

An International Spymaster and Mystery Man:

ABWEHR OFFICER HILMAR G. J. DIERKS (1889-1940) AND HIS AGENTS

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Hilmar Dierks in May 1940 on a destroyed warship of the Royal Navy in La Panne



Abwehr Officer Dierks in his office

In the history of the German secret service known as the Abwehr, few personalities emerge as strongly as Hilmar Dierks, who served his country's secret service from 1914 to his death in 1940, probably without interruption. In the Thirties, he was attached to the Abwehrstelle of Wehrkreis X in Hamburg. He worked consecutively for sections Luft and Marine, whose primary aim it was to gather naval and air information about the United Kingdom and the United States, and subsidiary on France. Abwehr Hamburg used frequently neutral countries such as Holland and Belgium as a jumping board for spying against the UK and the USA, e.g. by recruiting agents who could forward incoming reports from these countries by acting as a 'mail drop' or 'relay station'.

As far as we know, Hilmar Dierks ran agents in Holland, Belgium, France and the UK. The purpose of this notice is not only to describe the activity of Hilmar Dierks (whom we shall call HD hereafter) as an Abwehr officer, but also to outline his network of agents and, last but not least, to analyse the way in which British counterintelligence succeeded in uncovering this network and part of HD's schemes. We have decided not to include footnotes referring to

each and every document we used; a complete list of sources can be found at the end of this notice¹.

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1. *The first World War*

To understand HD's activity as a spymaster, a few words should be said about the German military intelligence service during the first World War in Belgium and the Netherlands. Soon after the beginning of the war, *Kriegsnachrichtenstellen* were created in Brussels, Wesel and Antwerp, the latter being by far the most important. They depended either on section IIIb of the *Generalstab* or on the *Nachrichtenabteilung* ('N') of the Admiralty. The *Stelle* in Antwerp was headed by *Hauptmann* Kefer, assisted by *Hauptmann* Ludwig Schnitzer, who had been recruited in 1913 as a *V(ertrauensmann)* for Rotterdam by the head of '*Dezernat N I*' (espionage) Fritz Prieger. Schnitzer acted as a liaison with the German consul in Rotterdam, *Legationsrat* Carl Gneist. In Rotterdam, both Schnitzer and Gneist were eager to recruit agents, and HD was one of their most consequential recruiters for 'N', the Marine intelligence service in the Netherlands.

Hilmar Gustav Johannes Dierks was born at Leer (East Friesland, near the Dutch border) on 5 January 1889 as the eldest of five children of Johannes, a Lutheran schoolteacher, and Marie Louise Lepin. The family values were Christian, patriotic and conservative and the Dierks family was devoted to the *Kaiser*. Hilmar became a professional soldier and served on the Western front during the opening campaign of the first World War in 1914. But soon he was given an espionage mission in the UK by the Wesel *Stelle*. He tried to reach the UK, first as a Belgian prisoner of war, later from Sweden, but he failed twice. This must have taken place before November 1914. In December 1914, he was in Denmark for 'N' and then came to the Netherlands for the same service. He assisted the German consul at Rotterdam, Carl Gneist, in the recruiting of agents who could be sent to the UK. These agents were sent either to Rotterdam or Antwerp for training. HD soon developed subagents in Rotterdam, Vlissingen and The Hague. He was arrested in June 1915.

To show his method of working for 'N', we will describe the way in which HD recruited agents in Holland and how he managed to establish himself as a secret agent. In December 1914 a man who called himself 'Richard Sanderson' came to live in Rotterdam, Proveniersstraat 72a, near Central Station, as a representative of an import-export tea company from Leer, Tjarks & Lühring. 'Sanderson' was of course HD, who started his recruiting work from there. During the following six months, he managed to enlist at least fifteen agents. Some were Dutch, others had various nationalities. Some of the Dutchmen were very young men (one was only seventeen) who found themselves without employment and wanted to earn some easy money. Among the Dutch recruits, some were skippers or seamen who would, as naval agents, try to obtain information about British naval matters or enlist other seamen for 'N'. Then there was a casual labourer, Jan van Brandwijk (A 51), who acted as a mail drop for naval agents working in the UK. For that purpose, he established the bogus firm 'Brandwijk & Co'. Dierks used also another bogus firm, 'Kestein & Co' for forwarding reports coming from the UK to Germany. Kestein, a resident of Rotterdam, set up another notional 'European Textile Company', which served as a cover address for the agent Paul E. Daelen, a former captain of the *Norddeutsche Lloyd*, who accomplished several

¹ More will be said about Dierks and his agents in the study which is now being prepared by the authors about the activities of the Abwehr in Belgium and the Netherlands between 1936 and 1945. The authors wish to thank Klaus-Peter and Michael Dierks, grandsons of Hilmar Dierks', for the supplementary information and photographs they provided.

missions in the UK in 1914-15 and subsequently organised German espionage from Amsterdam.

During his secret activity in Holland, HD used several real or cover addresses. We already know that he lived or said to live at Proveniersstraat 72 in Rotterdam, but some time later he seems to have stayed in a boarding house situated Aelbrechtskade 214, also in Rotterdam. In 1915 he moved to the Hague at two different addresses : Bleijenburg 27 (with a Mr. Van Geel) and Loosduinsekade 166 with a POB 38, where he ran a bogus firm, *Dierks & Co, General Export Agents – Export and Commission Agents*.

HD was assisted by Heinrich Flores, a German teacher of languages in Rotterdam who had been recruited himself by the 'Wesel Stelle'. It was Flores who introduced the Brazilian agent Fernando Buschmann to HD, and several agents who had been recruited by HD used Flores as their 'Dutch correspondent' or sent their reports to him at the address Binnenweg 127 in Rotterdam. This was the case for two other agents of HD's, Heicke Janssen and Willem Roos (who both arrived in the UK in May 1915 and were soon arrested) and for George T. Breeckow and Louise Wertheim (*née* Klitzke), two Germans who were recruited in 1914 and 'corresponded' with the business cover HD used in The Hague, Loosduinsekade 166.

Several agents of HD's who had been arrested in the UK were rather prolific during interrogation. As a result, New Scotland Yard sent an officer to The Hague. He found out that HD indeed had an office at the above cited address, consisting of two floors, the first being the 'export office', the second for residential use. Scotland Yard also found out that the address Binnenweg 127a in Rotterdam (Flores) was in fact a boarding house kept by a German woman, and that Flores regularly went to the German consulate, one of the centres of German espionage in Holland.

Apart from this, the Dutch police in Flushing, where HD ran a few subagents, and French counterintelligence in Holland got aware of HD's activity. All this led to his arrest in June 1915. If most of his agents had been talkative, HD was not. He only told the Dutch police that his name was Hilmar Dierks, but refused to give any information about his complete name and surnames, his date and place of birth, his nationality, the names of his parents, his dwelling place in Germany. He said that his profession was 'merchant in the broadest sense of the word', and refused to answer the question whether he was a member of the German army. After an intervention of Schnitzer, HD was released in September 1915, but he was nevertheless sentenced to one year of imprisonment on 19 October 1915 for "jeopardising Dutch neutrality". He was then attached to another intelligence branch, but nothing is known about this. In April 1916, he was attached to the *Nachrichtenstation Hamburg* of the German Marine.

In all, of the agents who were recruited and/or trained by Dierks and who were sent to the UK, at least eight were arrested and tried (Den Braber, Buschmann, Janssen, Roos, Klancke, Breeckow, Wertheim and Melin) ; seven of them were executed in the Tower. The seaman Cornelius M. den Braber was released due to lack of evidence.

2. The Twenties

Very little is known about HD's activity and whereabouts in the Twenties – as, in fact, little is known about the German secret service in that period. HD was unemployed for some time, during which he acted as a craftsman with the Reichsbahn. He married Gertrud Cordes in 1919 and took part in the anticommunist struggle of the *Einwohnerwehren*, which were disbanded in 1920 under Allied pressure for their participation in the *Kapp Putsch*. In 1923, the family lived in Bernau near Berlin. At that time, HD was a member of the *Schwarze Reichswehr*, a secret reserve army created to get round the restriction of the official *Reichswehr* to 100 000 men imposed by the Allies. He seems to have already been active in

the *Geheimer Meldedienst*, the precursor of the Abwehr. This is confirmed by one of his colleagues at Ast Hamburg, Nikolaus Ritter, who published memoirs in 1972. Ritter writes : *“Im ersten Weltkrieg war er Reserveoffizier gewesen und hatte schon damals im Geheimdienst gearbeitet. Obwohl er im Versicherungsgeschäft tätig gewesen war, hatte ich immer das Gefühl, dass er schon in der schwarzen Reichswehr für den Geheimdienst gearbeitet hatte. Er wusste so viel und war ein alter Fuchs auf dem Gebiet”*.

In 1919, HD was back in the Netherlands. He stayed a few weeks in Amsterdam at the boarding house of a Mr. and Mrs. Kruse, Prinsengracht 749. Their daughter Sophia, born in Amsterdam in 1883, will continue to have relations with HD until the end of the Thirties and will serve as a relay station for agents' reports.

According to Sophia Kruse, HD returned to Amsterdam in 1925 and stayed there for about a year. In September 1925, something rather unexpected happened : HD offered his services to the British SIS and was interviewed on 30 September 1925 in Amsterdam. He told the British he lived at an address (Nicolaas Witsenkade) which was found to be camouflage. He was actually living at the Kruse boarding house. SIS wrote (in 1940): *“He explained this precaution by saying that he had still certain accounts to render to Dutch Law for his activities in Holland during the war, and that he did not wish to come into contact with the Dutch Police”*. He stated he had been trying to make a living from the arms' traffic, but he did not really succeed owing to lack of capital. He said he was *“hard-up and desirous to offer his services to England”*. As a preliminary condition, he stated that he did not want to work against Germany. He was able, so he told the British representative, to render services in Russia, Turkey or Scandinavia. He also claimed considerable experience of naval intelligence, but in spite of this, SIS broke off the line *“as he was considered too well known to be employed, apart from the fact that he refused to work against his own country”*. This statement implies that SIS would have wanted HD to gather information about Germany itself, had he not been *“too well known”*. It is hard to determine whether HD's offer to the British was really due to lack of money. Supposing he was at that time still in some way or another connected with the German secret service, it is not impossible that he was told to try and contact SIS in order to penetrate or intoxicate this service.

3. The Thirties

In the early Thirties, HD was a car dealer at Hamburg (Dorotheenstrasse). This was a real business, but it may of course have served as a cover for secret service work. From 1935-36 on, the Abwehr started a vast recruiting campaign in most Western countries. This is obvious in the UK, in the USA, in Belgium, in Holland and in France. The increased activity of the Abwehr is related to the extension of the *Reichswehr* and to the development of offensive military plans by the Nazi regime, beginning with the remilitarisation of the Rhineland.

Ast Hamburg took an important part in this recruiting campaign. And, since Hamburg was primarily interested in military developments in the UK and the USA, it focused on agents who were able to report on the RAF, naval installations, ship movements and the development of new weapons. Consequently, Ast Hamburg extended its staff. When *Korvettenkapitän* Herbert Wichmann came to Ast Hamburg at the end of 1936, section I M(arine) only consisted of *Korvettenkapitän* Burghardt, *Kapitänleutnant* Ernst Müller (who organised a service to interrogate systematically all officers of the German merchant Navy after their return to Hamburg, the so-called *Schiffsbefragungsdienst*), HD and some secretaries. Later on, this staff was enlarged. According to Wichmann, who became head of *Gruppe I* in 1939 and in May 1940 head of Ast Hamburg as a whole). HD was specifically in charge of recruiting agents. Until the beginning of 1937, he worked for both I Marine and I Luft, but in 1937, I Luft was established as an independent section headed by *Hauptmann* Nikolaus Ritter. Both

men took a most active part in the extended recruiting activity of Ast Hamburg, travelling extensively between Germany, Belgium and Holland and using for that matter a variety of cover names and cover addresses.

3.1. Cover names, relay stations and safe houses

As for the cover names, we know that HD called himself sometimes 'Freiherr Hans Friedrich von Wedel', after a deceased house friend of the Dierks family, sometimes 'J. Van Dongen', or 'Hans zum Stuhreck'. He also used the names 'Müller', 'von Savigny' and 'Sanders', the latter one referring to one of his cover names from the first World War. HD used several professions as a cover : car trader ('Hilmar G.J. Dierks, Automobile', 'Lastwagen Vermietung Messberg H. Dierks', 'Auktionshaus für Kraftfahrzeuge und Maschinen H. Dierks'), insurance agent, export agent (with the address Reinhold & Co, Spaldingstrasse 4, which was widely used by officers of Ast Hamburg as a cover address and also as their *Stadtbüro*), commercial traveller (under the name 'Müller' for A.G. Hillermann). Spaldingstrasse 4 also hosted another cover address, 'Davidson & Mercier, Internationales Lastwagenwerk'. After the war Wichmann stated flatly : "*They did no trade whatsoever and merely had a single room with a door plate*". When he was in Hamburg, HD lived at the boarding house of *Frau Freese*, a long time friend of the family, at Papenhuderstrasse 1, which he also used as a cover address, along with other addresses in town (An der Alster 84, address of the so called 'J. Van Dongen'², Rothenbaumchaussee 83 and Heimhuderstrasse 18).

It is common knowledge that every secret service organises a network of 'relay stations' or 'mail drops' where agents who are operating abroad can send their reports to. In the jargon of the Abwehr, these relay stations were called *Umleitestelle* or *Umschlagstelle* and agents who had such a role were numbered U followed by four numbers. In most cases, these relay stations were real persons who were recruited for that purpose, but in some cases these stations were 'dead letter drops' where reports were dropped and picked up by a person who had instructions to do so and was paid accordingly, sometimes without knowing the real significance of what he or she was doing. According to Wichmann, HD preferred newspaper stalls : "*Dierks used several post-boxes in Holland. The people and places were unaware of the contents of the mail and of the real identity of the people using them. He liked to use newspaper kiosks, as it permitted an uncontrolled mail delivery. These functioned well till Spring 1940 for the incoming post*". Ast Hamburg had a few of these stalls at its disposal in Holland, which may have been organised by HD. One is the *Kiosk Weteringplantsoen* in Amsterdam, which was given to a British woman who offered her services to the Abwehr in August 1938. Another stall was given to one Desmond de Renzy, a New Zealand Nazi who equally had offered his services in 1938. As a result, he received a letter from 'L. Sanders' who advised him to write to 'Miss Nora Newman', Kiosk, Plein in Amsterdam. The kiosk probably existed, Miss Newman most probably not.

Also in Holland, HD created a safe house at The Hague, where one Hanne or Hanna Fiehne (or Fine) ran a boarding house. According to Ritter, HD met her in 1935 in Scheveningen. Her parents had come to Holland when she was still a child³. HD decided to hire a house for her ; from what Vera Schalburg and Ritter told the British, we know that this house was situated in the 1st De Riemerstraat 24 in The Hague (Hanne was not registered in the Population Register of The Hague though). HD's colleague Ritter stayed there when he came to Holland to meet his Dutch agents. The address was also used as a relay station (*Umleitestelle*) for reports from

² This address was also known to the Dutchman C. Leon, who was recruited in 1938 and was run by Nikolaus Ritter.

³ In his memoirs, Ritter calls her 'blonde Hertha'.

abroad. Reports for Ritter from agents in the UK arrived at Fiehne's house and were addressed to 'Richards'. When Vera Schalburg, another agent of Ast Hamburg, returned from a mission in the UK in September 1939, she first went to Hanne Fiehne, where she met another of HD's agents, Theo Drücke. More is to be said about Vera Schalburg and Drücke later on. When HD became head of the *Marine Abwehrstelle* in Antwerp in June 1940, Hanne Fiehne became his secretary. After his death in September 1940, Ast Hamburg sent a telegram to *Abwehrstelle Belgien* in which is clearly shown that she was an agent of I M, HD's service : "*Ast Hamburg I M tritt Fine als V-Frau an Abwehr Nebenstelle Antwerpen, Kapitänleutnant Bendixen, ab*" (Bendixen was HD's successor in Antwerp). Later, Hanne Fiehne was moved to Paris, where she also ran a boarding house/safe house for Abwehr agents on their way to the UK.

3.2. The UK

In the second half of 1936, Ast Hamburg started a vast advertisement campaign to recruit agents in the UK. It is an old secret service device, which was also used (by HD among others) in Holland during the first World War. Newspaper advertisements were studied in order to trace German firms or individuals who had connections in the UK, who travelled to this country and might be willing to accept missions. Equally, personnel of Ast Hamburg studied advertisements in *The Times*, focusing on ex-servicemen who were looking for work.

MI5 discovered quickly that this advertisements business hid something else. This was due partly to the fact that most British advertisers received a reply coming from the same address : 'L. Sanders, Post Office Box 629, Hamburg', and that Ast Hamburg had one favourite channel through which the recruited agents were paid. The money orders came from several most probably notional persons, such as De Ruyter and P. (van) Straaten. As we shall see later on, MI5 found out very quickly that the POB and the money channel were most suspect.

The money channel which is meant was the Amsterdam stock dealer 'Kol & Co' (POB 160) at the Herengracht, of which G.A. Heubel was a director. One of his daughters, Florrie, married M. Rost van Tonningen, one of the leaders of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, NSB, during the second World War. Nothing is known about the agreements which must have existed between 'Kol & Co' and Ast Hamburg, but MI5 and French counterintelligence were well aware of the firm's real role. Kol & Co had an account with the Overseas Branch of the Midland Bank, 122 Old Broad Street in London, and it was through this branch that they often made payments by cheques to German agents operating in Britain. Heubel was also manager of the 'Nederlandsche Oostfriesche Hypotheekbank' of Groningen, which sent money to at least two Abwehr agents (Kurt Wheeler-Hill who was active in Eire, and Sidney P. Gray).

There is also a link to H.J. von Brucken Fock, a prominent member of the NSB, manager of the Nederland Buitenland Bank, of which all shares were in German hands. According to MI5's Guy Liddell, who got his information from Wolfgang von Putlitz, the British agent at the German embassy in The Hague who fled to the UK in September 1939, this bank put more than 600 000 florins at the disposal of the Abwehr representative in Holland, Walter Schulze-Bernett, in order to be able to pay German agents. This occurred a few days before 3 September 1939.

In all, Kol & Co paid seven different agents at different times ; 'L. Sanders' sent letters to nine different agents. This seems a rather risky procedure, since the first discovery of the cover leads inevitably to a chain of intercepts which exposes all agents involved. We shall show hereafter that this was indeed the case. MI5 considered that "L. Sanders, POB 629, Hamburg" was a general address used at one time or another by all Ast Hamburg departments. True as this may be, there is also little doubt that HD used it extensively. A few cases of agents from the UK recruited by or linked to him shall show his role in this scheme.

Staying in the financial field, it is possible that HD was involved in the arrangements made between the Abwehr and paymasters in the West. His cover name 'von Wedel' appears only once in contemporary documents in relation to suspect financial operations. In April 1940, the representative of the French secret service in Brussels had learned from an 'official source' that two individuals, probably Frenchmen, accompanied by a German called von Wedel, held a meeting at the Metropole Hotel in Brussels with employees of the Deutsche Reichsbank at the end of February 1940. Subsequently, the two individuals went to Holland and returned to Belgium shortly afterwards. The 'official source' that gave this information to the French must have been the Belgian 'Sûreté Publique', which at that time was eager to get hold of German spies. It is not absolutely sure, though highly probable, that this 'von Wedel' was indeed HD. We know from the story of Vera Schalburg that he was regularly in Belgium in that period. We also know from other sources that the German Abwehr distributed money to paymasters in Holland and Belgium in order to provide local agents with the money they needed. These moves were made with the view to an expected war in the West. Since HD ran agents in Belgium and Holland, it can hence be supposed that he played a role in this distribution of funds.

Christopher Draper

The story of ex-RAF Major Christopher Draper contains a good lot of the ingredients which are necessary to show how British counterintelligence soon learned that POB 629 was in fact an Abwehr address. Draper worked in 1933 for some months as a Nazi propaganda agent in the UK. In July 1933, the London correspondent of *Der Angriff* and *Der Völkische Beobachter* H.W. Thost suggested to Draper that he supply military information to certain friends of Thost's. He gave Draper an air ticket to Hamburg and told him to get in touch with one 'Degenhardt'. Draper actually flew to Hamburg and met 'Degenhardt', who said the Abwehr needed secret military manuals. Draper received two cover addresses, one in Hamburg and another in Hilleegersberg, Holland. The latter address belonged to one 'Louis Fischer'. His correct name was Ludwig Jakob Fischer, an employee of Damco, Westplein 2, Rotterdam, a firm concerned with river transport between Holland and Germany. He also used a POB in Rotterdam, and after the war it became perfectly clear from Abwehr files found in Germany that Fischer was an agent of *Nebenstelle* Bremen since 1933. His agent number was U 2405, the letter 'U' meaning that he acted as an *Umleitestelle*.

In 1933 and 1934, Draper sent some information to Hamburg and also received money from Rotterdam, but then the case lapsed and was not developed again before the beginning of 1936. It should be noted that Draper was at that time, and maybe from the beginning, acting as a double agent, since he was also acting as an informant to MI5. On 6 February 1936, Draper received a letter from one 'L. Sanders, POB 629, Hamburg 1', referring to old Hamburg acquaintances and asking if Draper would be prepared to supply airmail stamps. The correspondence continued until the beginning of 1938, mostly under the thinly disguised pretext of dealing in postage stamps. 'Sanders' tried to convince Draper of coming to Germany, but without success. In 1937 and 1938, Draper received money through Kol & Co on behalf of a 'Mr P. Van Straaten' or 'De Ruyter & Co', two notional 'persons' behind whom HD and/or Ast Hamburg were hiding.

Thanks to Draper's role as a double agent, MI5 knew from February 1936 on that POB 629 was a cover address of Ast Hamburg and placed a Home Office Warrant (HOW) on all mail sent to and coming from this POB. Since most advertisements were answered by 'L. Sanders, POB 629, Hamburg', MI5 got wind of practically all agents whom the Abwehr tried to enlist in this way. Draper's role is important from an historical point of view, since most books

about what is called ‘the XX system’ (the use of double agents against Germany) only let it start in 1939 with the ‘Snow’ case, that is A.G. Owens, a well known agent of Ast Hamburg.

Arthur G. Owens

‘Sanders’ and POB 629 pop up again in the story of the famous British double agent, Arthur G. Owens, known as ‘Snow’ in the so-called ‘XX system’. He first offered his services to MI6, because he could bring information from Germany, whereto he travelled regularly as an electric engineer, specialising in the manufacturing of batteries which were used in military installations. More or less at the same time in 1936, Owens also searched a way to get into contact with the Abwehr. For that purpose, at least according to Ladislav Farago, author of *The Game of the Foxes*, he went to a social club set up by the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* for German servants employed in the UK⁴. This club was part of the British section of the NSDAP-*Auslandsorganisation* which had its offices at Cleveland Terrace in the London suburb of Bayswater. There, Owens addressed himself to the manager of the club Peter Ferdinand Brunner, who, still according to Farago, was the London representative of HD and who tried to exploit the German girls working in British households as sources of information. Brunner arranged a meeting with one ‘Konrad Pieper’, an engineer and scout for the Abwehr, whom Owens met at the Brussels Hotel Métropole. As a result of this meeting, Owens went to Hamburg, where he was introduced to a ‘Herr Müller’, who – what a coincidence! – like Owens specialised in batteries. ‘Müller’ told Owens that he represented the firm A.G. Hillermann, to which Pieper also ‘belonged’. Actually, ‘Herr Müller’ was HD, and soon after the first meeting with Owens, on 15 September 1936, he sent him a letter signed ‘L. Sanders, POB 629 in Hamburg’, asking that Owens meet him in the Minerva Hotel in Cologne on 24 September. MI5, which had duly intercepted this letter and forwarded it to Owens after having read it carefully, noted that Owens was indeed away from 23 to 29 September 1936. We know from Ritter’s memoirs that Owens was actually recruited by HD, who passed him on to Ritter at the beginning of 1937, when Ritter became head of I Luft, since Owens seemed able to **provide** more information about the RAF and air matters in general than about naval matters. This seems to have happened in 1937, when Owens travelled once more to Germany, where he met both HD and Ritter, who, for this occasion, posed as a representative of ‘Reinhold & Co’, another well known Abwehr cover address used also by HD.

Jessie Jordan

HD’s chief at Ast Hamburg, *Fregattenkapitän* Wichmann, stated after the war that HD ran a female agent in Dundee (Scotland). She was called Jessie Jordan (this was probably her husband’s name) and she sent a report to HD on the storage-tank installations in the Firth of Forth, south of Dundee. She was British by birth and German by marriage, and she arrived in the UK on 14 February 1937, already a widow. She was a hairdresser by profession and set up a parlour at 1 Kinloch Street in Dundee. It is probable that the Abwehr got wind of her intention to move to the UK and recruited her before her departure. In July 1937, the Home Office Warrant (HOW) on POB 629 picked up a letter in an envelope which had already been used. The old address had been erased and it was finally deciphered as Mrs Jordan, Breddalbane Lane, Dundee. In the first instance, the envelope had been posted at Amsterdam

⁴ The trouble with Farago’s book is that it contains no reference to sources whatsoever, except the very general mention of ‘Abwehr files’ discovered after the war. For a start, the very extensive MI5 file on Owens-‘Snow’ does not contain this recruiting story of Owens. It would nevertheless have been most interesting to learn where Farago got this story, since it is far from impossible.

Central Station. MI5, who were watching her and intercepted her mail, discovered she travelled to Hamburg in September, October and November 1937. It was also discovered that £5 notes were sent to her on 28 December 1937 and 1 February 1938, successively by 'De Ruyter' from Amsterdam (but posted in Groningen) and by Kol & Co to the order of Mr. P. Straaten. We know all these names as Abwehr cover names or cover addresses, used, among others, by HD.

Since the HOW had first been imposed on Mrs. Jordan, MI5 picked up several letters from an agent in the USA signing 'Crown'. In February 1938, a letter from 'Crown' was intercepted, containing details of a plan to abduct an American colonel in order to lay his hands on important military documents the colonel might possess. MI5 immediately informed the American authorities. As a result, 'Crown' and some of his associates were arrested on 27 February 1938 ; consequently, MI5 felt that their hand was forced and Mrs Jordan was equally arrested on 2 March 1938. During her detention, two addresses were found in her possession : *Frau S. van Straaten, Dusartstraat, Amsterdam South, and Otto Möser, Sechslingspforte 14, III, Hamburg 24*. MI5 noted that on 2 March 1938, the day of Jordan's arrest, a letter was posted in Hamburg signed 'Otto' and stating he would shortly start on a little trip. MI5 thought that Mrs Jordan had used the latter address to send her reports to. These reports, for which she served as a relay station, came from the USA, South America and France. It is not known whether HD or more generally Ast Hamburg ran still another agent in Scotland or whether it was Mrs Jordan herself who drafted the report on tank installation in the Firth of Forth.

As for the American agent 'Crown', his real name was Günther Rumrich. He had originally been recruited by Ast Hamburg in the following way. In January 1936, he offered his services by writing to the *Völkischer Beobachter* and asking the newspaper to forward the letter to *Oberst Nicoläi*, head of the German secret service during the first World War. The writer called himself Theodor Koerner and asked that the Abwehr should answer by inserting an advertisement in the New York Times. The letter seems to have reached whom it might have concerned. The ad did appear on 6 April 1936 and read as follows : "*Theodor Koerner, letter received, please send reply and address to Sanders, PB 629, Hamburg*". Farago thinks that 'Sanders' stood for Ernst Müller of IM at Ast Hamburg, who was very active as a recruiter, but it is of course not excluded that HD also got wind of Rumrich's offer. Anyway, Rumrich was passed on to *Korvettenkapitän Erich Pfeiffer*, head of Nest Bremen. He was given the address of Mrs Jordan and sent her envelopes which she should forward to PB 629. Rumrich's arrest lead to the arrest of practically all agents of Nest Bremen in the USA.

Mrs Duncombe

Mrs Duncombe (first name and maiden name unknown), of German origin and British by marriage, lived in London and acted as a relay station for forwarding reports from France to one 'Campbell', Klopstockstrasse 23, I, Hamburg 36. 'Campbell' was an alias generally used by Ritter of I Luft, but since Mrs Duncombe sent reports to 'Campbell' since at least August 1936, it is out of the question that 'Campbell' stood for Ritter, since he only started his work for Ast Hamburg in January 1937. It is most probable that 'Campbell' actually stood for HD, the more so as there existed financial arrangements between Mrs Duncombe and 'Dr. zum Stuhrheck', who is of course HD. Apart from this, Ritter did not run agents in France.

Mrs Duncombe came to the attention of MI5 in August 1936. She was reported by a housekeeper whom she had asked to forward letters to her new address. Two of these letters, which had arrived addressed to 'Miss Smith', were opened by the housekeeper and were found to contain details of French coastal defences". Another intercepted report, posted in

Paris, contained a description of French aerodromes. It should be remembered that HD worked at that time still for I Luft.

On different occasions in 1936, 1937 and 1938, the well known 'Mr. P. Straaten' from Groningen sent money orders to Mrs Duncombe to a total amount of £183. While observing Mrs Duncombe, MI5 noted a strange phenomenon : on more than one occasion, empty envelopes or envelopes containing only blank sheets of paper were sent to her. These envelopes were all posted in Strasbourg by a Gestapo agent named Armbruster, about whom nothing more is known. Mrs Duncombe also sent blank sheets to 'Campbell', sometimes forwarding blank sheets or envelopes that had been sent to her under one of the five different names she used. Clearly this system was part of a try out of a postal line from France to Germany *via* London. It is also possible that some of these blank sheets were covered with messages written with secret ink, although MI5's '*Summary of cases*' report does not mention this possibility.

Mrs Duncombe not only acted as a relay station. On 27 July 1937, 'Campbell' asked her to forward £15 to a Mr H.W. Simon. Hermann Simon was recruited by Ritter in 1937 and made three trips to the UK, the first one from 25 July to 25 August 1937. Wichmann seemed to think after the war that HD also had some kind of connection with Simon. Since Simon was a seaman, this seems plausible.

Mrs Duncombe was probably arrested in February 1938. MI5 stated that she committed suicide as a result of interrogation on 1 March.1938. This short statement fails to answer the many questions that arise when one reads the MI5 *Summary of cases* report on Mrs. Duncombe. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Duncombe also corresponded with Gisela Scheel, Gneisenauerstrasse 26, Hamburg 30. *Frau* Scheel acted as a secretary to *Fregattenkapitän* Erich Pfeiffer, head of Nest Bremen, but according to Wichmann she also did some work for HD. This seems to indicate that the activities of Ast Hamburg and Nest Bremen were not as separated as was intended.

There are other agents who were recruited by HD but who were passed on to other Abwehr sections. Two of them can be mentioned briefly. At the end of 1938, when on a family visit to Germany, Charles Eschborn, a photographer of German origin established in Liverpool, was recruited at the same time as his brother Erwin. A third brother, Hans, stayed in Germany. They were passed on to Ritter of I Luft, and Charles played a role in the XX-system under the name of 'Charlie'. He was put in touch with another double agent, Owens, ignoring each others' real role.

Werner Unland was an old acquaintance of HDs' who introduced him in 1938 to Prätorius, head of section I *Wirtschaft* at Ast Hamburg. Unland lived in the UK since 1929, whereto he came as a student (he was already 37 years old at that time!). He was the British agent of German textile firms, but MI5 was soon satisfied that this was bogus activity. Unland received money orders from Holland from Kol & Co to the order of different names, who were almost certainly notional persons. Significantly, Unland moved to Eire on 28 August 1939. From then on, his letters were intercepted, and though MI5 took considerable trouble to break his code, they were not successful in doing so.

A case apart : Vera Schalburg

Too much and above all too much nonsense has been published on this 'mystery woman', who after all might well be less mysterious than some authors make her appear. She is included here not only because she acted at one time during the Thirties as an agent to HD but also because it would seem that she married him in 1937. Most of the mystery clouds that surround her are due to the theory launched by Farago about her supposed role as a double

agent who was double crossing her German running officer (in 1939 this was Ritter). Farago enlarges his theory to two other female agents of Ast Hamburg living in Britain, one 'Duchess de Château-Thierry' and 'My Eriksson', whose real name was Josephine Karpp. This 'double cross' theory has been followed by other authors and even Ritter himself and Nigel West, well known author of several books on espionage, adopted it.

We are not going to insist on the Duchess and Karpp, but we must deal with the theory according to which the three women double crossed Ritter and worked in reality for the British secret service. First, it should be said that none of the authors who embrace this theory had the opportunity to consult the MI5 files concerning Schalburg, Karpp and Château-Thierry which are now available at the National Archives in Kew. Had they been able to do so, it seems likely that their theory might have melted as snow under the sun. Indeed, it is clear from these files that none of the three women ever worked for MI5. If they had, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to explain why MI5 first of all arrested them (Vera on 30 September 1940, the Duchess on 8 October and Karpp on 9 October) and then took the painstaking trouble of interrogating them thoroughly with the expressed wish to prove that all three were, in fact, German agents, and nothing more. These three women, instead of informing the British about the Abwehr, tried to hide evidence about their role in the German secret service, and careful reading of the interrogation reports of Vera leads to the inevitable conclusion that she was lying, hiding the truth and fabulating, even about her family, her real name and her date and place of birth. Nowhere in these interrogation reports is there a trace of a 'Mr. Knight' for whom, according to certain writers, she worked in 1939 during a mission in London.

What follows is an outline of Vera's probable story as it can be reconstructed on the basis of documents which are now available. Although she frequently said that her name was Vera *von* Schalburg, records of the Belgian *Office des Etrangers* show clearly that it was Vera Schalburg, born in Siberia in 1909 (not in 1912 as she told the British) and that she was the daughter of a Danish industrialist and a Russian mother. According to the stories she told the British, she was of Jewish extraction, born out of wedlock and later adopted by the Schalburg family. Neither of these allegations comes close to the truth. She also said that her family fled Russia in 1917 to Denmark. The Schalburgs (parents, two sons and a daughter) came to Paris in 1924. According to Vera, she became a professional dancer and married a mysterious Russian called Sergei Ignatieff, who, she said, worked for Soviet intelligence and for whom she claims to have done some spying in France. All this is far from being certain. What is certain is that the Schalburgs moved to Belgium in 1933. They lived at different addresses in Brussels (193 avenue Deschanel, Schaerbeek; 252 avenue Rogier⁵). According to Vera, HD used the former address occasionally as a relay station for incoming reports from France.

Vera told the British she got in touch with German intelligence in 1936 or 1937. She claims that an official of Belgian counterintelligence told her that her name was on a 'black list' in Germany because of her previous espionage for the Soviets. This is highly doubtful, since it is difficult to imagine how a Belgian official could have got wind of a vague German 'black list'. Anyway, to protect herself from what she called German retaliation, she contacted her stepbrother Constantin, one of the leaders of the Danish Nazi party. He introduced Vera to Holgar Winding Christensen, an Abwehr contact on the staff of Siemens and Halske, who subsequently introduced her to 'Hans Luders' (in reality Hans Lips of IH Ast Hamburg). Lips made her acquainted with Ritter (whom she only knew as 'Dr. Rantzau') who on his turn

⁵ Although all streets and municipalities in the Brussels area already had also official Dutch names at that time, Belgium was still a country where the French language was still predominant. In all British (and also German) documents, only the French names are mentioned. This why we prefer to do the same.

passed her on to HD. In 1937, Vera first worked for *Gruppe III* (von Engelmann), who had asked her to spy on Soviet intelligence in Belgium.

It is possible that Vera and HD married on 2 October 1937 ; this would at least appear from the Hamburg Registry Office. When interrogated on 30 October 1940 by MI5 she stated that the real name of her husband was 'zum Sturig'. But the interrogator continues his report as follows : "*She could give no particulars of her marriage to him. She had no idea where the Registry Office was where the ceremony had been held, and finally agreed that she was probably never properly married to him*". It is a good example of the ways in which Vera tried to set up smoke screens.

In 1939, HD must have 'lent' Vera to his colleague Nikolaus Ritter of *I Luft*. Ritter sent her to London, where she would stay with a female agent of Ritter's known as the Duchess de Château-Thierry. Ritter believed, almost certainly wrongly, that the Duchess had a lot of relations among RAF officers, and suggested her during a meeting in Germany to open a tearoom, where Vera would engage in small talk with officers. In that way, Ritter hoped she would obtain information about what these officers thought of the possibility of war. She should also try to obtain documents from these officers. The original plan was that she would photograph these documents (she had been trained in photography, maybe microphotography, while residing in German) and send them to the cover address of Sophia Kruse in Amsterdam. Vera arrived in Britain on 19 June and left again on 9 September 1939. She went to live with the Duchess, 102 Dorset House. Little is known about what exactly she did in London, but it seems unlikely that she obtained any useful information for the Abwehr. Though her presence in London was registered by the Security Service, her behaviour did not arouse suspicion. She first came to notice of the police on 16 December 1939. On that date, a Mrs. Josephine Eriksson attempted to leave Gravesend for Rotterdam, but was detained because in the Central Security Suspect Book she was described as a German spy. The woman was in possession of a diary containing a certain number of names and addresses, and she said that Vera had asked her to obtain the addresses so that she could write to the people who lived there. Josephine Eriksson, born in Germany as Josephine Karpp, was a friend of the Duchess' whom she had introduced to Ritter at the end of 1937. She herself had been recruited by Ritter on a trip to Germany as a relay station and paymaster. In September 1937, a letter signed 'Sanders' posted in Scarborough was sent to her by post, and she was asked to forward it to a newly recruited agent, Sidney P. Gray. Karpp was known to the police since the arrest of another agent of Ritter's, Walter Simon.

We already mentioned that Vera returned to Germany via Holland and stayed with Hanne Fiehne. It is probable that she did not come back to Belgium until May 1940. When she was in Germany, she stayed at the *Reichshof* Hotel in Hamburg, which was frequently used by the Abwehr to lodge and even to train agents. At the end of 1939, she was in Copenhagen with HD (who now travelled under the name 'von Wedel'). There they met with H. W. Christensen, an agent of Ast Hamburg working for Siemens & Halske who had introduced Vera to the Abwehr. His firm had given him the instruction, doubtlessly inspired by the Abwehr, to arrange a microphone tap on the French military attaché's apartment.

3.3. France and Belgium : Karl Theodor Drücke

According to Herbert Wichmann, chief of *Gruppe I* of Ast Hamburg, Dierks also ran agents in France, whom Wichmann only knew by their cover names ('Franz', 'Lehmann', 'Hecht', 'Logenbruder' and a Spaniard whose real name was Vilar). We know nothing of these agents, except that Vilar continued to serve the Abwehr during the war. It should be noted that 'Hecht' also appears as a cover name during the first World War as an alias for Peter Herz, director of the German School in Rotterdam, who was recruited by naval intelligence and

worked closely with HD. We do not know, however, if the same person is meant. Through 'Franz', HD and consequently Ast Hamburg received reports on French harbours and shipyards, submarine repairs and forecasts of the building programme of the French Navy.

The name Lehmann, a real one this time, comes up again in the story of a few agents of HD's who first developed their activity in France before coming to Belgium. The agents concerned were Karl Theodor Drücke, an old time friend of HD's born at Grevestein in 1906, and his companion in business Karl Spitzenberg. HD and Drücke met in Paris in 1936, according to Farago, but they had known each other before probably in relation with one of HDs' 'businesses'. It is most probable that Drücke was involved in HD's secret work, since he was sentenced to three years imprisonment in Paris on 12 May 1936. He must have been set free at some moment in 1938, and on 20 July 1938 he was registered at The Hague (he may have stayed at Hanne Fiehne's boarding house). He subsequently went to Germany, from where he arrived in Belgium at the end of September. He went to live for a few weeks at 26 rue de Stassart in Saint-Gilles (Brussels). However, according to Vera Schalburg who met him in Brussels in 1938, he actually lived avenue Rogier 150 ; according to MI5, he may have used at least three cover names (Thiry, Van Damme, Van Temsche). He also had an address at 20 rue Bosquet (Saint-Gilles) as a representative of 'Marcottay & Fils' of Paris, a firm with which Spitzenberg had been associated in France. Drücke must have returned to Germany at the beginning of 1939, since he applied for a visa to Belgium at the Belgian consulate general in Hamburg on 28 March 1939. His form states that he was a 'merchant' registered at An der Alster 18 in Hamburg. Between 25 October 1939 and 7 April 1940, Ernst Lehmann, a business friend of Karl Spitzenberg came at least eight times to Belgium and stayed on each occasion at 'Hôtel des Boulevards', Place Rogier 1-2 near Brussels North Station. Each time he gave Drücke as a reference until Drücke was declared *persona non grata* on Belgian territory. Spitzenberg posed as a buyer of all kinds of goods for 'the German government', a camouflage frequently used by Abwehr agents or officers at work abroad. According to Julius Hagemann, who worked for the Abwehr during the occupation of Belgium and who knew Lehmann before the war in Brussels, Lehmann was, under the cover of an international import and export agent, a recruiting agent of Herbert Wichmann, chief of *Abteilung I* of Ast Hamburg.

At the end of 1938, Drücke and Spitzenberg set up a firm called 'K. Th. Drücke & Co', established at 5 rue Faider, Ixelles (Elsene). There is little doubt that this firm was to serve as a cover for projected espionage activities. The Belgian authorities suspected Drücke and decided in February 1940 that all Belgian consulates should in the future refuse to give him a visa when he asked for one. In March 1940, Spitzenberg also was 'invited' to leave Belgium, which he did on 12 April 1940. According to an officer of Ast Hamburg, Heinrich Piepe, Spitzenberg was a pre-war agent of *Hauptmann* Tornow of Ast Hamburg (Tornow successively worked for I Luft and I Marine).

Drücke, though being an agent of HD's, was also known and visited by Ritter. Another fact is equally important to situate Drücke in the network of Ast Hamburg. Probably in September 1939, Vera Schalburg, who had just returned from the UK on a spying mission, met Drücke at Hanne Fiehne's boarding house in The Hague. According to Vera herself, she left the UK without money, and was told by the 'Duchess de Château Thierry' to go to Hanne who would provide her with the money she would need to return to Germany. When Vera arrived in the boarding house, Drücke was also staying there, and it was he who arranged Vera's border passage at Bentheim.

3.4. The Netherlands

As shown before, HD often worked in Holland. In 1937 and later, he was intermittently living at the boarding house owned by one Titte Geel (Prinsengracht 1073, Amsterdam). She had a liaison with Benny van Beelen, employee of the Bataafsche Import Maatschappij at The Hague. Through Geel, van Beelen got to know HD as an insurance agent. It is not known whether van Beelen worked for HD already before the war, but he did try twice to reach the UK as an Abwehr agent during the second World War. Sophia Kruse, whom HD had known since the early Twenties and with whom he had a liaison, also lived in Geel's boarding house and acted as an 'Umleitestelle' (e.g. for the communication between HD and Vera Schalburg when she was on her mission in the UK in 1939). On some occasions when coming to Holland, HD was accompanied by other German officers, who were all lodged in the boarding house. Both Geel and Kruse were at one time members of the NSB. The rent of the room which Kruse kept permanently for HD was paid by Jan Pieter Bolhuis or Hermanus Olij, two other agents of Ast Hamburg. Olij had probably first been recruited by HD, but was later, in 1939, passed on to Hilmar's brother Gerhard, who was at that time equally working for the Abwehr.

HD's activity in Holland must indeed be linked to the work which his younger brother Gerhard, born at Leer in 1895, accomplished for the Abwehr. He was manager of an insurance company and knew a lot of people in the Dutch-German border area of East Friesland. Most probably through his brother Hilmar, he followed a few Abwehr courses in 1938-39 and was drawn into the Abwehr in September 1939 as a *Sonderführer*. His mission was the building up of a *Grenzgängerorganisation*, roughly between Bentheim and Emden, a network of frontier crossers who would smuggle reports of agents from Holland to Leer, from where Gerhard would forward them to Hamburg, and who could also assure the safe crossing of the border for Dutch agents travelling to Germany. Through some German relations, he found two smugglers in Bourtange (province of Groningen), near the German border. They mediated in the recruiting of Nanno Addens of Bellingwolde in the same region, who introduced a vegetable cultivator from Sint-Pancras (Noord-Holland), and Jan Kloosterboer, who had been recruited originally by HD to report about ship movements in Rotterdam and Amsterdam (Kloosterboer knew HD under the name of 'von Savigny'). Through Addens, G. Dierks also recruited Harm Siemers, Reichsbahn employee at Weener (Germany) near the Dutch border. In the beginning of 1940, Addens and Siemers (together with a Post Office employee from Bellingwolde, Rosken Luchterberg) were involved in the escape of two *Luftwaffe* officers who were imprisoned in Holland. The three agents were arrested in February 1940. It will be seen hereafter that Gerhard Dierks' organisation was indeed part of the machinery set up by his brother. In 1940 and later, he continued to use the room at Titte Geel's boarding house. He was then engaged in recruiting agents willing to go to the UK and in black market activities.

HD's frequent travels to Holland must have aroused the suspicion of the Dutch police. In April 1940, he was considered as a spy and van Beelen was warned against him. As for the Belgian police, it does not appear they were aware of his regular travels to Belgium or of his activities as a spymaster.

3.5. HD recruits wireless operators

In September 1938, two Jews who had fled from Germany to Holland, informed the British consul in Amsterdam about one Leo H. Abas, manager of *Nederlandsche Vliegtuigmodelbouw*, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 316 in Amsterdam. One of these Jews had known Abas, a Dutch half Jew who was born in Hamburg in 1905, when they were both living in Hamburg. Before leaving for Holland about mid-1938, Abas must have been recruited by HD. In September 1938, he became the manager of the *Nederlandsche*

Vliegtuigmodelbouw, a firm meant to be used as a cover by HD. One of the Jews became an assistant of Abas'. When Abas was away, he was in charge of his correspondence and must have learned some interesting things that he judged worth telling to the British consul in Amsterdam, hoping to obtain some easy money. The consul noted that the *Vliegtuigmodelbouw* was "a cover under which the German secret service is organising a bureau in Holland for transmitting information obtained in the UK concerning Air Defence. L.H. Abas is the chief of the organisation in Holland and is in direct communication with Dr. Hans zum Stuhreck of Davidson and Mercier, Spaldingstrasse 4, Hamburg. (...) On November 1st [1938] zum Stuhreck will become a partner in the Dutch firm and will deposit Fls 1 000 therein. Abas has already made one trip to England and sent or brought with him plans of the air defences of Portsmouth, which have been handed to zum Stuhreck. A further trip to the UK, with zum Stuhreck, is contemplated. Eventually offices will be established in the UK, ostensibly for legitimate business purposes, but in reality to control agents there". The consul added that the firm *Nederlandsche Vliegtuigmodelbouw*, although claiming to be of Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris, was not entered in the Commercial Register at Amsterdam. This first hand information was quickly sent to MI6, who transmitted it to MI5. The address in the Spaldingstrasse was at that moment already known to MI5 as an Abwehr cover address, since MI5 learned in April 1938 that it was used by one 'Hans Lorenz', who actually was Hans Lips from Ast Hamburg, but the cover name 'Hans zum Stuhreck' must have been a new piece of MI5's puzzle about Ast Hamburg.

The Abas affair popped up again in the beginning of 1940. On 26 February of that year, *Meldekopf* Leer, an Abwehr outpost where HD's brother Gerhard was busy organising a *Grenzgängerorganisation*, reported to Ast Hamburg that agent RR 3076 had been arrested the night before by the Dutch police at the small border town of Bourtange on a return trip from Germany. The agent told the police that he was connected to 'Dr. Hans zum Stuhreck' of whom he now gave an address, Papenhuderstrasse 1, Hamburg, where HD actually lived when he was in Germany, but which was also used as a cover address or mail drop. There is practically no doubt that agent RR 3076 was indeed Abas. This can be concluded from information of the *Politieke Recherche Afdeling* of the Amsterdam police, which mentions the arrest of Abas in Bourtange exactly during the night of 26-27 February 1940. He declared that he had made an agreement in 1939 with 'zum Stuhreck', who according to Abas, was a 'judicial adviser' to the Heinkel aeroplane constructions. The agreement stipulated that he, Abas, would become Heinkel's representative in Holland. It was found after his arrest that Abas possessed a wireless set, and it is most probable that he was part of a scheme of Ast Hamburg to establish wireless operators in Belgium and Holland who would send meteorological information to Hamburg. In July 1939, Abas hired a house in the Michelangelostraat 13 in Amsterdam, where Heinkel Nederland, which was still to be founded, was – so to speak – to be established. The rent was paid by Heinkel, even after September 1939, when it was decided to discontinue the Heinkel project in Holland.

Abas was indeed not the only radio operator who was recruited by HD. At some time in 1939, one Heinrich Walti came to live in Antwerp, Van Dijkstraat 29. It is not sure that 'Walti' was his real name. According to Nigel West, his real name was Robert Petter. This is not impossible, since he arrived on a secret mission in the UK in September 1940 under the name of Heinrich Werner Wälti or Walti, and it was indeed not customary that secret agents accomplished a mission under their own name. In any case, neither Walti nor Petter were entered in the Antwerp Population Register. He said, in 1941, that he ran a small transport business before the German invasion of Belgium. Actually, he had another role. Ast Hamburg sent him to Belgium to establish himself as a radio operator. For that purpose, the radio

specialist of Ast Hamburg, Heinrich Trautmann, came to Antwerp in March 1940 to test the wireless transmitting installation of *V-Mann* 'Keller' (an alias used by Walti).

On this occasion, Trautmann also went to Amsterdam and The Hague in order to test the wireless set of another radio operator of I M Ast Hamburg, Gerhard Fabricius. He was born in 1903 and applied on 15 February 1939 for a visa ("*Dauervisum*") at the Belgian consulate general in Hamburg. The purpose of his projected stay in Belgium was "*Berichterstattung für deutsche Wirtschaftsgruppe Bauindustrie, Exportabteilung*". The most interesting mention on this application form is his address in Hamburg : An der Alster 84. We know that this address served as a cover address to HD under the name of 'J. Van Dongen'. In May 1939, Fabricius was staying at the boarding house 'Welcome' in Brussels, but at the end of July 1939, he was staying at the Astoria Hotel in The Hague. In the meantime, he once again applied for a visa to Belgium and this time, he gave as his address another address of HD where he actually lived when he was in Germany : Papenhuderstrasse 1. According to Wichmann, Fabricius was most certainly an agent of HD's. Most probably, he went under the agent number S 3003, of whom a great number of telegrams has been preserved. He sent them from Holland before the war, and seems to have been active primarily in France after the German invasion.

It should be noted that Ast Hamburg also asked 'Snow'-Owens from September 1939 on for daily weather reports and that Ast Münster had equally installed a wireless operator in Schiebroek (P.C. Bakker), who was to send weather reports.

4. May-September 1940

HD took part in the Western campaign in 1940, most probably as a member of the *Einsatzkommando I M(arine)* which was led by *Fregattenkapitän* Erich Pheiffer, head of I M *Nest* Bremen. When he was interrogated by the British after the war, Pheiffer did not mention HD as a member of his *Kommando*, but according to Wichmann, head of *Gruppe I* of Ast Hamburg who participated in the building up of the *Kommando*, HD was indeed one of its members. Confirmation of this could be found in HD's inheritance. In his series "*Suche im dunklen*", Michael Dierks, a grandson of HD's, reproduced a number of photographs taken by HD or some of his companions during the campaign of May 1940. One of the photographs shows HD on board of the steamer '*Wilhelm III*' of the *Nederlandsche Stoombotenmaatschappij*. We know that members of the *Einsatzkommando I M* lived on this ship for a few days, and besides there is another photograph showing the crew of the '*Wilhelm III*' with HD among them. Pheiffers' *Einsatzkommando* arrived in Rotterdam on the evening of 14 May. HD's inheritance contains a letter written by Dierks to his son from Antwerp on 2 June 1940, in which he asks whether his son has received the two letters he sent from Rotterdam, another indication of the fact that HD was certainly in Holland during the campaign of May 1940). Little is known about the *Kommando's* activity. Pheiffer said after the war that he was interested in information about Dutch and British ships and that the *Kommando* also laid hands on all sorts of *Beutematerial*, among which secret archives.

On 1 June 1940, HD was already in Antwerp. On 4 June, he was promoted *Oberleutnant* and about a week later he undertook a '*Dienstreise*' which brought him, in his own car, to Zeebrugge, Blankenberge, Ostend, Nieuwpoort, Dunkirk, Saint-Malo and Brest. He took photographs again, e.g. of refugees, destructions and buildings, but nothing precise is known of the purpose of this trip. In August 1940, he was promoted *Hauptmann der Reserve zur Verwendung*. At that time, he had become chief of the *Marine Aussendienststelle* in Antwerp, with an office in the Sterstraat 26.

In August 1940, HD was involved in the preparations of '*Unternehmen Seelöwe*', the German plan to invade the UK. One of these operations was '*Unternehmen Walfisch*' by which some Abwehr agents (among them the well known Helmuth Clissmann) were to be transported to

the UK by boat from the Belgian coast. To obtain these boats, *Abwehr Gruppe II*, which was responsible for the operation, turned to HD. Johannes Carl, an agent of *Nest Bremen* who operated in Belgium at that time, obtained from HD the name and address of one of HD's friends, probably a prewar agent, Karl Giese, born Heimersdorf in 1891 who lived in Blankenberge and who became a Belgian citizen in 1938. He was the owner of a small fishing fleet, among which – according to a British intelligence source – “*a number of wireless transmitting equipped vessels which he was reported in March 1940 to be using to obtain naval intelligence for the Germans*”. Giese agreed to lend at least one vessel, but the operation was cancelled a short time afterwards.

The *Abwehr*, more specifically *Ast Hamburg*, was charged with the building up of a *Vorauskommando*, which would go ahead of the invading troops and was to be headed by Wichmann, who, if the invasion had succeeded, would become head of *Abwehrstelle London*. It does not appear that HD was going to be a member of this *Vorauskommando*. It seems more likely that he was intended to participate in another secret operation of *Ast Hamburg*. The story of this operation was often told before by other authors. This is why we are not going to insist upon it. Suffice it to say that the original intention was to send HD himself, Vera Schalburg and Werner Walti/Petter (whom we already know as a wireless operator established in Antwerp before the war) to the UK. HD would be ‘head of mission’, Walti wireless operator and Vera was, one can think, to use her supposed relations in the UK. On 28 August 1940, HD and Vera, who were about to leave for Hamburg, met Ritter and one of his agents in a well known Brussels restaurant, the ‘*Rôtisserie Ardennaise*. In Hamburg, they met Karl Theodor Drücke, one of HD's prewar agents in France and Belgium. The party consisting of HD, Vera, Walti and Drücke celebrated the launching of the operation on 2 September 1940 in a reputed Hamburg wine bar. The end of the story was that the car with which they went home, crashed and that HD lost his life in this accident. The mission was eventually launched from Norway at the end of September 1940, comprising Drücke as the team's chief, Walti as a radio-operator, and Vera Schalburg. They were all three arrested a few hours after their arrival in Scotland. Both Drücke and Walti told practically nothing to their British interrogators. They were executed on 6 August 1941. Drücke had taken a list of airfields in Britain on which he was supposed to obtain information. This indicates that the mission had been planned by I *Luft* and Ritter, and makes it seem somewhat unlikely that HD of I *Marine* would act as chief of the party.

The fact that Drücke, who had returned to Brussels in June 1940, was also in Hamburg at the beginning of September, might lead to the conclusion that it was already decided that HD would not go to the UK. However, on 5 September 1940, Pfeiffer sent a telegram to Wichmann announcing HD's death and suggesting *Kapitänleutnant* of *Ast Hamburg* act as a substitute for HD “*for the special enterprise*”. Either Pfeiffer, who at that time was stationed in Brest, was not well informed or it was believed until his death that HD would actually accomplish the mission. On the other hand, it seems most unlikely that an *Abwehr* officer, himself runner of several agents, would be chosen to be sent as a secret agent to an enemy country.

Conclusion

HD served three regimes : the *Kaiserreich*, the Weimar Republic and the Nazi regime. Nothing is known about his attitude towards National Socialism. He was ready to recruit persons who professed to be Nazis and he did not avoid contacts in Dutch NSB circles. His brother Gerhard, who played a role in the *Stahlhelm*, was at one time an *Anwärter* to the NSDAP but never joined the Party. Most likely, HD would have considered he served his

country in the first place, whatever the regime. His brother Gerhard told the Americans after the war that he had been a 'good German' but was opposed to National Socialism.

If one is to evaluate the career of HD as a longstanding officer of the German secret service, two aspects need to be considered. First of all, apart from a short term of imprisonment in Holland in 1915, HD managed to travel extensively during more than twenty years between Germany, Holland and Belgium without being caught. Sophia Kruse said after the war that he never declared himself to the Aliens Administration when he came to Holland. Nevertheless, at the end of the Thirties, his name got known and the Dutch police had no doubt about his real activity. As for Belgium, he must equally have entered and left the country illegally, since no file whatsoever was found in the Belgian *Office des Etrangers* with the name of Dierks or whatever cover name he used. As far as we know, his name was not known to Belgian security, although one of his cover names, 'von Wedel', was brought to the attention shortly before the war.

On the other hand, the question arises as to the use of the agents who were recruited by HD. Most of the agents, who were sent to the UK during the first World War and who had been instructed or recruited by HD, were arrested after a short period of activity. The covers they used were far from being safe : two Dutch young men (Janssen and Roos), both being sent to the UK as 'cigar travellers' and reporting both by telegram to a firm 'Dierks & Co' about the amount of cigars to be shipped to them, must have attracted the police's attention as highly suspect. HD and the Abwehr in general repeated this error of using too often the same cover during the Thirties. The repeated use of one cover address (POB 629) and of the name 'Sanders', and most of all the use of one and the same money channel to pay agents in the UK must be considered as imprudent. It would seem that the Abwehr underestimated the efficiency of British counterintelligence. The Abwehr also paid not a great attention to the agents' instruction and to security rules they should have used. If the number of agents recruited by HD was considerable, the results they obtained were less important.

It is true that the Abwehr managed to develop agents outside the UK who were not discovered. Since we know very little about what kind of information they sent to HD or to the Abwehr, it is impossible to say if their activity was fruitful. The information that was sent in by HD's French agents seems to have been relatively important. It may be supposed that the Abwehr wanted to develop long term agents who were to lie down in peacetime and who would be activated during the war to come. This may have been the role of Drücke and his circle and maybe of Vera Schalburg and some of the British agents.

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