AMERICA'S NO. 1 nazi

Smiling, affable Fritz Wiedemann masquerades as an insignificant Consul General in San Francisco, but he is reputed to be the Fuehrer of the Fifth Column in the Western Hemisphere...Here, a reporter turns the spotlight upon this mystery man of international intrigue

by Stephen Riley King

EVER since the British blockade cut off traffic across the Atlantic between the Americas and the warring nations of Europe, agents of the totalitarian powers have been funneling into the Western Hemisphere through the Golden Gate at San Francisco.

Some of them carry diplomatic brief cases, and their papers are exempt from inspection. Others are disguised as businessmen, students, explorers, scientists, or merely travelers. But our investigators have noticed one curious fact: Upon landing, many of them head immediately for the modest office of Captain Fritz Wiedemann, the genial German consul general at San Francisco—a comparatively minor diplomatic official, if you judge by the title.

Trains and airplanes from the East bring high-ranking Nazis to pay "courtesy calls" on this behind-the-scenes diplomat. Such prominent German agents as Dr. Gerhard Alois Westrick, who tried to contact leading industrialists around New York, and Frederich Reid, ousted from Brazil for directing Nazi espionage throughout South America, took time out to visit Wiedemann before they headed back to Berlin on Japanese boats.

Who is this man of mystery, and why are foreign agents so anxious to confer with him behind closed doors before proceeding with their activities in the United States, Mexico, or South America? The answer is simple. Captain Wiedemann is the most important Nazi agent in the Western Hemisphere, believed to outrank the entire staff of the German embassy in Washington. He was Hitler's commander during the World War, and their friendship was further cemented during the terrifying days of the Nazi blood purge. Today, this debonair but tight-mouthed henchman probably knows more Nazi secrets and executes more vital missions than any other diplomat except Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.

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Fritz Wiedemann

THE fuehrer, I am told, placed his old friend in San Francisco because he regards it today as a clearinghouse for the espionage and intrigue that extends from the pampas of the Argentine up to the political labyrinths of Washington. The consul general's contacts are by no means limited to Nazis. He often disappears from San Francisco for several days at a time, and newspapermen have traced him to a lonely ranch near the Mexican border, where, it is said, he confers with Japanese secret agents.

Captain Wiedemann looks like a smiling, ingratiating Max Schmeling, and he dresses as meticulously as Anthony Eden. Six feet tall, he affects perpendicular pin stripes in his suits that make him look even taller. Occasionally, he wears a monocle, and his suave manners once won him entree into the exclusive Cliveden set in England, where he is supposed to have spread the defeatist sentiment that paved the way for the Munich settlement.

He can speak English fluently, but he prefers to talk through an interpreter. That gives him plenty of time to think, and Fritz Wiedemann has plenty of things to think about.

How does he get away with his mysterious activities in a nation which is actively preparing itself for any military crisis? One means is through diplomatic immunity. The other, as J. Edgar Hoover explains such things, is that the Federal Bureau of Investigation prefers to have known agents of foreign powers remain in this country, so all their contacts can be studied. And in Wiedemann, the FBI may have a subject to keep it busy.

On the day the Low Countries were invaded, last May, the captain told a reporter:

"My mission to America remains the same as it was when I came here more than a year ago—to promote good will and friendship. I have no hidden motives. As for propaganda, I would not indulge in it. Besides, you must remember that propaganda costs money, and, as far as money is concerned, Germany is a poor country."

Yet, at almost that very moment, an official of a San Francisco bank reported to a law-enforcement body:

"Captain Wiedemann has withdrawn $100,000 cash in the last two days—all in $100 bills."

What became of the money is another mystery. The consul general's accounts in several banks are reported to average around four and a half million dollars. Congressman Martin Dies, commenting on investigations by his committee into un-American activities in the San Francisco area, stated that "out of respect for the State Department, findings on Cap-

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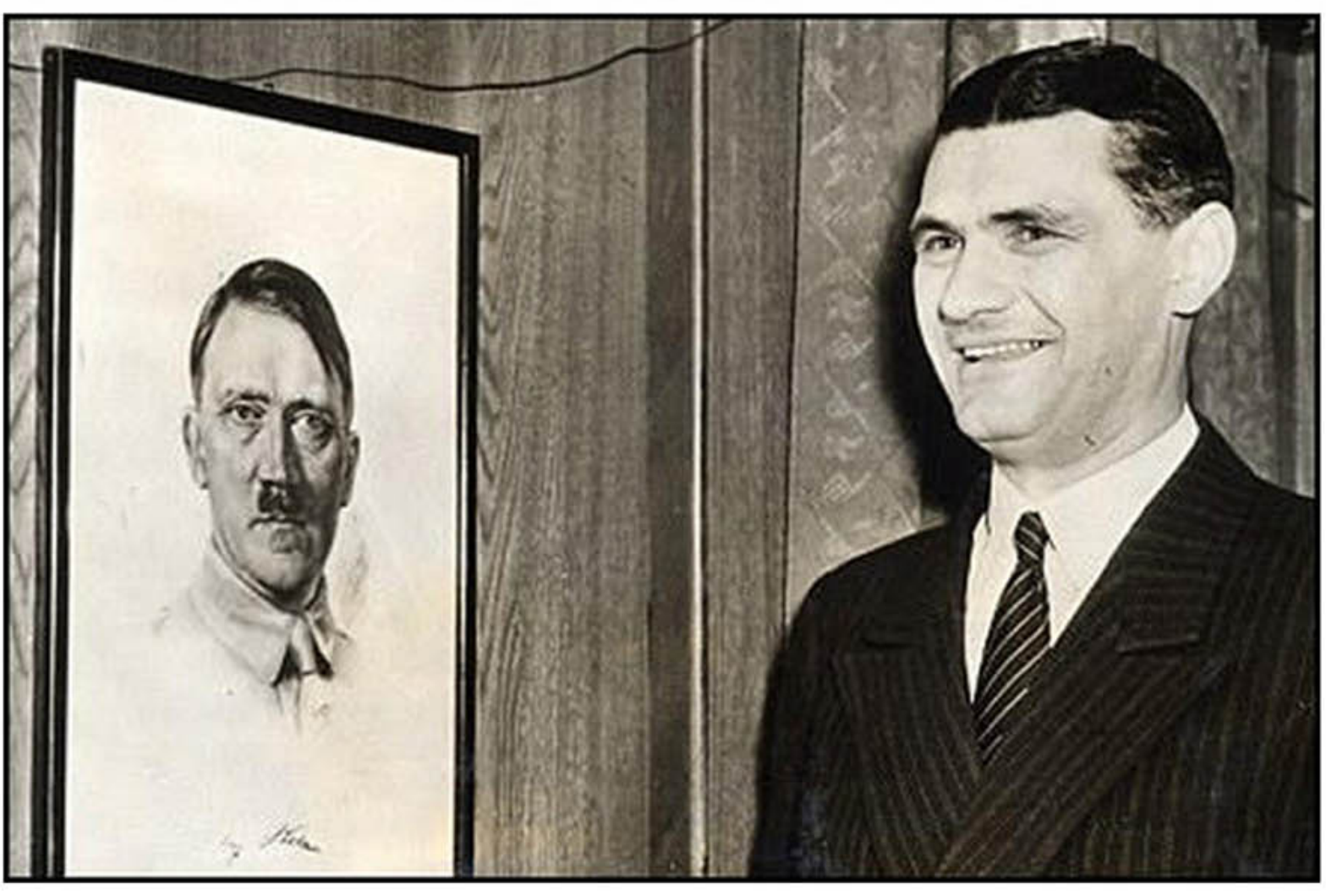
tain Wiedemann will not be made public." Colonel William J. Donovan and Edgar Mowrer, writing of fifth-column activities at the direction of Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, charged Wiedemann had been praised by Hitler for helping to spike American legislation to aid the Allies in 1939.



ALL this the genial captain waves aside, arguing that Germany is merely eager for such products of the West Coast as dried fruit, lumber, borax, and barley. For them, he says, Germany would some day like to trade farm machinery, tools, and precision instruments.

No newcomer to the United States, Captain Wiedemann paid his first visit around the summer of 1933, when he ostensibly studied American publicity as an agent of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. During this visit he conferred frequently with founders and officers of what was then called the Friends of New Germany, later known as the German-American Bund. Among these men were Hermann Schwinn, who recently appealed from deportation proceedings; Heinz Spanknoebel, who returned to Germany rather than register as an agent of a foreign power; and Walter Kappe, now an assistant in Germany to Ernest William Bohle, director of all Nazi organizations in foreign countries. But when Wiedemann was appointed to his present post in 1939, he was careful to deride the German-American Bund as "an American organization over which the Nazis had no control, and one which has done German prestige great harm."

Paradoxes like that are plentiful in the career of (Continued on page 116) this Nazi man of mystery. For a time he even let it be noised around that he had fallen out of favor with the Fuehrer, but that line found few takers.

Born in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1891, son of a country doctor, Wiedemann entered the World War as a lieutenant of infantry, later becoming captain of the 16th Bavarian Infantry, where he met Adolf Hitler.

"He was not a corporal, as most persons believe," the captain says, "but a regimental adjutant and a dispatch bearer. And a good one, too."

Corporal or adjutant, Hitler admired his superior tremendously. After the war, Captain Wiedemann, disgusted with German democracy, retired with his wife to his ancestral farm, where his children were born, a girl and two boys. Documents show that

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almost the first person for whom Hitler sent after seizing power was his old commander.

AFTER his first assignment in America as a Goebbels propagandist, Wiedemann returned to important duties at home. One of these was the opening of the secret negotiations with the Japanese which led to the anti-Comintern pact. After the purge of many old-time Nazis in 1934, the anti-Nazi German-American League for Culture states, he rose to the even more important post of personal adjutant to the Fuehrer.

Hitler even sent him as his personal emissary to England, where, according to Lloyd George and other British statesmen, the affable captain industriously spread stories of how generously the Fuehrer would react to a policy of appeasement.

He returned to the United States in 1937. When arriving on the liner Europa, he proclaimed his love for Shirley Temple and all other things American. Sixty New York policemen were required to hold back the vociferous crowd which shouted its disbelief.

Visiting San Francisco, his attention was drawn to a woman modeling a bust of San Francisco's Mayor Rossi. She was the Countess von Bernstorff, daughter-in-law of Imperial Germany's wartime ambassador to the United States. The captain greeted her cordially, extending his hand. She did not respond. "My hands, they are all covered with clay," she said, and calmly proceeded with her work. Wiedemann appeared oblivious of the rebuff.

About the same time, a Nazi spy, later convicted, bragged that he and Wiedemann were good friends and displayed as proof a photograph of himself, Wiedemann, and the German ambassador, taken together at the embassy in Washington. The captain explained glibly:

"A person at the embassy took photos of some sailors and I was asked to step into the picture. Later, one of these sailors was named in a spy case and the picture was produced, with the charge that I was sent from Germany to confer with him. The charge was ridiculous, as we crossed on the same ship and I could have talked for days with the sailor."

WITH this experience under his belt, Captain Wiedemann was appointed consul general in San Francisco early in March, 1939.

Evidently deciding upon the same social technique he had used in England, he leased a ten-room house in San Francisco's socialite suburb of Burlingame. Recently the house was sold over his head, and the new owner gave him 30 days' notice. He was never admitted to the exclusive Burlingame Country Club, practically next door to the house, but he did manage to get into the social Olympic Club of San Francisco.

While his home has always been that of a family of means, his office reflects the strict economy about which he speaks so often. Seven persons constitute the entire staff, while in other consulates, such as the one in Chicago, the personnel runs up to thirty. The rooms, neither pretentious nor shabby, occupy the ninth floor of an office building at 26 O'Farrell Street.

One member of his staff, Miss Ingeborg Moerschner, formerly a student at the Sorbonne in Paris, acts as a press attaché. When she was attached to the propaganda division in Berlin, she conceived the idea that working hours should be cut down for married women, so they would be less fatigued when they reached home at night and

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so improve domestic felicity and, perhaps, Germany's birth rate. Wiedemann is said to have been so struck with the idea that he presented it personally to the Fuehrer, who ordered it tried out in a large factory. The hitch came when the women discovered that their wages were also to be cut, and they protested that they thought they could stand the fatigue, after all. The captain was coming to America about that time, and he took along the ingenious Miss Moerschner.

Wiedemann's social life is a strange, Alice-in-Wonderland existence that keeps everybody guessing just who is really who. For example, a mysterious German baroness (her name is withheld by the FBI, which investigated her activities) gave a "birthday" party for him on his first anniversary as consul general. The captain sent over a maid from his own household to help out with the serving. She performed her duties admirably until about halfway through the evening, when she suddenly dropped her role as servant and started mingling with the guests, shaking hands right and left and chatting pleasantly. Later, when she went into the kitchen to start washing the dishes, Mrs. Wiedemann hastened to help her. Some of the guests are still wondering whether the "maid" wasn't really a person of more consequence than she appeared to be when she was passing the hors d'oeuvres.

At one party, the baroness put on a mystery act herself. Assuming a dramatic pose, she announced she had been ordered home for saying unkind things about Hitler. Patriotic Germans, she continued, should get together and assassinate the Fuehrer. As she waxed hysterical, Wiedemann smiled and appeared to enjoy the scene hugely.

When she sailed, a few days later, he was on hand to pat her kindly on the shoulder and tell her not to worry too much about the headsman's ax when she reached Berlin. Apparently, his reassurance calmed her considerably, since she wrote to American friends after reaching Japan that she was enjoying her trip no end, thus confirming the belief that her actions had stemmed from an old trick in espionage, designed to evade suspicion by apparently repudiating the persons or nations for whom they work.

Aside from strange acquaintances like the baroness, the spy sailor, and known Nazi agents like Dr. Westrick and Frederich Reid, the captain's intimates include at least one man who has run into serious trouble with the United States authorities.

LAST June 16th, the Japanese liner Asama Maru arrived at San Francisco with a load of *Herr Doktors*, businessmen, and technicians, all eager to pay their "courtesy call" upon the consul general before proceeding with their business. Blond Hubert Hoehne, who could speak no English, was in such a hurry to pay his "courtesy call" that he did not notice the FBI men on his trail. After his conference they followed him to the San Francisco airport, where they observed a miracle: the *Herr Doktor* now spoke excellent English as he presented his ticket to Buenos Aires for validation. The FBI took him in tow at Los Angeles, where he protested—in English—that he could not speak English. Investigation revealed that he was carrying coded messages for consuls and other prominent persons in South American countries. Why had he not registered with the State Department as an agent of a foreign power? The *Doktor* produced a letter signed by Fritz Wiedemann:

"This is to certify that Dr. Hoehne is

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taking along three small packages containing diplomatic mail from Berlin to the German legations in Mexico, Panama, and Guatemala. According to international accepted rules, these packages are exempt from inspection."

The American authorities did not interpret the rules that way, and Dr. Hoehne was indicted. Tried in the Federal Court in Los Angeles in September, he refused to plead guilty. The district attorney then read a telegram from the Department of Justice in Washington, which said that, in order to convict Hoehne, it would be necessary to present evidence concerning "far-reaching activities," thus intimating that if Hoehne were prosecuted, a great part of the FBI's investigation of Nazi espionage would be prematurely exposed. The judge had no alternative but to free Hoehne, who hurriedly continued his voyage to South America, where he insisted he merely wanted to start an aspirin factory.

Meanwhile, papers found on Hoehne started investigators trailing another Nazi agent, Emil Wolf, who had already sailed from San Francisco with a trunkload of dubious papers. Arrested in Balboa, the Canal Zone, he calmly dumped the whole caboodle overboard. In Cristobal he pleaded guilty to a charge of acting as a foreign agent without registering, paid a $2,000 fine, received a three months' suspended sentence, and hurried away to his South American tasks.

However, the real significance of such men as Hoehne and Wolf lies not in themselves, but in Fritz Wiedemann, who operates within the protection of diplomatic immunity. His papers cannot be examined.

Although the consul general at first insisted that he had no interest at all in the two men, he posted a $15,000 bond for Hoehne, explaining it was merely a favor to Hoehne's employers, the I. G. Farbenindustrie, for whom the *Herr Doktor* apparently goes around building aspirin factories.

A WIDELY known aviator recently received vivid proof of the wide connections of the mysterious Captain Wiedemann. A waiter recognized the aviator as he was sitting in a San Francisco restaurant.

"Haven't I seen you here with Captain Wiedemann?" the waiter asked.

The flier nodded absently.

Back at the hotel, the flier's telephone rang.

"This is Captain Wiedemann," the caller announced. "I heard from a member of my staff that you were in town—"

The flier would like to know just how far Captain Wiedemann's "staff" reaches. That is a question which should also be of the deepest interest to everybody concerned in the protection and safety of our America.

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