive labor, a code machine far in advance of any encryption device invented until then. Known as *Enigma*, it preserved the secrecy of German military orders from all outside attempts to read them.

In November, Schmidt went to the Grand Hotel in Verviers, Belgium. There he turned over confidential documents divulging the secret workings of *Enigma* to a French secret agent for 10,000 marks (about \$30,000 in today's money). "Thanks to Schmidt's treachery," Simon Singh writes in his history of cryptoanalysis, "it was now possible for the Allies to create an accurate replica of the German military *Enigma* machine" (146). The operation to finally crack its encoded messages was referred to by British Secret Service agents as "the Ultra secret". Thanks to an apolitical traitor who betrayed his country for cash, a world would come to an end. But even *Ultra* was not enough to win the war for the Allies, particularly at sea, where the *Kriegsmarine* codes still defied de-cyphering. In early 1943, however, the British captured a u-boat with part of its code still on board. Traitors in the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence) supplied the rest, and henceforth the submarine campaign abruptly collapsed. Royal Navy and U.S. Navy destroyer captains knew the whereabouts of all German submarines, and proceeded to relent-lessly depth-charge them.

The events leading up to that crucial turning-point in the Second World War began with a covert struggle going on inside the Third Reich between two of its lesser known figures: Wilhelm Canaris and Reinhard Heydrich. Ironically, both men were old friends. Heydrich, leader of the SS Sicherheits Dienst [the SD] (SS Security Service), had served under Canaris in the navy during the 1920's, and his former superior rose to the post of Abwehr Chief in 1935. The following year, Heydrich became the head of the Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei, the State Secret Police, equivalent to the F.B.I. or Scotland Yard). It was his duty to ferret out spies and traitors, while promoting espionage in enemy countries. These tasks were normally within the purview of the Abwehr, a supposedly non-political organization dealing strictly with military problems. But the S.D. was needed to counter ideological opponents---both foreign and domestic---bent on destroying National Socialism by any means possible. Heydrich proved a genius in defeating these unseen enemies, and was able in large measure to nullify the effectiveness of secret intelligence technology by rapidly tracking down spies and traitors feeding England the vital information that made *Ultra* work.

He was no less successful in offensive covert operations. Described by Mikkelson as "undoubtedly the single most spectacular coup of the entire war," Heydrich so manipulated Stalin's paranoia with the skillful deployment of convincing disinformation that the Marshall responded by murdering his own Red Army high command. The wholesale loss of the Soviet Union's professional military leaders manifested itself in humiliating set-backs at the hands of little Finland in 1940, and the unbroken success of Axis forces in Russia the following year.

On 27 September 1941, Heydrich was made Protector of Czech territory. He had been officially appointed to bring order to that troublesome, unproductive land, but secretly and primarily to hunt down an espionage ring suspected of operating inside the Wehrmacht itself. Heydrich brought the Czechs out of a feudal Slavdom that had dominated them since the Middle Ages with the goal of making them members of the modern European community. So rapidly had his plans developed by early 1942 that the Czechs became the most productive, pro-Reich of all the occupied peoples---a transformation the more remarkable in view of their popular hatred for Germany less than a year before. Heydrich's success lay in his determination to make the Czech polity an ideal National Socialist state, in which its people felt they no longer belonged to some insignificant, little country, but valuable, contributing members of a united continent. They began to think of themselves less as Czechs, than as Europeans struggling for their common existence with not only Germans, but French, Scandinavians, Hungarians, Spaniards, etc.

While Heydrich up-graded the Czech Protectorate with one hand, he was undoing the treason and espionage of the Reich's underground enemies with the other. He was hot on their trail, locking up one spy after another, with disastrous consequence for British military intelligence. But in February, 1942, Heydrich made a shocking discovery: Paul Thuemmel, an agent in the German *Abwehr*, was spying for the Allies. Rather than liquidate Thuemmel, Heydrich released him and had him followed. The traitor was leading S.D. investigators to the highest levels of the *Abwehr*, perhaps even to Heydrich's old friend, Wilhelm Canaris.

Unbeknownst to Heydrich was the deep hatred Canaris nurtured for National Socialism, and the terrible, even decisive damage he had already done to Germany. For example, in summer, 1940, Canaris, as the leader of the Third Reich's military intelligence, was ordered to diplomatically pave the way for cooperation with Vichy France, then Spain, where Hitler was to meet with Phillipe Petain and Francisco Franco, respectively. The Fuehrer believed their cooperation was so important he wanted to appeal to them in person. He was a strong admirer of the French Marshall, who stayed behind at the side of his defeated country in its darkest hour the previous June, while the likes of Charles DeGaulle and others who started the war with Germany left France in the lurch by running away to England.

Hitler had timed his meeting well. On 3 July, Royal Navy ships launched unprovoked, sneak attacks on the French fleet riding peacefully at anchor in its North African ports, Algeria's Oran and Mers-el-Kebir. Bombers from the HMS aircraft carrier, *Ark Royal*, returned on the 6th, when their attempt to sink the French battleship, *Dunkirk*, was beaten back, but not before a British torpedo struck a lighter laden with depth-charges, killing 150 of her crew. Two days later, more bombers from the HMS *Hermes* attacked the French flagship, *Richelieu*, at Dakar, and were again repulsed by the defenders. As late as the end of September (23 through 25), Churchill tried to grab the French naval forces in West Africa. In his attempted seizure of the garrison at Dakar, the French fought so furiously, they badly damaged two British battleships (HMS *Barham* and *Resolution*), and sent his attempted invasion packing.

These victories restored French self-esteem after defeat by the German Wehrmacht, and represented serious blows to British morale, particularly in the Royal Navy. During the first two days of English aggression against their erstwhile comrades-in-arms, 1,297 French sailors had been killed; more were horribly scalded by seas of burning oil, their vessels sunk or badly damaged. Churchill claimed the raids on his ally of scarcely two months before were to prevent the ships from being grabbed by Germany. But Hitler was never interested in the French Navy; he had no intention of squandering his precious oil reserves, earmarked for the Panzers, on costly and vulnerable warships.

Consequently, he allowed the French vessels to be manned and even armed exclusively by French sailors under a special provision, wherein attempts by Germans, Italians or British to seize the fleet would result in their being scuttled before they could be taken. In other words, the Fuehrer made it impossible for himself---or anyone else---to steal the French ships. Churchill knew this, as well as the rest of the world, because the agreement had been published as front-page stories in every major newspaper on Earth. Although the Allies continued to depict Hitler as an untrustworthy liar, a secret naval conference held at his Wolfsschlucht headquarters on 20 June 1940 proves he believed what he said. Grand Admiral Raeder reported in regard to France's High Fleet, "The Fuehrer wishes to refrain from taking any measures which would affect French honor."

Churchill's real motive for ordering the cowardly operation was to vent his revenge on France for having had the effrontery to sign an armistice with the despicable Nazis, even though he betrayed the French Army in the field during the campaign of 1940, insuring its defeat (see below). Churchill had other motives for aggression. The pro-Allied *Marshall-Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopedia of World War Two* admitted, "To put it bluntly, Churchill wanted to strike a mighty blow at low cost to galvanize British national and international opinion. As he wrote in *The Second World War*, 'Here was this Britain which so many had counted down and out, which strangers had supposed to be quivering on the brink of surrender to the mighty power arrayed against her, striking ruthlessly at her dearest friends of yesterday and securing for a while to herself the undisputed command of the sea' (sic, British naval forces were repulsed by the French defenders)" (vol I, 229).

According to the same source (226, 227), when he proposed military action

against his "dearest friends of yesterday" to Royal Navy commanders, North and Somerville, they were "horrified and astonished". More than twenty years later (in 1962), Admiral of the Fleet (Retired) Sir John H.D. Cunningham still cringed at the very memory of Churchill's armed betrayal of a surprised ally as "appallingly shameful; appallingly stupid"(229). Waging all-out war---not on a neutral country only, but against a former ally of just eight weeks before---Churchill committed a genuine war-crime of the first magnitude. The day following his underhanded attack, the French severed diplomatic relations with Britain, then dispatched a bomber raid against Gibraltar in retaliation. Churchill backed down from declaring war, because doing so would have given Hitler what the Fuehrer wanted: military alliance with the French.

Hatred of the duplicitous British had never run so high in France before, and Hitler sought to take advantage of popular sentiment by requesting from Petain an alliance against England. In view of recent events, the Marshall felt obliged to comply, so prospects for French-German cooperation looked good. General Franco was even more anxious to jump into the fray. He relished the opportunity of coming to the Reich's aid in its time of crisis, just as the Germans had helped bring him victory in the Spanish Civil War. But before the Fuehrer met with Petain and Franco to confirm their alliances, Canaris personally informed them in strictest confidence, as one old soldier to his brothers-in-arms, that Germany was doomed to lose the war, and both statesmen, if they loved their countries, should never agree to any kind of deal with Hitler. They were astounded to learn such news, but because it came from none other than the head of Germany's own military intelligence, they were inclined to believe him, in spite of Hitler's unbroken line of successes on every front at the time.

Franco, especially, was vulnerable to the *Abwehr* Chief's subversion, because he was an old, personal friend of the ingratiating Canaris, in whose office hung a large photograph, not of his Fuehrer, but of the Spanish generalissimo. When Hitler visited Petain, the Marshall, while still friendly, unaccountably refused all proposals for cooperation; his attitude had been changed. For his support against England, Hitler had offered to rebuild the French fleet, but not even this unprecedented generosity swayed Petain. A year later, in early July, Churchill's belligerence against his erstwhile ally was unabated, when he launched a powerful invasion of neutral Syria. The French defenders were overwhelmed, but not before inflicting about 2,500 casualties on the British. Such aggression---the seizure of French territory, the killing of thousands of French civilians in terror attacks, and sinking of French ships with high fatalities---were more than sufficient grounds for the Marshal to declare war on England. But Canaris had poisoned his mind with serious doubts about the future, uncertainties that prevented him from making the correct

decision.

Moving on from the disappointing meeting with Petain, Hitler was similarly rebuffed at Hendaye, on the Spanish border, by Franco, whose seizure of Gibraltar would have assured victory in the Mediterranean and, inevitably, North Africa. This was the operation uppermost in the Fuehrer's mind at the time. He wanted an alliance between Germany, Italy, France and Spain to drive the British out of the Mediterranean. Without the diplomatic sabotage wrought by Canaris, such an alliance would have undoubtedly been made, and the course of the war radically changed in favor of the Axis. But his diplomatic sabotage did not end in France or Spain. He tried to similarly dissuade Bulgaria, with is valuable oil reserves, from joining the Axis, but failed when King Boris allied his country with the Reich on 1 March 1941. In cowardly revenge, Canaris had the monarch poisoned two years later.

Like other recreant aristocrats who plotted in the shadows against their own people, Canaris "was never to lack the money to maintain a comfortable and cultured life at home," (Manvell, 41)---even during the darkest post-First World War days, when impoverished Germans were starving by the millions. The son of a Ruhr industrialist, he was determined to maintain his position of inherited wealth above all other considerations. There may have been another factor that not only understandably generated his inveterate hatred of National Socialism, but set him apart from his fellow traitors. Canaris was possibly Jewish. Known mysteriously among his closest friends as "the little Levantine," (Manvell, 39), he had ancestral roots, not in Germany, but Lombardy, where Jews operated a thriving mercantile community since the Italian Renaissance. An unconfirmed report (Britton, 26) mentions in a footnote that "Wilhelm Canaris" was actually born Moses Meyerbeer. Manvell and Fraenkel underscore his possibly non-Aryan background by explaining that Canaris "even managed (by the use of false papers) to introduce Jews into the Abwehr, men such as Colonels Simon and Bloch" (140). With Jews running his own military intelligence. Hitler could hardly have been expected to win the war.

By spring, 1942, Heydrich was beginning to identify Canaris (or Meyerbeer?) as the most dangerous traitor in the Third Reich. According to *SD* officer, Walter Schellenberg, Heydrich "felt certain, in fact, that Canaris had betrayed the date of the attack in the West, but nevertheless he did not want to proceed against him yet. He would wait and gather more evidence. 'You should not let yourself be lulled asleep by him,' Heydrich warned me. The day would come, however, when Canaris would be punished for all the damage he had caused to the regime" (Schellenberg, 405-6). In fact, Canaris had not only informed the British of Germany's advance against France, but twice warned them of the imminent attack on the Soviet Union (Manvell, 150).

Canaris was at last becoming circumspect among loyal elements in the Wehrmacht. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel "had even reprimanded him for the incessant warnings which, as head of military intelligence, he thought it his duty to give" (Manvell and Fraenkel, 150). And Heydrich was beginning to close in on the Abwehr traitor. "I noticed now for the first time signs of an inner weariness in Canaris," Schellenberg remembered. "He was worn out by the continual internecine conflict. Heydrich's ice-cold tactics of the last months were beginning to show their effect. He felt insecure and restless, and, or so I thought, something like a physical fear of Heydrich" (Schellenberg, 406). Schellenberg's impression was seconded by an early biographer of Canaris; the turn-coat Admiral was "frankly scared to death of Heydrich, whom he once called 'the cleverest of beasts'. Although he never seemed nervous with Hitler, however difficult the circumstances, a telephone call from Heydrich disturbed him the whole day" (Abshagen, 202).

A panic-stricken Canaris informed the British that if Heydrich was not eliminated at once they would lose all their contacts inside Germany after a few weeks. In a fair fight, the Germans had always won and would continue to win, until final victory was theirs. The Allies' only hope for survival was espionage. Heydrich's Czech showcase had likewise come under final consideration for implementation in all the occupied territories, where the heavy-handed German Army aristocrats were in charge. According to Mikkelson, Heydrich "expected nothing less than to replace the inefficient and corrupt Army administration of France and quite possibly all of the territories. Allied leaders in Moscow and London were terrified. What if Heydrich and the SS took over all of the territories and enlisted the effective cooperation of tens of millions of Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutch, Danes, Norwegians, Poles, Slavs, Ukrainians and White Russians united into a super SS state? The war could be lost! Clearly, Heydrich was the most dangerous man in the Third Reich, and he must be eliminated at any cost."

Alarmed by the gravity of the situation, Churchill ordered some expatriated Czech assassins parachuted near Prague. On the morning of 27 May, they attacked the open, unguarded car in which Heydrich was riding. Their hand-grenade exploded on the running-board, fatally wounding him. He lingered painfully for a few days, then passed away at 4:30 a.m., on 4 June 1942. In the wake of his murder, Rommel's *Afrika Korps* was badly defeated at El Alamein, followed only a few weeks later by the encirclement of the 6th Army's 22 divisions of 330,000 men at Stalingrad---the two most decisive battles of the Second World War. In both cases, Churchill and Stalin knew the Germans' battle-plans before they took to the field.

Probably nothing more graphically epitomized the turning-point that had been reached with Heydrich's death than the war at sea: The moment of his assassination marked the absolute high-water mark in the fortunes of Germany's submarine campaign, when 190 Allied vessels were sunk, the greatest number ever scored by the u-boats. Beginning the very next month, their successes declined. It was no co-incidence that the Axis had been winning until his murder, but began to steadily lose thereafter.

Heydrich was perhaps only days away from arresting Canaris and closing down the Jew-ridden *Abwehr*, with inevitably fatal consequences for all conspirators in the General Staff. But following his assassination, Gestapo investigators were side -tracked by an apparently more pressing espionage ring inside Germany known as *Die rote Kapelle* ("The Red Orchestra"). It was set up and operated by Leopold Trepper, a Communist Jew, who immigrated after the war to Israel. Like their counterparts in the *Abwehr* and General Staff, Trepper's traitors were upper-class dilettantes, including an American Jewess and "an impoverished Prussian aristocrat" (Manvell, 166). This seditious rabble, known even among themselves as "the Communist aristocracy", also enjoyed what they considered intellectually fashionable flirtations with Soviet-style Marxism to distinguish themselves from vulgar Nazis.

With Trepper's assistance (10,000 marks, mobile printing presses, and several radio transmitters), they nonetheless set up "an organization for intelligence work and the promotion of political propaganda which to a considerable extent threatened the Nazi war machine" (Manvell, 166). The Red Orchestra placed agents on the Luftwaffe general staff, the Foreign Broadcasts Monitoring Service, and even the German government itself. Although Trepper's *Red Orchestra* was eventually wiped out by the Gestapo and S.D., its pursuit and eradication distracted attention from the Abwehr and Army.

Meanwhile, counter-intelligence investigators could not believe that Germany's own Military Intelligence was a hatchery of traitors. In the years following Heydrich's assassination, Canaris resumed his role as Germany's most lethal cancer, until he was exposed in the failed attempt against Hitler's life on 20 July 1944. Eight months later, "the little Levantine" died naked on the gallows. Too late! By then, he and his fellow traitors in the General Staff had supplied the Allies with everything they needed to win the war. Hitler was like a blind boxer fighting outnumbering opponents who knew each move long before he made it.

As Mikkelson writes, "Allied leaders in London and Moscow knew exactly what was at stake. Their murder of SS-Obergruppenfuehrer Reinhard Heydrich guaranteed that the Third Reich would be crushed in the Allied pinchers of overwhelm-ing numbers."



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