

HESS AND THE MIG STING

John Harris, author of an important book on Rudolf Hess and his flight to Scotland, has secured new evidence that suggests this part of WWII history might have to be re-written...



John Harris's book - *Rudolf Hess: The British Illusion of Peace*, explores the change of strategy employed by the German High Command when it became obvious that an invasion was not going to be militarily possible.

It was apparent to the Nazi leaders that the military option of invasion of Britain was no longer viable, therefore a tactical change was implemented. Firstly, the 'Blitz' commenced in an attempt to bomb Britain to the negotiating table and secondly, Rudolf Hess decided to implement his own diplomatic peace mission. This was to directly lead to his bizarre flight to Scotland on the night of 10 May 1941 (which was also to coincide with the last major raid of the Blitz).



If Britain could not be defeated militarily it was vital to Germany that Britain was at least neutralised prior to the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, which originally was planned for 15 May 1941. The 'two front war' had long been cited as a principal reason for the 1918 German defeat and yet whilst Britain remained unbowed and a Russian invasion was planned the repetition of a disastrous two front war began to look all the more likely.

The stakes were to about to get even higher. In December 1940, Hitler approved the military plans for the Russian invasion. The invasion was on and still Britain had to be subdued...

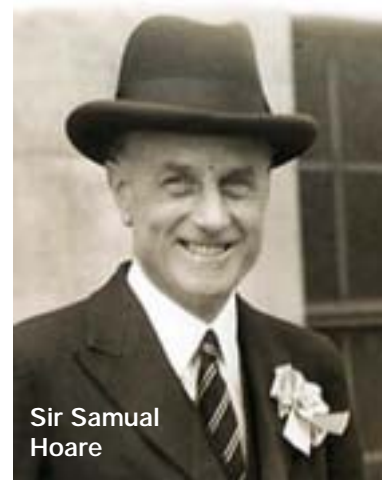
On 31 August 1940 Rudolf Hess, one of Hitler's oldest confidants (the two men had been imprisoned in Landsberg prison together in 1923 following their attempted coup) met with his former university tutor and long time friend, Karl Haushofer. The meeting was recorded as taking place from 5.00pm to 2.00am the following morning and included a three hour walk in the Grunwalder Forest, south of Munich. Haushofer was a former Army General and is credited with the Nazi policy of Lebensraum, or 'living space'. It was this meeting that was to instigate the chain of events that was to lead to the flight.

Hess wished to discover if the possibility of a negotiated settlement was still possible and so Haushofer, in turn, asked his son Albrecht to write to the Duke of Hamilton, who was then an RAF station commander, based at RAF Turnhouse, Scotland. Albrecht and Douglas-Douglas Hamilton were close pre-war friends and the Duke had invited Haushofer to his 1938 wedding.

Clearly, Albrecht Haushofer could not directly correspond to the Duke and so chose to write to a 3rd party, Mary Violet Roberts (1864-1958), who lived in Cambridge, England. Mary was a 76-year-old widow, whose late husband Ainslie had founded the Cambridge University Appointments Board. Haushofer chose to use the Thomas Cook postal service which allowed regulated correspondence between inhabitants of belligerent nations and on 23 September 1940, the letter was duly posted. The Roberts family had been friends with the Haushofers since before the 1914-1918 war.



Carl Burckhardt



Sir Samuel Hoare

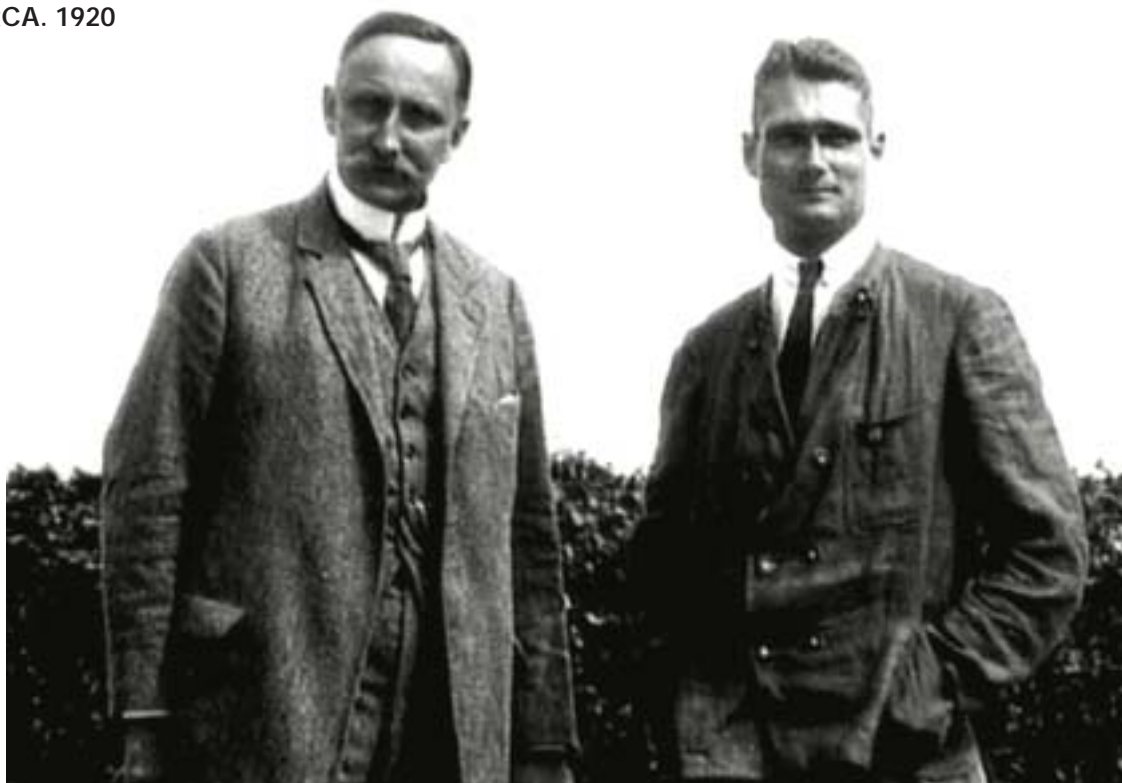


Rudolf Hess



Spandau Prison, Berlin. Rudolf Hess was incarcerated here for the rest of his life

Karl Haushofer and
Rudolf Hess.
CIRCA. 1920



Unfortunately for Haushofer (and Hess) the letter was efficiently intercepted by the British censor prior to reaching Cambridge and copies sent to MI5 and MI6. The letter still remains on file at the National Archives in Kew.

The problem that confronted Hess, was that the British Government would not negotiate. Churchill had demonstrated his resolve to fight on by destroying the French Navy at Oran. That is why Hess had to approach persons other than those in a governmental position; he knew that the sitting British government favoured American support to a negotiated Anglo-German settlement.

However, he also knew that there were important persons within the British Establishment who favoured a negotiated settlement with Germany. It was these persons whom he must try to reach - hence the initial approach.

Unfortunately for him, MI6 had become aware of the approach via the intercepted letter. John Harris, the author of *Rudolf Hess: The British Illusion of Peace*, then makes the convincing case that Hess was effectively lured, or tempted to fly by an MI6 'sting'. This theory first surfaced in the *'American Mercury'* in 1943, and Josef Stalin also certainly believed it to be the case.



Claude Dansey

Harris made a major breakthrough by discovering that it was MI6 who sent Tancred Borenius to Geneva in early 1941 to talk peace to the Hess faction. Tancred Borenius was an Anglo-Finnish art historian who had become politically active following the Russian invasion of his former homeland. He served on various relief committees pertaining to Poland and Finland. Prior to making the trip he was given a cyanide capsule by Claude Dansey, then deputy head of MI6. Quite why it would be necessary for an art historian to carry a poison pill remains unclear.



Duke of Hamilton

MI6 sent Tancred Borenus to Geneva in early 1941 to talk peace with the Hess faction



His trip to Geneva was first documented in the diaries of Ulrich von Hassell (published 1948) which describe how Borenus met with Carl Burckhardt, the acting Head of the International Red Cross. Burckhardt was well known and trusted by both the British and German leaders and as soon as Borenus had left, Haushofer travelled to Geneva, also to meet with Burckhardt. Burckhardt was clearly acting as a mediator/facilitator. He was also playing with fire; the Red Cross is a strictly non-political organisation.

What is more controversial perhaps, is to ask who Burckhardt was acting as mediator for? Certainly not the British Government - they would not employ a part-time Finn. Harris makes the convincing case that Burckhardt was providing a mediation service between Nazi Germany and the MI6 'illusion' of a British Peace Party. Borenus was telling Hess (via Burckhardt and Haushofer) exactly what he wanted to hear - a negotiated settlement was very much still an option, albeit not with a government led by Churchill. Hence the title of the book; the *Illusion of Peace*. Sam Hoare, the British Ambassador to Spain and former rival to Churchill, was also in close contact with the Hess mission, again via Haushofer and his assistant Stahmer in

Madrid. Hoare, with long term intelligence links was well placed to play the role of a potential British Quisling or Petain – once Churchill had been deposed.

Besides the Borenus mission Hess was also listening to similar overtures from other parts of the continent and eventually he was convinced enough to fly. What is for sure is that Hess was not mad, (the subsequent Nazi explanation) if so, he would not have been able to fly what was then one of the world's fastest aircraft across Europe. Hess thought he knew exactly what he was doing.

Harris goes on to pose one final conundrum. The unwritten British Constitution only allows the Monarch to prorogue or dissolve Parliament. Therefore, the only way that Churchill could have been unseated during a sitting parliament was for the King to dissolve it. Is this what Hess was being told? Was his flight to act as a catalyst? Tancred Borenus was of course a close friend of the Duke of Kent, the King's brother...

Harris firmly believes that the continental machinations in Geneva and Madrid were designed to give Hess the impression that



Nuremberg Trials. Hess is pictured front row, second from left next to Hermann Goring

the King was indeed prepared to dissolve Parliament and replace Churchill with Hoare who would then make a negotiated settlement with Nazi Germany. Some 70-years on, with the benefit of hindsight, this may appear preposterous, but at the time there were many in Britain who would have supported just such an action. Poland would also have been present at such negotiations; Wladyslaw Sikorski, the Polish leader, flew into Prestwick airfield on the morning of 11 May 1941. Poland was of course the 'official reason' for going to war in 1939. Furthermore in May 1941, Britain had yet to win a battle and Churchill had just survived a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons. He was far from secure.



Wladyslaw Sikorski pictured with Winston Churchill

Given the massive stakes that Hess was potentially playing for, effectively the survival or annihilation of Germany, taking such a gamble could well be seen as being justifiable from Hess's standpoint. That certainly does not make him a 'peace martyr'. He was just a Nazi desperately trying to secure Germany's western frontiers. However, as his 1987 gravestone accurately declared, 'he dared'.

So, Hess flew, crashed and was eventually imprisoned in Spandau Prison, Berlin, for the rest of his life. Britain just survived the Blitz, long enough to witness Germany and Russia start fighting each other to the death. Far better for Germany to fight Russia than to fight Britain? If nothing else to buy precious time. That is precisely what the MI6 illusion achieved.

Wladyslaw
Sikorski



At a recent seminar at Bletchley Park, in the company of Sir John Scarlet (former MI6 Chief), Professor Keith Jeffrey (author of the authorised history of MI6) dismissed the Hess affair as an "irrelevance," though did admit there "was some stuff in the archives."

This is somewhat surprising. True, 70-years on and with the benefit of hindsight, Hess failed to obtain an Anglo-German peace. However, the MI6 inspired ruse could be argued to have deterred Hitler from launching a Western invasion prior to Barbarossa. That is truly controversial given the 20 million that died as a result of that strategic decision.

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