

The duke of Windsor and the Nazis

Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David Saxe-Coburg-Gotha abdicated as Edward VIII in 1936, becoming duke of Windsor. After abdication the duke married Wallis Warfield who had changed to her maiden name by deed poll.

In July 1933, he told Kaiser Wilhelm II's grandson, Prince Louis Ferdinand, it was "no business of ours to interfere in Germany's internal affairs, either re Jews or re anything else". "Dictators are very popular these days". "We might want one in England before long".

Having failed to get the future king to marry a German princess, Hitler had sent a flood of Nazi supporting aristocrats to London who were ordered to find out what their Royal cousins were thinking. The duchess was a Nazi spy.

Particularly important in this network was Charles Edward duke of Coburg. He was a relative and confidante of the duke of Windsor. In the 1920s Coburg was involved in a German terrorist group that tried to overthrow the elected German Republic. Members of the group were involved in political murders. Coburg funded them. After the failed Hitler Putsch of 1923, Coburg hid Hitler supporters on the run in his castles. Hitler made him a general. From 1935 to 1939 he was received in Britain due to his sister Alice Countess of Althone's work. She was Queen Mary's sister-in-law and fought for Coburg's acceptance. This resulted in him not just being welcomed in British drawing rooms, but most importantly, by the Royals. Coburg was first invited in January 1932 to Sandringham to see George V and Queen Mary during the Christmas break. Despite the War, Queen Mary had renewed contacts with her German relatives as early as 1918. Coburg and the duke of Windsor shared their dream of an Anglo-German alliance.

Before he abdicated, Edward VIII sent a telegram a month after Hitler occupied the Rhineland in March 1936, wishing Hitler "happiness and welfare" for his 47th birthday.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Nazi foreign minister, had been the duchess's lover when he was the Reich's ambassador to Britain in 1936. von Ribbentrop, while in England, sent the then Wallis Simpson 17 carnations a day, representing the number of times they had slept together.

With Nazi funding they went on a tour of Germany, arriving by rail in Berlin where they were greeted by Nazi officials and cheering crowds. In late October 1937, Hitler met them at his mountain retreat. On parting they exchanged Nazi salutes.

In September 1939 the duke became liaison officer with the British military mission with the French Army High Command, serving as an agent for British military intelligence, which wanted information on French defences. The duke's report on the Maginot Line gave a very accurate assessment of French unpreparedness.

On outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the duke and duchess were escorted to Britain by Louis Mountbatten on HMS Kelly. After a short stay in London they returned to France.

The Reich's ambassador in The Hague, Count Julius Zech-Burkesroda, reported in February 1940 that the duke had leaked Allied war plans for the defence of Belgium. In May 1940, Zech-Burkesroda was given the responsibility of passing the Reich's declaration of war against the Netherlands to Dutch foreign minister Eelco van Kleffens. He stated that Zechs-Burkesroda was stunned speechless by the actions of the Nazis.

During the early months of World War II, Thomas Bradish Biddle was in Paris as the US Deputy Ambassador to France. He became close friends of the duke and duchess of Windsor, who spent a considerable period of time living in the luxurious house of Baron Eugene de Rothschild. However, Biddle's greatest friend in Paris was Ambassador William Bullitt. Bullitt also had held strong pro Hitler views and was responsible for introducing the American millionaire Charles Bedaux to the Windsors.

Bedaux was a good friend of IG Farben's Hermann Schmitz, head of Farben's commercial operations. Bedaux had been instructed by SS Chief Heinrich Himmler to inveigle them to help in plans for a negotiated peace settlement. In a meeting held at the Hotel Meurice in Paris between Bedaux, Rudolf Hess, Martin Bormann and Hollywood actor and Nazi sympathiser Errol Flynn, the duke of Windsor promised to help Hess contact the duke of Hamilton, an aircraft squadron leader who also had been in the first flight over mount Everest. This finally led to Hess's dramatic landing on the Hamilton estate in 1941. When that happened the duke of Hamilton, who had Nazi sympathies and many Nazi contacts like Archibald Ramsay, Lord Redesdale, the fifth duke of Wellington, the duke of Westminster and the Marquess of Graham, had been persuaded to become a double agent after interception of a communication to him from Albrecht Haushofer (who had written prior to this directly to Churchill). Haushofer was in close contact with Rudolf Hess. The duke of Hamilton reported the landing to Churchill.

When Germany invaded the north of France in May 1940, the Windsors fled south. The couple retreated to a Biarritz hotel. Within minutes of checking in, Berlin radio announced their hotel room. The duchess had given von Ribbentrop her itinerary and schedule before departure.

In June they were ordered by the Foreign Office to move to Spain, a neutral country. They crossed the border on 19 June. From the embassy in Madrid he telegraphed his brother King George VI who feared for his safety. Within days of their arrival, German diplomats were working with their Spanish allies to ensure the duke remained in Spain.

On 23 June the German ambassador to Madrid, Eberhard von Stohrer, telegraphed von Ribbentrop that the Spanish Foreign Minister, Juan Beigbeder y Atienza, was enquiring on how to deal with the duke, with the possibility of detaining him. von Ribbentrop instructed von Stohrer the following day that the duke and duchess be detained for two weeks, but not let it appear that the suggestion came from him. Stohrer replied that Beigbeder would do as von Ribbentrop asked.

The duke told Don Javier Bermejillo, an old friend and Spanish diplomat, that he blamed "the Jews, the Reds and the Foreign Office for the War". On 25 June 1940 the duke told him "if one bombed England effectively this could bring peace". In a report to Franco that was passed on to the Germans, Bermejillo concluded that the duke seemed very much to hope that this would occur: "He wants peace at any price". The bombing of Britain started on 10 July.

On 2 July the Spanish Foreign Minister wired von Ribbentrop that he had met with the duke and reported the duke's antagonism to the Royal Family because of the treatment meted out to his wife, and his criticism of Churchill for his wartime policies.

The couple were offered a small fortune and a palace in Ronda in southern Spain to sit out the war. German diplomats believed the duke was "the only Englishman with whom Hitler would negotiate any peace terms, the logical director of England's destiny after the War". German telegrams intercepted after the War claim the duke and duchess reacted with surprise when it was suggested to them that the duke might yet have another opportunity to take the throne. "Both seem completely bound up in formalistic ways of thought since they replied that according to the British constitution this was not possible after abdication. When an agent then

remarked the course of the war may produce changes even in the British constitution, the duchess in particular became very thoughtful". The Germans promised to protect his rented houses and their contents in Paris and Cannes.

Dated 7 July 1940, a memorandum from an informant inside occupied Czechoslovakia to Sir Alexander Lodge, permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, says "A new source in close contact with von Neurath's (the German protector of Bohemia) entourage in Prague has reported that the Germans expect assistance from the duke and duchess of Windsor, the latter desiring at any price to become Queen. The Germans have been negotiating with her since 27 June. The status quo in England expect an understanding to form an anti-Russian alliance. The Germans propose to form an opposition government with the duke of Windsor, having first changed public opinion by propaganda. The Germans think King George will abdicate during the attack on London".

One intelligence report from a Spaniard, Count Nara de Tajo, to British diplomats said that the duke believed there could be a revolution in Britain, resulting in the abdication of King George VI. He then hoped that a subsequent Labour government would invite him back to take the throne.

The duke telegraphed Churchill and asked if there was any need for a prompt return to London. Churchill ordered that they move to Portugal. In July they moved to Lisbon, Portugal, where they lived in the lavish house of Ricardo Espirito Santo, a pro-Nazi Portuguese banker with British and German contacts. The Germans regarded the duke as a prisoner of the British secret services longing to escape and join them.

The British obtained information on the duke's remarks to Beigbeder, and as a result Churchill sent him a telegram ordering him back to Britain. Churchill pointed out that the duke, under temporary rank as a major general, was under military authority, and unless he obeyed he would be court-martialled.

The German ambassador, Baron Oswald von Hoyingen-Huene, reported to von Ribbentrop on 11 July "The duke intends to delay his departure as long as possible ... in hope of a turn of events favourable to him".

von Ribbentrop took this as an encouraging sign and cabled the German Embassy in Madrid to try to prevent the duke from going to the Bahamas. Devised initially by von Ribbentrop, Operation Willi envisaged the duke's return to Spain, preferably by his Spanish friends, where he would be persuaded, or compelled, to remain. von Ribbentrop intimated that the British secret service would "do away" with the duke as soon as he arrived in the Bahamas. This information came maybe from the Siemens transatlantic cable between Britain and New York (the Allies thought the scrambling system for phone calls was secure, but Siemens had been able to decipher it). After the fall of the British government the duke would assume the throne. The next day, 12 July, von Stohrer saw Ramón Serrano Súñer, Spanish Minister of the Interior, who promised to get his brother-in-law Generalissimo Francisco Franco involved. The Spanish government would send a friend of the duke, the diplomat Don Miguel Primo de Rivera, leader of the Falange and son of Miguel Primo de Rivera, a former dictator, as an emissary. de Rivera would invite the duke to Spain for a hunting trip and to discuss Anglo-Spanish relations. He would be told of the plot by the British secret service to liquidate him, and be given financial assistance to maintain a lifestyle befitting his station.

de Rivera agreed to the task, although he was not told of German involvement, and met the duke on 16 July to persuade him to return to Spain. de Rivera made the offer and during the meeting the duke made disparaging remarks about the British government, calling the King

“stupid” and the Queen “a clever intriguer”. Nevertheless, whilst receptive to the offer, the duke expressed reservations for several reasons, not least of which were the telegrams from the British government urging him to leave for the Bahamas. A similar visit on 22 July gave the same results.

On the personal directions of Hitler, the SS officer Walter Schellenberg was authorised to offer the duke 50 million Swiss francs deposited in a Swiss bank account if he would sever all ties with the British monarchy and repudiate Churchill’s wartime policy. Schellenberg travelled to Lisbon where he had talks with Baron von Hoyingen-Huene. An abduction scheme envisaged capturing the duke at a hunting party and spiriting him out to Spain. Schellenberg planted a rumour that a bomb had been planted in the ship that was to take the duke to New York, which had been rescheduled via the Bahamas, and had knowledge that Churchill was considering the option of having him assassinated.

The duke and duchess were taken by the British secret services to a British flying boat scheduled for South Africa, which was diverted to the flying boat station at Darell’s Island in Bermuda then on to the Bahamas.

The duke was appointed governor of the Bahamas in strenuous efforts to get him away from Europe beyond the reach of the Germans, and to prevent the duchess from coming into contact with British officials and revealing more secrets. Special precautions were taken by the British to prevent her from establishing any channel of communication with von Ribbentrop.

According to a FBI agent in 1940, the duchess of Windsor had an intense hate of the English, since they had kicked them out of England.

In December 1940, the duke gave Foulton Ousler of Liberty magazine an interview at Government House in Nassau, published in 22 March 1941, where he said “Hitler was the right and logical leader of the German people”.

President Roosevelt ordered covert surveillance of the duke and duchess when they visited Palm Beach, Florida, in April 1941.

Robert Gayre was the head of the US branch of the racist organisation, the International Association for the Advancement of Eugenics and Ethnology, which is headquartered in Scotland. Eugenics formed a very powerful undercurrent in Nazi ideology and thinking.

The IAEE was founded by Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton who was a Wing Commander for the RAF in World War II. Lord Malcolm was a member of the Clivenden Set – which is another name for the Rhodes-Milnor Oxford Group that was sympathetic to Hitler’s war aims. Not least Malcolm had the honour of being the brother of the duke of Hamilton.

Douglas-Hamilton was sympathetic to neo-fascist groups like the Nordic League and the Right Club. Hess thought Hamilton would arrange him to meet George VI. Hess believed he could persuade the King to sack Winston Churchill and make peace with Germany, in order to join forces against the Soviet Union.

In April 1945, code breakers at Bletchley Park came across a telegram from Hitler saying: “The Führer attaches importance to the duke of Coburg, on no account falling into enemy hands”. This was one of Hitler’s “Nero orders”, an indirect sentence of death.

Anthony Blunt, an MI5 agent and Soviet spy, acting on orders from the British Royal family, made a secret and successful trip to Schloss Friedrichshof in Germany towards the end of the war to retrieve sensitive letters between the duke of Windsor, Hitler and other leading Nazis.

Cabinet papers show Churchill wanted to “destroy all traces” of telegrams revealing a Nazi plot to reinstate the duke of Windsor to the British throne. Churchill appealed to the US president Dwight Eisenhower and the French government not to reveal the German telegrams for “at least 10 or 20 years”.