



Foreign &
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Office

THE CICERO PAPERS

*Further releases concerning the security breach
at HM Embassy, Ankara, in the Second World
War, 1943-73*

**FCO Historians
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‘Snatch’ and CICERO

Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, his Valet and the Security Breach at the British Embassy, Ankara

Between October 1943 and March 1944, the British Embassy in Ankara was the source of a serious leakage of information that could have proved disastrous for the Allied cause in World War Two. Ilyas Bazna, the valet to Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen (aka ‘Snatch’), HM Ambassador to Turkey, was able, through poor security arrangements, to photograph a large number of important and secret documents, which he then sold to the German Embassy. The Germans gave Bazna the cover name CICERO. Papers released to The National Archives (TNA) in 2003 show that it was not until the end of the war that the Security authorities were able to establish the identity of CICERO and MI5 was able to give a full account of the affair. This was obtained from the interrogation of several Germans involved with CICERO including Ludwig Moyzisch, the case officer, Maria Molkenteller, Amt VI Headquarters of the Sichertienst (SD), the Security Police of the SS, and Walter Schellenberg, Head of Amt VI. Further information, though of a somewhat negative character, came from SS Ostuf Schuddekopf, Head of the British Section of Amt VI. The latter felt most of the documents provided by CICERO were very dated and of historical interest only. But, this did not apply to Knatchbull-Hugessen’s personal notes, which were considered valuable since they dealt with the problem of British-Turkish relations. Schuddekopf’s analysis is probably nearer the truth than the exaggerated claims made by Moyzisch, which he elaborated in his book and fictionalised in the film based on it.¹ Newly released Foreign Office papers to TNA reveal that the British security authorities went to elaborate lengths to trap the spy, including planting a forged War Cabinet paper, without the Foreign Secretary’s knowledge, in the Embassy in late January 1944. For Knatchbull-Hugessen, the new papers also indicate that he spent much of the rest of his career trying to clear his name from the fallout of the CICERO revelations.

The Consequences of CICERO's Activities

The potential damage that CICERO could have inflicted was enormous. Major political and strategic decisions were being taken in Moscow, Cairo and Tehran. A number of the planning documents produced in Cairo could have proved fatal had they leaked. Fortunately, only one of them was ever in Knatchbull-Hugessen's possession. The others were never at risk. Although the code-name OVERLORD was referred to in documents passed over, the date and location of the operation were not compromised by CICERO. Another potential area of damage concerned the possibility that the CICERO information enabled Franz von Papen, the German Ambassador to Turkey, to bring pressure to bear on the Turkish Government which delayed a declaration of war by Turkey on the Allied side. The British desire to have Turkey on side increased when Italy surrendered in September 1943. British forces had then taken over a number of the Dodecanese Islands from their Italian garrison, including Leros and Cos, and an attack on Rhodes, operation ACCOLADE, was contemplated. But the Germans tightened their grip on the area and re-took Leros in November 1943. To mount an attack on Rhodes, Turkish airfields were now needed to provide bases for fighter protection.

At the Cairo Conference, between 3 and 7 December 1943, Churchill produced a long minute on operation SATURN, a plan for the preparation of British airfields in Turkey to enable the 'fly-in' of British fighter squadrons that would cover the ACCOLADE operation. Mention was also made of a possible infiltration of British submarines into the Black Sea. When, on 4 December 1943, the Turkish President, together with his Foreign Minister and Knatchbull-Hugessen, arrived in Cairo, copies of Churchill's minute on SATURN were handed over to the Turkish President and Knatchbull-Hugessen. The latter was instructed to draft the minutes of the talks. No doubt Knatchbull-Hugessen took notes to this end, which formed the basis, together with the SATURN memorandum, for a further CICERO haul. However, Churchill's minute was not a paper on 'Preparations for Turkey's entry into the War' nor the more generally accepted term 'Establishment of Allied Forces in Turkey in 1943'. Both terms are misleading and the limited nature of Churchill's minute must be noted.

ACCOLADE was cancelled on 25 December 1943, not for lack of air cover but because of the decision to launch the assault on Anzio. Negotiations with the Turks

also foundered – talks continued throughout January 1944 but took on an air of unreality. On 4 February 1944, all military supplies to Turkey were cut off and the military negotiating team returned to Cairo. Knatchbull-Hugessen was told to avoid official contact to the best of his ability. By that time the CICERO leakage had been effectively plugged. Moyzisch and Molkenteller confirmed that they never again approached the results achieved in December. It seems likely that some of Knatchbull-Hugessen's reports to the Foreign Office on the state of the negotiations with the Turkish Foreign Ministry may well have been passed on to the Germans; but they could have been of little more than academic interest. It was known that the Turkish Foreign Minister was himself keeping a number of diplomatic missions informed on the progress of negotiations and there was no reason to suppose that he did not discuss the matter equally freely with von Papen.

Two other possible consequences of CICERO's activities have been suggested. Moyzisch had argued that the documents enabled the German cryptographers to break an important British cipher but this story was investigated and found to be untrue. The other was that, through this leakage, the Germans became aware that there was no genuine threat of an Allied move into the Balkans. If this particular statement is true (and it rests on an entry in General Alfred Jodl's diary and less direct statements by von Papen) then perhaps CICERO earned all the money the Germans paid him. Molkenteller also disposes of the myth of CICERO's mastery of photographic technique – the photostats, she says, showed many duplicates and some of the manuscript notes were largely indecipherable. It is possible that CICERO had a confidant in the Embassy since, according to Moyzisch and Schellenberg, two fingers or thumbs which did not look like the agent's own were visible in several of the photographs. In his own account, Bazna tells of having two female accomplices. The first of these – whom he names – was completely innocent of the actions he attributed to her. There is little reason to suppose that the second woman was not also a figment of his imagination. But this small mystery remains.²

Reactions in Berlin

In Berlin, CICERO's documents received a mixed reception. The German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, was still smarting after being duped by operation MINCEMEAT – an Allied ruse which pointed to an attack on the Balkans in the

summer of 1943.³ Ribbentrop also cultivated a long-standing feud with von Papen and had his own brother-in-law, Albert Jenke, promoted to the post of Minister in Ankara in August 1943 to monitor the ambassador. At Hitler's court Ribbentrop relentlessly intrigued against von Papen and the Turks – the latter compromised in Ribbentrop's eyes following President İnönü's meeting with Churchill at Adana in February 1943. Thus Ribbentrop was somewhat surprised to receive von Papen's telegram of 27 October informing him of CICERO's offer although he cautiously gave his approval for the scheme. Photographed documents were in German hands by 1 November but very soon the fratricidal tendencies of the Nazi elite were in evidence. Jenke had been contacted by CICERO but had passed him on to Moyzisch. Thereafter, CICERO would only deal with Moyzisch alone – a factor that riled Ribbentrop, as he knew that the kudos for this intelligence coup would accrue to Walter Schellenberg and the SD. In turn, Schellenberg had little time for Ribbentrop and attempted to use CICERO to discredit the Foreign Minister.

On his return to Berlin to report, Moyzisch was ordered to the Foreign Ministry by Ribbentrop and thoroughly grilled on 11 November. Moyzisch was told to stay in Berlin until the end of November, but as CICERO would deal with him only, the information dried up and flowed again only when Moyzisch returned to Ankara. When details of the Cairo and Tehran conferences were provided by CICERO Ribbentrop finally came to the conclusion that the material was not British misinformation. Instead the Foreign Minister thought the documents showed fault lines in the Allied coalition, an interpretation which countered Schellenberg's rather more reasoned viewpoint that the documents pointed, however vaguely, to a massive Allied invasion of Europe and the destruction of Germany.⁴

As already discussed some debate exists about the impact that CICERO had on British-Turkish relations. There is no doubt that von Papen made full use of the material he had in his possession, whatever its value, in attempting to keep Turkey neutral. After Cairo, he warned the Turkish Foreign Minister that compliance with British requests for Turkish entry into the war would 'inevitably lead to German reprisals' whose 'least consequences would be the complete destruction' of Istanbul and Izmir. Von Papen was gratified to find out a few days later from CICERO that the Turkish note to the British on 12 December was non-committal. With the departure of

the British military delegation in early February 1944, von Papen informed Ribbentrop that ‘this round in the campaign for Turkey has been won by us...a Balkan offensive could not now take place.’⁵

Sir John Dashwood's Investigation and the forged War Cabinet paper

On 17 January 1944, when the British authorities learned that von Papen had obtained secret documents that must have come from a British source, this aroused intense and very high level concern in London. Churchill was told, and he in turn informed Franklin D. Roosevelt, the US President. Sir John Dashwood, the Foreign Office's security liaison officer, left for Ankara at the end of January 1944 to carry out an investigation. As part of Dashwood's investigation, a document - a forged War Cabinet paper - was planted in the Embassy, the contents of which, if they reached Berlin, might be expected to provoke some reaction on the part of the German Government that would betray their knowledge of the document in question. Although the trap was laid for several days, there was no result and Dashwood returned with the problem unsolved. The forged Cabinet paper, composed by Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, was unique. The War Cabinet remained unaware of it; there was no copy in the archives of the War Cabinet and its existence was only known to handful of officials. It was a perfectly genuine Cabinet paper, printed by the Foreign Office printer, with a genuine and authentic number but its contents were entirely fictitious. The whole process required a considerable amount of deceit by all concerned. In particular, Pierson Dixon, the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State, forged Anthony Eden's initials to indicate that the paper had been approved by the Foreign Secretary, when the latter had in fact never seen it, and was completely oblivious to its existence. Without this lie the printer would never have accepted the paper.⁶

Knatchbull-Hugessen himself was determined that any leakage had occurred not from his own house but on a train journey, either on the way to or from the Cairo meeting. The papers known to be in the Germans' possession corresponded closely to the briefs he had carried in a brown travelling box, in the special train to and from Cairo. This box he had left unattended, in his carriage while he was in the restaurant car. However, after accumulating evidence for what he called the ‘train theory’, Dashwood was unconvinced that this was where the theft took place and fell back on

the assumption that the theft took place in Knatchbull-Hugessen's house.⁷ In reviewing members of Knatchbull-Hugessen's personal staff in Ankara, the British security authorities had nothing on their records against his domestics. The butler could speak a little English but none of the other servants were known to be able to read English and 'all the indications are against them being able to do so'. However, Dashwood noted that the butler, footman and valet were all in the habit of entering Knatchbull-Hugessen's study at any time of the day and also before they went to bed at night and equally had access to his bedroom suite:

In these circumstances, and in view of the fact that the Brown box is always kept in His Excellency's house and that the Black box has often remained there all night, it is difficult to avoid the conviction that any of these persons may have had opportunities for tampering with these boxes and may well have duplicate keys to the boxes since His Excellency carries his set of keys on his person.

What emerged therefore was that Knatchbull-Hugessen kept his working papers in a black box in his bedroom overnight and carried on his person the key to this box, together with a key to a red circulation box in which such papers were transported to and from the Chancery, and another key which is sometimes described as the key to his safe and sometimes as the key to his brown travelling box. There is little doubt that Knatchbull-Hugessen was at fault for leaving the box unattended in the Residence rather than returning it to the Chancery at night, and in leaving the key to it where CICERO could, and did, get hold of it. Knatchbull-Hugessen was warned not to do this in 1942, long before CICERO came on the scene but he persisted in doing so. The Security Guard's log for the period from 1 September to 11 October 1943, for example, shows that of the 25 days that the Ambassador spent in Ankara during this period, he kept the box in his Residence on 20 of the nights, and returned it to the Chancery on only five. It was no surprise that Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, asked Knatchbull-Hugessen to do his work in the Chancery in future.⁸

Efforts to Clear Knatchbull-Hugessen's Name

Knatchbull-Hugessen was transferred from Ankara in September 1944 to become Ambassador in newly liberated Brussels. At that time his responsibility for the

leakage at Ankara was not known for certain although it was suspected, especially after the Dashwood report, that his negligence might have been a contributory factor. When the British Government found out the true story in 1945, Cadogan confided in his diary on 14 August, that 'Snatch ought, of course, to be court-martialled, but I must think over this'.⁹ Two weeks later Cadogan sent Knatchbull-Hugessen a formal reprimand in a letter dated 28 August 1945 but this was never made public. The full story of CICERO became public only in 1950 when Moyzisch published his account of it in his book *Operation Cicero*. In response to a Parliamentary Question (PQ) by W. S. Shepherd MP on 18 October 1950, the Secretary of State, Ernest Bevin, told the House of Commons that:

The Ambassador's valet succeeded in photographing a number of highly secret documents in the Embassy and selling the films to the Germans. He would not have been able to do this if the Ambassador had conformed to the regulations governing the custody of secret documents.¹⁰

On the minuting of the draft reply to the PQ, Sir Andrew Noble, the Under Secretary overseeing the Security Department, said 'I do not know what we say if asked why Sir H's punishment was not something more than a severe reprimand. It has always seemed to me that he got off far too lightly.'¹¹

The day after the PQ, Knatchbull-Hugessen came into the Foreign Office and saw the then PUS, Sir William Strang. Knatchbull-Hugessen complained that the Foreign Office might have warned him that the PQ was coming up and perhaps given him the opportunity to discuss the wording of the reply. Knatchbull-Hugessen also argued that correspondence would show that he did not in fact infringe any particular security instruction and he had been given to understand that the box from which the papers were taken was absolutely safe. The PUS apologised for not having informed him of the PQ, though he did not think that the Foreign Office could have altered the draft substantially. After reading the whole file, the PUS said that he had been left with the impression that with such highly secret documents it was scarcely in conformity with general security instructions for him to have left the box or possibly his key to it, anywhere within reach of foreign servants.

That same day, 19 October 1950, Shepherd wrote to the Secretary of State again asking why details of OVERLORD should have been sent to Ankara. The Secretary of State replied, 'I think that we can be absolutely certain that "details" of operation OVERLORD were never sent to the Ambassador'.¹² On 15 October 1964, Knatchbull-Hugessen wrote to Sir Edward Peck, who had served as Third Secretary in Ankara during the war, stressing that he did not want to go down in posterity as having given away the date and details of OVERLORD. Since Knatchbull-Hugessen himself was not in a position to deny this in public he was anxious his obituary should do so. The Office agreed to this, which led to Sir Edward Peck's supplementary obituary on Knatchbull-Hugessen, printed in *The Times* on 12 April 1971.¹³

On 3 November 1964 Knatchbull-Hugessen also sent to Peck a memorandum in which he give his version of the CICERO affair and its aftermath. In the letter covering the memorandum, Knatchbull-Hugessen stated, 'The paper is not intended for publication. It is intended for the FO to look at and I hope agree to as background in the event of any of the false reports appearing'. The Foreign Office's Head of Security Department commented that he was not sure about 'our agreeing to any version of Sir H's paper'. He did not want to stimulate any further discussion and 'when all is said and done, he was responsible for a serious leakage to the enemy'. This view prevailed at the time. After Knatchbull-Hugessen's death on 22 March 1971, Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe, former MP and a good friend of Knatchbull-Hugessen, took up the cause of vindicating the former Ambassador, writing to Sir Denis Greenhill, the then PUS, on 2 April 1971 and the Secretary of State on 14 April 1971. Mott-Radclyffe did not feel that Peck's obituary went far enough and in particular he wanted to make public the contention that there was no safe in Knatchbull-Hugessen's residence at the time of CICERO. There is no indication on the files at the time that the FCO agreed to the accusation being modified. Cadogan did acknowledge on 7 November 1945 that Knatchbull-Hugessen's safe had been removed to the Chancery in January 1943, and that this should be modified in his original letter to Sir Hughe reprimanding him. But, Cadogan continued, 'however that may be, the harsh fact is that the enemy did succeed in obtaining access to vital documents entrusted to your charge'.¹⁴

Conclusion

CICERO was able to bring off a major espionage coup through bad security in the British Embassy in Ankara and this must largely be ascribed to the carelessness by Knatchbull-Hugessen himself, as the Dashwood enquiry cleared all other elements of the British staff. Fortunately, the leakage did not last for very long. CICERO entered Knatchbull-Hugessen's service in mid-July 1943 but did not contact the Germans until late in October. He gave in his notice about the third week in January 1944 and left at the end of February. After Christmas his material deteriorated, but the two months November/December 1943, when his activities were at their peak, coincided with events of great moment in the Middle East. Although the damage done was probably not very important – it is, for example, unlikely that Turkish foreign policy was seriously influenced – the potential danger was enormous.

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¹ L. C. Moyzisch, *Operation Cicero* (London, 1969).

² The above is taken from investigations into leakage of information to the German Intelligence Service from British Embassy Ankara (CICERO case). The file documents MI5's efforts after the event to piece together facts relating to a serious wartime espionage case involving the leakage of Allied secrets which, it became apparent from the interrogation of German prisoners, had occurred in Turkey in 1943 and 1944. Dated from 1945 Jan 01 - 1952 Dec 31, KV 6/8, The National Archives (TNA).

³ On 30 April 1943 a corpse draped in a British Army officer's uniform was washed up on a Spanish beach. Attached to the body was a briefcase full of plans which suggested an Allied attack on the Balkans. The Spaniards passed these papers to the German Embassy in Madrid in mid-May.

⁴ Michael Bloch, *Ribbentrop* (London, 2003), pp.423-25.

⁵ Richard W Rolfs, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: The Life of Franz von Papen* (Lanham, Maryland, 1996), pp.406-08.

⁶ Clutton, minute for Strang, 4 January 1950, FO 370/2930.

⁷ The Chancery was cleared of complicity by the fortuitous fact that Mrs Sterndale Bennett, the wife of HM Minister at Ankara, had typed four copies of a document which Knatchbull-Hugessen was due to take to the conference in Cairo, and had corrected a misprint on three of the copies but not one the in the Ambassador's possession. This was the copy which was discovered to have reached the Germans. See Edward Peck, *Recollections of Edward Peck: 1915 to retirement 1975* (Unpublished manuscript available from the FCO Library), p.39.

⁸ A copy of Dashwood's report, entitled 'Leakages in Turkey. 1943/44', 7 March 1944, can be found in FO 850/128, TNA.

⁹ Diary entry for 14 August 1945 in David Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M. 1938-1945* (London, 1971), p.761.

¹⁰ 'Background to the CICERO Affair and Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen', Everett note, 25 October 1973, FCO 12/161, TNA

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ 'Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen', *The Times*, 12 April 1971.

¹⁴ 'Background to the CICERO Affair and Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen', Everett note, 25 October 1973, FCO 12/161, TNA.