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THE SWISS SECRET SERVICES DURING THE WAR

Much has been written since the fifties on the role of Switzerland as the centre of various spy networks during the Second World War. A sensational book, written by a duo of French journalists even had the title "La guerre a été gagnée en Suisse". A recent and remarkably concise study, carried out under the auspices of the Federal Council, has put the assertions of these various attempts at building a story that would sell in their right perspective. It dispels the idea that the secrets that were wired to the allies by agents operating in Switzerland determined the course of the war, but gives these secrets the importance that they deserve.

The book by Hans Rudolf Kurz, *"Die Schweiz im Nachrichtendienst des zweiten Weltkriegs"* (Verlag Huber, Frauenfeld) offers a dense and precise picture of the Swiss secret service during the war, describes the essential foreign spying activities on Swiss soil and gives a clear account of the highly publicised Masson-Schellenberg affair.

Destruction of a Myth

War historians argue that the most decisive secret ever delivered with effect during the Second World War was the news that Japan was not going to attack Russia from the east. This vital information supplied by the double agent Richard Sorge allowed Stalin to draw on his eastern reserves and defend Moscow. Several other vital secrets were transmitted thanks to the genius and courage of agents dedicated to political causes or money.

One of these secrets was the announcement of the forthcoming invasion by the Turkish spy Cicero. Hitler ignored the warning. Another vital secret was the news that Germany was preparing to invade Russia. This information was sent by the Russian agent *Alexander Rado* operating from Geneva, in the summer of 1940—one year before "Operation Barbarossa" was actually launched. Stalin did not take this information seriously. He had only just signed a non-aggression pact with the Third Reich. The Alexander Rado network is also credited with having warned Moscow of the German counter-offensive at *Kursk*. The battle of Kursk is reckoned to have been more important than Stalingrad in the turning of the tide on the Russian front because the Germans sacrificed their last reserve and their remaining tank divisions in a wild effort to regain the initiative.

Although the news of the Kursk counter offensive was beamed from Geneva to Moscow well in advance of the event, the Russians were warned by their own sources on the field. Hans Rudolf Kurz quotes a former German general as saying that a German attack on the Kursk salient was amost predictable, given the geography of the situation.

Thus Kurz's work discounts the idea that "the war was won in Switzerland".

The most important secret that was probably transmitted to the allies from Switzerland was the exact location of the Peenemunde V-2 installations. These details were to allow the RAF to carry out massive raids over Peenemunde and delay the German V-2 programme significantly. This action did not however alter the inevitable outcome of the war.

The routine of intelligence

These are "glamorous" secrets which appeal to the imagination of the public. Besides these, the various networks operating in Switzerland supplied a steady stream of material to the allies (Russian, British and American) as well as to the Swiss secret services. The routine work of the information agent should not be overshadowed by a few ominous secrets. It is only by a vast supply of economic, poitical and military information that a clear picture of the situation in Germany could be pieced together.

Kurz dwells at length on the apparent contradiction between the concept of neutrality and espionage. It is because of Switzerland's neutrality that the operations of foreign agents were declared illegal. Rado escaped to France when his network of three transmitting stations was discovered by the Federal Police. Yet Switzerland was fairly lenient with these agents as they were working for an early end to the war and safeguarding Switzerland's own security by informing the allies. Kurz argues that Switzerland was in a state of "effective war with Germany". Despite its neutrality, it had a vital interest in the victory of the allies. It could not expect her neutrality to be respected in a German ruled Europe. This subject is developed with insistence by the author because of the various criticisms which have been levelled at Switzerland after the war concerning her alleged lack of neutrality in intelligence activities.

Although the work of foreign agents was forbidden—the three main networks were eventually dismantled —it is true that their organisers were sentenced to small terms of imprisonment at the end of the war. The main advantage of operating in Switzerland lay in its proximity to Germany and Italy, and the fact that the worse that could befall an agent was to be thrown in jail, whereas spies operating in Germany faced almost certain death.

Kurz points out that agents working for the allies in Switzerland were not technically "spies" but "gatherers" of information supplied by their own network of informants. This information was conveyed by various devices, such as microfilms, couriers or post. *Rudolf Roessler's* communications lines passed through Milan, Italy, before crossing the Swiss border. This information was then beamed to the foreign powers concerned by radio. The Americans and the British used their embassy transmitters and were covered by diplomatic immunity, whereas the Russians relied on three illegal transmitters in Lausanne and Geneva because of the absence of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

Rado and Roessler

The two "master agents" in Switzerland were Alexander Rado and Rudolf Roessler. Alexander Rado, a Hungarian communist, took over the Russian information network in Switzerland in 1939. The network had already been set up by two successive women agents who had installed a transmitter in Caux. After the fall of France and the dismantling of the Russian network in that country, Rado's network was the most important Russian observation post in the west. Rado held the rank of colonel in the Russian Army and was decorated with the Order of Lenin for his work in Switzerland. He was in contact with Moscow through three agents (one of them an Englishman) with transmitters in Lausanne and Geneva. They were in operation from 1940 until their arrest in October 1943.

Rudolf Roessler, a German-Jewish emigre, was approached by a semi-independent but official intelligence agency known as *"Büro Hausamann"* and used his contacts in Germany to supply vital information to the Swiss Information Service, via Hausamann. He eventually turned double agent and supplied information to the Russians through a third "espionage" outfit, the *Dübendorfer-Boettcher couple* in Geneva.