

# THE *Master Spy* OF THEM ALL

BY THOMAS M. JOHNSON



Master spy Canaris

**T**O her spies as much as to her arms does Germany owe her victories. German agents set the scene for the tragedy of France. German spies picked and rehearsed the Quislings for their rôles in Norway, Belgium, and Holland. German armies, air fleets, and U-boats have struck with a timing that showed they had full information from behind enemy lines. German espionage has done the best job any spy organization ever did for a nation bent on conquest. The man who spun most of this world-wide web and now sits at its center certainly is the world's master spy. He is perhaps the ablest that has ever afflicted the world. Yet he is all but unknown.

This is by his own choice and his own careful contrivance. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, titular chief of military intelligence for the German Supreme General Staff, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, and actually much more than that, is a quiet little man who wears a uniform only when he has to, lives in a middle-class Berlin suburb, keeps his name out of newspapers, official communiqués, Who's Whos, city directories, and telephone books, smokes a pipe and cultivates his roses. His one friend is his code and cipher expert. A grotesque touch—he avidly studies detective stories.

Canaris arrived at his eminence by climbing a dirty, devious, and bloody trail. He has served Germany well, and Canaris better.



A tanker torpedoed off the New Jersey coast. Presumably, Canaris' agents have tipped off Hitler's U-boats to American ship movements.

He grew up in the officer caste; his father, too, was a naval officer. In World War I, young Canaris was serving on a German naval vessel which was interned in Chile after the Falkland Islands battle. Disguised as a stoker, he escaped to Spain on a merchantman. He served the rest of the war in Spain, nominally as a naval attaché to the German Embassy.

Actually he spied on Allied ship movements and set up the system of surreptitiously refueling German submarines in Spanish waters. As his talents won recognition in Berlin, he was given more and more responsibility, and eventually, from Madrid, he directed the German spy service in France, including, of course, spies in the rear of the A. E. F.

**MATA HARI** was one of his agents. She was not quite the siren the movies have since made her out, but for a time she was useful. Eventually she became something of a nuisance to him. The French intercepted an incredibly careless wireless message from Madrid which led them straight to her. They trapped her, proved her guilty, and shot her. But the French had watched Canaris too long to believe he was ever careless or stupid, or that he tolerated blundering subordinates. From the message that betrayed Mata Hari they drew their own inference: the handsome attaché was not only clever—he was ruthless.

To Canaris as to Hitler, the defeat of 1918 was an unforgivable insult. He began at once to devote his talents to circumventing the terms of the Versailles Treaty and rebuilding the power of the Reich. But at no sacrifice to Canaris; he has always made it pay.

He began cashing in before Hitler did. He went where the money was—to German big business—to the Krupps, Thyssen, and the rest who hated the new Weimar Republic and feared it would surrender to the Reds.

The most fiery Red leaders, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were assassinated. The assassins were ar-

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rested. Canaris went to visit one of them in prison, and immediately thereafter the prisoner escaped by using a forged pass. The Socialists called Canaris a murderer. They charged that he had at least had foreknowledge of the assassinations, if he had not helped big business plot them, and also that he made money out of them, going short of the stock market in anticipation of the panic they caused. The charges made a stink, but nothing happened to Canaris; his connections were too powerful.

With other Pan-German fanatics and tough adventurers he continued guerrilla warfare against the Socialists and Communists, and was prime mover in plots to establish a secret army and navy. Three naval officers, to raise funds for the work, sold government supplies and diverted most of the proceeds. Two were jailed, but not the third, not Canaris.

A very private yacht club was organized at the Baltic port of Lübeck. The yachtsmen were singularly hard-faced and weather-beaten. You would not have said they looked well-to-do, yet they seemed to have infinite leisure for sailing. The republic grew suspicious and arrested twelve "stewards." All turned out to have been officers in the German Navy. The yacht club members were former petty officers, cast ashore by the loss of the German fleet, glad to be paid secretly to man a new one. The yacht club itself was the "shadow fleet," the "Black Marine," counterpart of the "Black Reichswehr." The club was broken up and the twelve stewards were sentenced. They were, of course, Canaris stooges.

Next, Canaris was made head of the Department of Naval Transport, careful camouflage for the revival of the naval espionage service which Germany had foresworn under the treaty. It gathered information about ships, men, and bases of other Powers and it protected the secrecy of Germany's naval rearmament. The office was small, not only to be inconspicuous but also because the Weimar Republic was stingy with funds.

Shortage of money cramped Canaris' style. So he persuaded Captain Lohmann, who controlled secret government funds, to use them to "save the Phoebus Film Company from the American octopus" and then produce an anti-democratic propaganda picture, stabbing in the back everything for which the Weimar Republic stood. By the time the government discovered this, Canaris had got Lohmann to put \$6,500,000 of government money into the film company and seventeen other enterprises which were assorted disguises for war preparations, such as building auxiliary ships, testing a new motor fuel, studying northern oceans. But this time Canaris was removed from his post.

For a little while he cultivated his suburban garden and his big-business friends. They agreed with him that

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Canaris in the former Kaiser's funeral procession at Doorn. Intentionally inconspicuous, as always, he is the little admiral at left, whom the arrow points out. The two in front are Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart and the aged General von Mackensen.

their best chance of overthrowing this *verdammte* republic that was taxing them to death was by backing this man Hitler. So in 1929 Canaris opened a private detective agency with Kapitänleutnant Steffens as partner.

The private detective agency was supposed to protect German industrial secrets from foreign agents, but its real business was political intrigue. One enthusiastic client was Canaris' old comrade in anti-Weimar plots, General von Schleicher, "the Fox." He got from Canaris information that helped him oust Bruening and become chancellor. For this he paid Canaris. Canaris kept the money; he also kept back his best information—for his own uses and for Hitler's. As became apparent later, von Schleicher was used to run interference and take out blockers, whereupon Hitler knifed through the opening and seized the chancellorship for himself.

Once in power, Hitler quite understandably wanted no such adroit double-crosser as von Schleicher around. Nazi gunmen killed the general and his wife in their apartment. The accusation was "plotting with foreign agents." The natural supposition was that Canaris supplied the evidence.

Now Canaris was really getting ahead. Hitler recognized him as a man after his own heart, made him rear admiral, chief of Naval Intelligence, and instructed him to expand it into a world-wide service.

The new admiral fell to with zest and ingenuity. New consulates began springing up in Africa and the two Americas "to serve Germany's rapidly expanding export trade." "Export or die," the Führer had said. It seemed curious that so many of the new consuls had the look of seafaring men. German archaeologists suddenly got tremendously interested in ancient Mediterranean cultures and sent ex-

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peditions to the Near East. British Intelligence officers pounced upon a "band of Afghans" in the Khyber Pass who had excellent radio transmitters and spoke perfect German.

**A NEW** type of British plane flew from the deck of a carrier—and disappeared. The British Intelligence service got the astounding report that it had been shot down by a German submarine and the wreckage had been picked up to be studied by Hermann Göring's designers. Commander of the submarine, the story went, was Rear Admiral Canaris. Fantastic as the tale may sound, it came independently through two British espionage channels, both trusted.

Canaris went to Spain to arrange for supplies of strategic metals, and after Hitler's rise to power he set up factories in Spain for German armament, working closely with the notorious Spanish multimillionaire, Juan March, backer of Franco. When civil war broke out, Canaris went to Spain to arrange the hidden bases from which "pirate" submarines attacked British merchantmen.

In Hitler's birthday honors of 1938 Canaris' name led all the rest. He was made a Vice-Admiral, attached to the General Staff. At last he definitely outranked his rival, Colonel Nicolai, head of Army Intelligence but with ambitions to head all German spy branches for this war as he had for the first World War. It was clear that Hitler intended this job for Canaris, instead. Nicolai for the army, Ribbentrop of the diplomatic service, Haushofer who worked with Germans abroad, Himmler of the Gestapo would continue their activities, but Canaris would get their reports, would be chief among them. When he chose to interfere, he would interfere. For example, he undertook chief responsibility for collecting Quislings in each of the countries Germany had marked for conquest. Ribbentrop and Haushofer helped, but it was Canaris who actually chose, bribed, and coached the Judases in Poland, Norway, Holland, and Belgium.

**I**N the second year of the war Hitler rewarded Canaris royally, making him full admiral and co-ordinator of all intelligence for the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. That placed him openly at the head of the most powerful combination of secret services in history: not only army, navy, and air but on occasion the Gestapo, the Auslands Institut, and the Foreign Offices, *Ribbentropbüro*.

*Der Schnüffler*—the Snooper—had attained dizzy heights than any other spy who had ever snooped. Napoleon denied Schulmeister the Legion of Honor, Bismarck extended to Stieber only his left hand, but Hitler publicly proclaimed Canaris an *Unabhaengige Reichsbehörde*—meaning, one of the little inner circle who knew his real

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plans. Canaris shuddered at the publicity and, to avoid being seen, moved a cot bed into his office for a time.

He even blamed the publicity for a turn in his luck. His first real setback was in Greece. He is of Greek ancestry; one of his ancestors is *the* Greek naval hero; a destroyer recently launched by King George and the Greek government in exile is named Kanaris. However, when Hitler's Admiral Canaris sent agents to buy up Quislings, various Greeks took the money and bought cartridges for the Greek Army. "This Greek has become too German," they remarked grimly.

He failed in Russia. True, he advised Hitler not to attack and told him no effective fifth-column preparation was possible there. But the generals said that with his powers and resources he should have been able to gather a better appraisal of Russian war strength. His defense was that Gestapo meddling had botched the job. He wrote a long and bitter report to Hitler, demanding that Himmler be told to stick to domestic affairs and leave foreign intelligence work to some one who was experienced and competent.

This brought into the open a rivalry that had smoldered ever since Hitler had made Canaris supreme over all spying and counterspying that concerned the armed forces. By Canaris' interpretation, there was little that did not. He assumed control of the Hamburg spy school and the Berlin sabotage school. He sent secret agents into factories to check up on output, sabotage, and secrecy. He set up a spy system to watch officers and even privates, and a parallel system to watch the Italian forces.

Canaris even tapped the wires of Gestapo officials. Himmler was enraged. Unperturbed, Canaris countered by working one of his own men into the Gestapo, just to be sure he knew what Himmler was up to. This man was Heydrich, who was killed perhaps by infuriated Czechs, as announced, perhaps by the Gestapo.

**A**S American defense preparations and aid to Britain increasingly demanded Canaris' attention, he jeered at the Gestapo's fumbling agents here and went to work by his own methods. He consulted naval officers experienced in the United States, like Captains von Bonin and Menzel. In Berlin his men, in particular his ingratiating assistant Rear Admiral Buergner, assiduously cultivated and tried to pump Americans. Old naval friends were placed in key ports—for instance, von Spiegel at New Orleans. Many a "coffee planter" was planted in Caribbean lands. Canaris helped develop the Spanish Falange, and has been using it cleverly for work in Latin America. He built connections with a subversive ring in Brazil. By the time we entered the war he had become the most dangerous foe the American secret services have ever had.

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Naturally we hear more of his failures here than of his successes. It was Canaris who sent the eight saboteurs here by U-boat; they were caught and six of them executed. Lest Americans suppose the spying is all one-sided, it can now be revealed that our Intelligence services knew they were on their way here. Where or on just what day they would land, of course, had to be pure conjecture. We have rounded up others of Canaris' agents, the Rumrich ring and the thirty-two satellites of the professional spy, Fritz Duquesne—one of whose trusted agents was working for the F. B. I.

It is taken for granted that the admiral's agents have hurt us badly by tipping off U-boats to ship movements; but in one department they have failed. There has been no important case of sabotage in war industry—not as yet. Of course he probably will try again and again.

Of late there have been queer stories floating around: that the Führer in one of his rages screamed that Canaris was a *niete*—a flop—and demoted him; that Canaris was behind the mysterious anti-Nazi, pro-army Siegfried radio station which showers foul billingsgate on the Nazi leaders. There was even a story that Canaris represented powerful forces within Germany that would like to get in touch with responsible British and American elements to explore the possibilities of ending the war—behind Hitler's back and thus overthrow him.

Qualified American observers doubt all these stories. After all, most of them come from Lisbon, the bailiwick of Canaris' veteran stooge, von Stohrer. Canaris rivals Goebbels as a spreader of false reports. One of his oldest dodges is to spread stories of internal weakness in the Reich. He misled some of the best French and Polish agents by such tales.

It is probable that again he is playing some deep double-dealing game. Which is not to say he would not slit Hitler's throat in a minute if he could see advantage in it for Canaris. Canaris always will be loyal—to Canaris.

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