PATHFINDER

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SPY TRIAL

Suddenly last June, a Federal grand jury in New York City hoisted the curtain on "America's most significant spy prosecution since the World war" by indicting 18 persons for participating in a conspiracy to steal U. S. defense secrets for Germany. Subsequently, only four of the 18 could be found for trial. The others, including two high officials of the German War Ministry, were safe in—or had escaped to—the Fatherland.

Last week, the trial was underway in New York's Federal District Court before John C. Knox. Immediately, the number of defendants was whittled to three. Guenther Gustav Rumrich, U. S. Army deserter whose bungling efforts to obtain blank American passports had led to the discovery of the espionage conspiracy last March, pleaded guilty and promised to testify for the government. A stroke of luck for the government, the confession left for trial Johanna Hofmann, titian-haired hair-dresser on the German Lloyd liner *Europa*, accused of being a go-between; Private Erich Glaser of the U. S. Army, charged with stealing an aviation code, and Otto Voss, airplane mechanic, who allegedly stole plans for design of an Army pursuit plane.

Calmly, almost monotonously, bald, bespectacled U. S. District Attorney Lamar Hardy opened proceedings before the jury of 10 men and two wom-

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en by describing the intentions and workings of the alleged Nazi plot, which newspapermen called "more fantastic than fiction."

"The conspiracy," Hardy said flatly, "was conceived in, and directed from Germany" chiefly through the War Ministry, which sent its demands for U. S. Army and Navy defense secrets to Nazi spies in this country by means of "messengers" working as employees on the German-owned North German Lloyd and Hamburg-American steamship lines. These same "messengers," he said, carried back to Germany what information the spies forwarded. The information was allegedly "cleared" through the home of Dr. Ignatz Griebl, New York physician who fled to Germany last summer to escape arrest.

Among the specific secrets wanted by the spy ring, according to Hardy, were these: (1) designs of American warships, airplanes and anti-aircraft guns; (2) Army mobilization plans for the eastern seaboard; (3) coast artillery defenses in the Panama Canal Zone. To get them, such schemes as forging letters on the President's stationery and gassing a top-ranking Army officer had been planned. Although the three defendants and Rumrich were relatively unimportant cogs in the Nazi espionage machine, Hardy said, more adept agents had penetrated to the Army and Navy drafting rooms, after important defense plans.

Soon after Hardy had astounded the packed but quiet courtroom with these charges, 27-year-old Chicago-born Rumrich took the witness chair to explain his part in the plot. As the government's "star" witness, he told how he became a Nazi spy in 1936—after deserting his Army post—by contacting German espionage officials through Hitler's paper, the *Voelkischer Beobachter*. Thereafter, he said, he sent U. S. military information, mostly insignificant, to a "Mr. Sanders" in Hamburg, who particularly wanted to know how many troops were stationed in the New York City area. Late in 1937, Rumrich added, he was told that Germany was more interested in American industrial activities, especially toward rearmament, than in military secrets and he was asked to probe into the workings of the du Pont munitions and Bethlehem steel plants.

As the New York spy trial was thus getting under way, news dispatches from the Panama Canal Zone added fuel to the nation's "spy scare." In a Cristobal jail were held four persons, one a woman, on charges of violating the law against photographing strategic gun emplacements. All were Germans.

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