

Smashing the BIGGEST Spy Ring[✠]

Harry Sawyer's death-defying masquerade for the U. S. is a saga of patriotism

OF ALL THE SPY STORIES of World War II, the most thrilling is that of Harry Sawyer, one-time German machine gunner and late-comer to liberty. For a year and a half, in daily peril of detection, Sawyer lived the double life of Nazi "spy" and F.B.I. agent, matching wits with the deadliest espionage ring that ever menaced the U.S.

In a way, too, it is an inspirational story. This tall, sickly man was a naturalized American with a fierce love of freedom. When fate placed him at the mercy of the Nazi secret police, he willingly gambled his life to thwart their plans for sabotage and terror.

Under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, the 42-year-old Sawyer became a superspy, wheedling secrets from veteran professional operatives who would have killed him in a minute had they known he was playing a double cross for democracy. Here, taken from court records, is the amazing account of one brave man's fight against the forces of totalitarianism.

After serving as machine gunner in World War I, Sawyer became a German merchant seaman. In 1929, he came to America, took out citizenship papers, and went to work for Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego, California.

Spy Ring



Ten years later, Sawyer was operated on for stomach ulcers. Though war clouds were already lowering, he decided to visit Germany during his convalescence. This might be his last opportunity to see his aged mother in Mülheim.

In February, 1939, as the gaunt, pale Sawyer walked down the gangplank in Hamburg, a stranger imperiously called him aside and questioned him about his aircraft work. Then he told Sawyer: "You will hear from us."

Soon, Sawyer felt well enough to take a job in a steam-turbine plant. But the Nazi SD secret police hadn't forgotten him. Repeatedly, the spy chiefs demanded Sawyer's "cooperation" with the state, and harassed him by stealing his passport. The showdown came when a Dr. Gassner told him brusquely that he was to return to the U. S. and spy in behalf of the *Reich*. Otherwise, Sawyer was warned, he might be hurt in an "accident."

Finally, purred the *Doktor*, one must think of Sawyer's aged mother. She could not get a U. S. passport and yet, unfortunately, her father had been non-Aryan.

Sawyer turned pale. The *Doktor* smiled and said he would return.

Secretly Sawyer visited the American consul in Cologne. "You're in a tough spot," he was told. "You'd better get out of the country."

But Sawyer couldn't leave his mother to the mercy of the SD. There was only one thing to do: he would ostensibly play along with

Spy Ring

Dr. Gassner and at the same time work for America..

In Hamburg he was taken to daily classes in a "spy school" conducted by the SD. He mastered microphotography, and he learned the ingenious SD code based on any previously selected book. In his case, the code book, ironically, was *All This, and Heaven Too*.

In January, 1940, Sawyer was "graduated" as a spy. Yet even before he sailed that same month for the U. S., he obtained sad but priceless information for America. Seeking to draw out the usually closemouthed master spy, Dr. Nikolaus Ritter, alias Dr. Renken, Sawyer said maybe he could get hold of the famous Norden bomb-sight. "It's already in our possession!" Ritter bragged.

Then the SD gave him \$1,000 to meet expenses, slipped five micro-films of instructions into his watch, and identified the agents in America who were to receive them.

For one archspy—Herman Lang, draftsman in the Norden plant who was so mechanically brilliant that he could memorize blueprints—the Nazis didn't dare risk a printed message. Sawyer was to introduce himself with the password, "Greetings, Rantzau, Berlin, Hamburg."

"Tell him to come back to Germany as soon as possible, by way of Japan and Siberia," Sawyer was instructed. Apparently, the Nazis *didn't* have all the Norden secrets.

When his ship reached New York, Sawyer braced himself for the long, dangerous deception that lay ahead. Nazi suspicion worried him most, for though the F.B.I. promised protection, it was thought inadvisable to have G men follow him to meetings in isolated homes

Spy Ring

on the outskirts of New York and in a dangerous Yorkville restaurant where the ring gathered.

To Everitt M. Roeder, designer for the Sperry Gyroscope Co., maker of secret mechanisms for the Army and Navy, Sawyer delivered \$500 and one microfilm, compliments of Hamburg. The F.B.I. marked Roeder for special attention.

In a mid-town Manhattan apartment, Sawyer introduced himself to an innocent-looking girl who had once been a Viennese artists' model. But Lilly Barbara Carola Stein was not quite as innocent as she looked. In Vienna, her association with a young American vice-consul had caused an international scandal and wrecked his diplomatic career. Sawyer left another film with her.

Of the three remaining films, two were for Sawyer himself, the third for a fabulous adventurer and spy with a 40-year career of intrigue. He was known now as "Jim Dunn," but his real name was Frederick Joubert Duquesne. He was the man who arranged the sinking of the British cruiser *Hampshire* in World War I, with Lord Kitchener aboard.

Sawyer, meeting him in an office in the financial district, was silenced almost as soon as he started talking. The crafty, hawk-faced Duquesne slipped him a piece of paper which read, "We will go out—cannot talk here." In a nearby automat, Sawyer handed over a microfilm of instructions.

As the F.B.I. had already noted, Duquesne's film betrayed Nazi anxiety about certain rumored American military inventions. The aging professional spy was told to find out all he could about them.

Spy Ring

Living from hotel to hotel under assumed names to cover his own F.B.I. link, Sawyer went on baiting the trap. He "plotted" with Axel Wheeler-Hill, brother of an imprisoned Bund leader and a dangerous Nazi zealot in his own right. He met seamen, ship stewards, and an air-line employee who acted as couriers for the ring.

Besides Lilly Stein, Sawyer discovered, two other women were implicated in the conspiracy—the American-born Evelyn Clayton Lewis, sculptress and playwright who was living with Duquesne in an uptown apartment; and Else Weustenfeld, a plump, fading stenographer who had been the mistress of Hans Ritter of the *Luftwaffe*—brother of Dr. Ritter.

At this point, the picture was not reassuring for America. Operating under the restraint of a nation still at peace, Hoover found himself pitted against a lavishly financed world-wide gang, experienced, desperate, ruthless.

But the arrogant spy *Doktors* had dealt Hoover an ace. Never dreaming Sawyer would betray them, they had chosen him to operate the secret radio station which was to contact their outlaw station AOR in Hamburg. It was Hoover's daring plan to have the F.B.I. operate the station, milking what information it could from AOR and furnishing only false or carefully censored data relayed to Sawyer by German operatives here. In a bungalow overlooking Centerport Harbor on Long Island Sound, a secret station was set up with two G men in readiness.

Now there was nothing to do but wait. Finally, in May, 1940, the Germans sprang their own trap. Contact was established between

Spy Ring

AOR and the Long Island station using the call letters DXVW-2. On May 31, AOR to DXVW-2:

Need urgently monthly production of plane factories, exports to all countries, especially to England and France, type, date of delivery by steamer or air, armature and armament, payment cash and carry or credit. Rose has \$200 for you. Not for Stein. Greetings.

Thereafter, month after month, threatening, wheedling, bribing, AOR poured out its soul to the special agents in Centerport. In return, DXVW-2 furnished a steady stream of "information" until those opposite poles, SD and F.B.I., had exchanged a total of 461 messages.

WHILE THE AMERICANS were triumphing in this long-range duel of wits, Sawyer was probing deeper into the Nazi machinations. In their own code phrase for danger, "the air was thick" for this brave, frightened man.

In the Yorkville restaurant, Paul Bante handed him two sticks of dynamite, wire, and percussion caps. To his consternation, Sawyer learned that Duquesne was threatening to blow up a General Electric plant in Schenectady. Obviously, the plot had to be scotched, but he would be suspect in the Nazis' eyes.

Waiting outside was a G man. Obeying an almost imperceptible signal, he followed as Sawyer came out. Two blocks away, the undercover agent gave him the bundle of explosives. The GE plant was saved—but suppose Hamburg learned how the plot had misfired?

Worst of all, Wheeler-Hill was operating a *second* short-wave station, using a different code. What was he sending abroad? The tip-off that Sawyer was a ringer who de-

Spy Ring

served execution?

From across the ocean, AOR talked almost as though it knew something were amiss. Too much of the "information," it complained suspiciously, was already known or botched. The ship and weapon blueprints arriving by courier were blurred (as the F.B.I. had made certain before releasing them) and the radio data was stale.

If Hamburg only knew what was being held back! Sawyer shivered at the thought. It was the greatest espionage triple play in history: from the spies to Sawyer to the F.B.I.—and out.

From Lang came a steady stream of information about the Norden bombsight. From Hartwig Richard Kleiss came construction details of the new 35,000-ton battleships, plans for a new Navy carrier, blueprints of the United States Line vessel *America*, later the Army transport *West Point*, on which gun positions were marked. The plans were forwarded to Hamburg by courier—after certain markings had been eliminated by the F.B.I.

From Duquesne came diagrams and pictures of the Garand rifle, a new plane, a new type of torpedo boat. Instead, false or trivial information was passed on to Hamburg by DXVW-2.

Finally, when Hoover felt that AOR was pumped dry, that he knew all the American hirelings and their contacts in this country, he prepared for the kill. Ostensibly obeying SD orders, Sawyer organized the dummy Diesel Research Company so that espionage funds could be forwarded to New York from abroad. When offices were set up in a Times Square skyscraper, the F.B.I. rented the adjoining room.

OldMagazineArticles.com

Spy Ring

Stationed there, a 16mm camera trained on a peephole looking into Sawyer's office, was a G man. Beside him, ready to record all conversations, was another. Now, let's look at the amazing denouement of this long cat-and-mouse game.

Duquesne enters and Sawyer innocently seats him so that he faces the G men. The camera catches him extracting an envelope of Army secrets from his left sock.

Sawyer examines them one by one, holding them up so that the camera will record them. He draws Duquesne out and the braggart talks—as the notebook in the next room flips over page after page.

Lang comes in and the camera records his act of betrayal as he hands over Norden data. One by one, most of the others visit Sawyer, and are maneuvered into convicting themselves on film. So thorough are these F.B.I. movies that they include even the electric clock and calendar on Sawyer's wall, thus establishing not only the dates but the precise time and duration of each conversation!

At last, in June, 1941, Hoover made the fateful decision. Simultaneously, in more than two dozen homes, apartments, and offices, his agents struck. His phone rang again and again as his agents reported one capture after another.

At last, Hoover grinned broadly. All 32 Nazi spies in America had been picked up without a mishap! All 32 were found guilty and sentenced to prison. And all but one were U. S. citizens or had already taken out first papers.

For Sawyer, the grim task was over at last, without special glory.

Spy Ring

or reward. But now he could sleep nights, secure in the knowledge that he had done more than his bit for the cause of freedom.

Happily, he lapsed into an obscurity which has been protected ever since by the F.B.I. All we know is that somewhere in the U. S. today is a tall, gaunt, middle-aged man to whom each native-born American can well doff his hat in love and respect.

Coronet

December, 1951: p. 130