1 SPY FEVER-ISH

The couple who entered Portgordon railway station with a suitcase on the morning of 30 September 1940 did not seem immediately suspicious to the stationmaster. That was until the woman approached him to ask: 'What station is this?' Who would find themselves in the small fishing village of Buckie in north-eastern Scotland at half past seven in the morning and not know where they were? Even in peacetime this would have been a strange encounter. Now highly suspicious of the pair, the stationmaster also noticed that their shoes were soaking wet and they had frost on their coats, even though it had not rained that morning. He excused himself, rushed to send a message to the police then calmly returned to sell two southbound tickets to the woman and the man accompanying her. The police arrived before their train did. A quick body search justified the suspicion that the pair had arrived clandestinely by sea. In the man's overcoat pockets was a large amount of cash, bullets, a torch marked 'made in Bohemia' and a piece of German sausage. The woman insisted that they were on a visit from London and that they were simply trying to return home, but went quiet when their suitcase was opened. The wireless transmitter inside it, together with a morse tapping key, headphones and German Mauser pistol, left no room for arguing that they were anything but spies.[1]

Vera Schalburg and Karl Theo Drueke – Russian and German respectively – were bound to attract attention at some point considering

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

that upon landing their best instinct was to ask the stationmaster the name of his station. Not only that, Drueke spoke no word of English and this too caught everyone's attention when in these interactions he sat completely silent, letting Schalburg – who was fluent in English, French, Russian, German and Danish – deal with the police. And while the two had National Registration cards with them, a document which everyone in wartime Britain had to carry, it did not take more than a couple of glances for a policeman to spot that theirs were forged.[2]

With Schalburg and Drueke was also a third spy, Werner Waelti. The three were flown by seaplane from Norway and then rowed a dinghy to the Scottish coast. Once ashore, Waelti went in the opposite direction to the other two, but he also did not get far. On his way to Edinburgh, he tried to pay for a bus ticket using ten times the amount needed because he did not understand local currency. While waiting for the train from Edinburgh to London, he had a haircut and went to the cinema, giving enough time for the police to plan his arrest once he returned to the station.[3] He too had a transmitter in his suitcase, maps of England and Scotland, and German sausages.[4]

Far from being an outlier, the eventful arrival of this trio reflects the inadequacies of espionage missions to Britain.[5] Of the small number of 'invasion spies' who arrived in the autumn of 1940, all except one were arrested within hours of setting foot in the country. Earlier in September, when four men reached Kent on a dinghy at the crack of dawn, two of them were arrested within an hour by patrolling soldiers who spotted them making a vain effort to hide in the grass. The third man went from the shore straight to a pub for a drink, unaware that buying alcohol was prohibited so early in the day; a customer walked him to the police station. The fourth man may have stayed at large for longer, had the others not told the police about him. A short search found him hiding near where they had landed.[6]

In between the failed Buckie and Kent missions was a Swede, Gösta Caroli, whom the National Guard found asleep in a ditch shortly after being parachuted into Northampton. The next parachutist was Wulf Schmidt, expected because he was friends with Caroli and the latter had told MI5 about him. Then Schmidt, in turn, informed about fellow German Kurt Goose's impending landing and gave some information about Vera Schalburg. In her turn, Schalburg informed about Gunnar Edvardsen, a Norwegian who was meant to land with her in September but whose mission was delayed. Not much effort

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

was required to find Edvardsen when he did arrive in October. He and two others were arrested outside Nairn Police Station, on their way to report their arrival under the pretence that they were refugees, having just reached Scotland on a dinghy.[7] The only one not arrested – Engelbertus Fukken, alias Jan Willem Ter Braak – died by suicide in an air raid shelter in 1941 after he ran out of money.

In hindsight, one could almost feel sorry for these 'invasion spies' who proved unable to take a step without being noticed. But only in hindsight. In the thick of the war, nobody knew who was arriving and what they were capable of; nor would it take a genius to cause harm if they were not caught quickly – after all, some of these people were armed and a few had wireless transmitters, allowing them to report back on defences and on other topics of military interest. The spy threat was therefore a serious matter that demanded a serious response. Still, there was no experience within MI5 on how to deal with German spies, nor were there trained MI5 interrogators in service. The little interrogation experience that was starting to develop at that point concerned prisoners of war, but MI5 had nothing to do with them. Those interrogations were making extensive use of covert methods, including concealed microphones and stool pigeons, gleaning information in this way that prisoners never realised they were revealing. But MI5 could not apply these methods wholesale to spies. To start with, spies were facing the death penalty and so were unlikely to open up to stool pigeons just because they were lonely or bored, unlike prisoners of war. Nor could microphones be used too extensively in this case, because the aim was not simply to draw information but to bring these people to trial: ideally, any evidence obtained had to be admissible in court. In short, at around the time the Schalburg trio arrived in 1940, MI5 had to come up with its own way of interrogating them.

The resulting process worked, not only because all Axis spies sent to Britain were eventually caught (as far as we know), but because almost all of them confessed their motives and missions; only around five cases of 'undoubted enemy agents' offered not the 'slightest confession' in interrogation, one of whom was Waelti.[8] This success was in part down to the poor tactics used by the Abwehr, the German military intelligence. Some of the spies they chose proved to be no match not only for MI5 but also for locals, who were fully aware of who was among them. There was, after all, an intense propaganda campaign alerting people to the spy threat. In the early months of the war,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

'Careless talk costs lives' posters were being circulated in their tens of thousands across the country, many featuring the now-iconic cartoons by Cyril Kenneth Bird, known as Fougasse.[9] Commissioned (for free) by the Ministry of Information, Fougasse drew cartoonish scenes of everyday chatter between Britons, all shadowed by caricatures of Hitler eavesdropping on them. Prominently on each poster was the phrase 'Careless talk costs lives'. Humorous and simple, their message was clear: there could be a German spy in every bus, in every pub, in every bush.

But much of this success was also down to the immense intelligence effort to apprehend and interrogate anyone suspected of espionage. At the centre of that effort was an interrogation centre known as Camp 020, which interrogated some 480 people between the autumn of 1940 and the autumn of 1945.[10] Those interrogated came from all over the world: the total number of nationalities interrogated was thought to be thirty-four, including Germans, Britons, Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese, and more exceptional cases from Romania, Lithuania, Egypt and Japan. The vast majority were, however, from Nazi-occupied Western Europe – most prominently from Belgium, France, Norway and the Netherlands.

1.1 SETTING UP

Very few of these spies arrived covertly by parachute or boat, which is perhaps the way we imagine the spies of this war making their entrance. Most instead arrived openly, pretending to be refugees from the Continent. Yet for all the anxieties around spies in 1939 and 1940, the actual measures put in place for identifying them were superficial. Upon arriving as refugees, individuals would be questioned by MI5 officers at the port of arrival. Those officers would then decide who seemed like a spy based on little more than gut instinct – 'a farcical thing in the light of later experience', is how MI5 later described it.[11] At the same time, using their instincts was the best these officers could do, for the simple reason that MI5 – and the MI5 Central Registry more specifically – held information on individuals in Britain, not France, Belgium, Norway, the Netherlands and so on.

Others within British intelligence were shocked at this initial process. An Air Ministry intelligence officer, William Emanuel, who had nothing to do with MI5 and was unaware of how lax its vetting

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

was, was stunned when his Dutch cousin appeared at his doorstep in North London as he was having dinner one evening in May 1940. The German Army had invaded days prior, causing thousands of Dutch civilians like her to seek refuge in Britain by undertaking haphazard boat journeys. Yet the most horrifying part of the woman's escape as she recounted it seemed to be the security measures at Harwich, where she arrived. There she was only asked Emanuel's name before being allowed to make her way to London to find him. She was not even asked for his address. That there was no attempt to establish her identity alarmed Emanuel. If she could enter the country merely upon giving a name – any name – spies also could. The next day he reported his cousin's experience to his superiors, adding to the multiple accounts reaching government at that point about the inadequate vetting arrangements at Britain's ports.[12] A Dutch diplomat even drove to the Home Office to express his dismay at the fact that Dutch Nazi Party members had been let in as refugees.[13]

In contrast to the cursory measures for Allied nationals fleeing the Continent was the draconian decision to preventively intern 'enemy aliens' – nationals of countries with which Britain was at war, most of whom had been living in Britain for years. The resulting tens of thousands of German, Austrian and Italian internees posed a further challenge for MI5, which similarly had to determine whether any of them were a threat. The MI5 Central Registry proved a problem here too. Despite technological advances, MI5 was storing information in 1940 in the same way as in 1910. Information cards existed only in physical form and were too often lost or out of date.[14] There was also the logistical problem of where to interrogate all these people since they were already in the country rather than arriving in a more staggered way. The camp initially used for questioning them was the Oratory School in Chelsea, south-west London, even though it had no rooms that were actually suitable for interrogation.[15] There were instances where a classroom was at once being used 'by an officer who was changing for tennis, by an infatuated German couple who were disposed on his bed, and for the interrogation of [a man], whose attention would stray to lascivious pictures on the walls'. On another occasion, interrogation had to be delayed because the interrogation room, which doubled as a bedroom for staff, was occupied by an officer trying to get the zip of his trousers unstuck.[16] All of this meant that 'enemy aliens', many of whom had lived in Britain for

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

decades, were being vetted only to confirm that they posed no threat, while most Allied nationals fleeing Nazi Europe entered Britain without anyone knowing much about them. It really seemed like much more thought was being put into Fougasse's cartoons than to actual security measures.

Matters began to change in the second half of 1940, influenced by the realisation that makeshift arrangements had to be made suitable for long-term use. A two-step interrogation process would achieve this. Instead of MI5 officers at ports 'sensing' who could be a spy and who could enter the country immediately, anyone arriving after December 1940 would be detained so that they could be interrogated properly and have their stories checked.[17] This was a rule that affected everyone who arrived after that point, with very few exceptions; exempt groups included Americans, Russians and anyone on a diplomatic passport. Even if at the port there was certainty that a man or woman was *not* an enemy agent, they still had to be detained for in-depth interrogation (along with any children they had with them). This 'sieving' would take place not in places such as Harwich but in London, and specifically at the Royal (Victoria) Patriotic School in Wandsworth. Some 35,000 people – all of them nationals of allied and neutral countries – passed through its premises between 1941 and 1945, the overwhelming majority of whom were refugees who wanted to make themselves useful to the war effort. Only fifty proved to be enemy agents.

It was the second step of the process that was reserved for those highly suspected or already proved to be spies. The place requisitioned for them was Latchmere House, a stately home in Richmond, south-west London. Until recently a hospital for 'shell-shocked' officers of the Great War, it was now given the inconspicuous name Camp 020, although it was often referred to as Latchmere House, or simply as Ham, the Richmond district in which it was based. In charge of it was forty-year-old Robin Stephens, a captain who had spent some fifteen years in the Indian Army. At the start of the war, Stephens was recommended to MI5 by his former Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Birdwood. He had no interrogation experience, but he was a fluent speaker of French, German and Italian with some knowledge of Somali, Amharic, Urdu and Arabic, which made him an obvious choice for the makeshift interrogation camp in the Oratory School. Once Camp 020 was established – something Stephens himself pushed for – he took command of it.[18]

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

His French, German and Italian were not needed with his first prisoners, however, as they were members of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). They included Brian Donovan, Assistant Director-General of the BUF; composer and Hitler devotee Leigh Vaughan-Henry; Raven Thompson, another leading member; and James Battersby, who killed himself in 1955 'to follow the Fuehrer to glory and eternity'.[19] These people had nothing to do with espionage and had been rounded up before Camp 020 even opened. But now, with MI5 having its own camp, it was considered desirable to move some of them to there, if only because there was no one else to keep in Camp 020 in the summer of 1940. No spies had been captured yet; civilians who had arrived amid the collapse of Western Europe that spring, such as Emanuel's cousin, had been 'vetted' and so had most enemy aliens. A call was put out across MI5 asking various sections to 'please consider recommending further cases for Ham … even when internees have already been interrogated … the better conditions prevailing [at Camp 020] for the work of interrogation may lead to further results'.[20] The few who could read between the lines knew that 'better conditions' referred to the microphones that were concealed in the camp's interrogation rooms and some of its cells. The idea was that useful information could be collected by listening in to conversations between detainees, while the ability to record interrogations would free the interrogator from having to take notes and allow him to focus on what was being said rather than on writing it down.

Moving BUF members to Camp 020 was a decision MI5 nevertheless came to regret, and leaving the camp empty would have been much better. The Home Office – under whose remit Camp 020 ultimately fell, like all civilian camps and prisons – was anxious to ensure that it looked just like the internment places these detainees already knew. This included allowing them to write and receive letters, receive visitors and have relative freedom to socialise. After all, they had not committed a crime but were interned preventively, in case they proved to be a threat in the future. Such an environment was incompatible with the methods MI5 had in mind for Camp 020. They instead wanted prisoners to have little contact with the outside world and only staged interactions between them, in order to facilitate the use of microphones. If they were to socialise freely, 'they would get off their chests all that they had to say during the recreation hours and we should pick up very little by special treatment', warned Dick White,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

Deputy Director of MI5's B Branch for counter-espionage.[21] What was particularly limiting was that the microphones available allowed only for two people being recorded at once; more than two speakers were difficult to distinguish and the slightest background noise would distort the sound. So, while MI5 gave way on the issue of detainees writing and receiving letters, they remained adamant that detainees should not socialise.

Soon enough, questions started being asked publicly about this camp which still looked different from other internment places. In Parliament that September, the Labour MP Richard Stokes – an opponent of the government's pursuit of the war, as well as a member of an antisemitic and fascist group – seized this fresh opportunity to question why these internees had suddenly been moved there and why they were kept in solitary conditions.[22] He continued with behind-the-scenes pressure on the government, joined by his colleague and Stalin supporter Denis Pritt, as well as Osbert Peake, Conservative MP and Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office. Soon enough, there were also claims that interrogations were violent. One such allegation was made by Archibald Ramsay, the antisemitic MP and founder of the Right Club, who was now detained. While Ramsay never set foot in Camp 020, he wrote to the Attorney General to protest about 'the methods of the Gestapo' being used to force information out of 'the wretched [BUF] people' about each other.[23] He referred specifically to the interrogation of Brian Donovan, during which he claimed MI5 tried to 'wring out' evidence against Ramsay using techniques that were 'not only abominable but illegal'. Yet the allegation could not have been true. Unbeknown to Donovan and Ramsay, that interrogation was bugged, with a verbatim transcript having already been made available. Far from any signs of coercion, it shows Donovan speaking freely about Ramsay and others, and concludes in a cordial tone:

> MAXWELL KNIGHT (MI5): If by any chance you do hear anything I should be grateful if you would let me know.
> DONOVAN: I should consider it my duty to let you know.
> KNIGHT: You can see the Commandant here, or give him a letter. It would get to me very quickly. I can always come down and have a chat with you if you did happen to hear anything. I'll be frank. Even among the small number of internees here I think it's quite possible there are some who know something.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

> DONOVAN: Of course, you realise that we are not allowed to talk to each other, and the chances of finding out anything are pretty limited. The only chance of conversation is roughly an hour every other day, when somebody is pitchforked into one's room. One never knows who is coming in, so that there's very little chance …[24]

It was no doubt easier and preferable for BUF members to claim coercion rather than voluntary cooperation with MI5, but the commotion caused within weeks of the camp opening could not go on. The solution arrived at was to return the BUF prisoners from whence they came and avoid taking British citizens to Camp 020 altogether, unless there was evidence of espionage against them that was especially strong; the person to determine how strong was the MI5 Director-General himself.[25] Ten or so Britons were held there after October 1940 as a result, all of whom had offered their services to the Germans. This removed a major headache from MI5, the logic being that no one else would look for all the others, given that only their German spymasters knew they were in Britain. Not even the Aliens Branch of the Home Office was being informed about who exactly was held there. It was agreed that a list of names had to be sent to the Home Secretary's office once a month, but it was to be kept under lock and key, and made available only to the Home Secretary and Sir Alexander Maxwell, his Permanent Under-Secretary.

This level of secrecy was needed in order to keep the Germans in the dark about the fate of their agents.[26] Agents often had information about future missions – like Caroli, who informed on Schmidt, who informed on Goose, who knew of Schalburg, who informed on Edvardsen. If there was a way for the Germans to know who was being captured – for example if agents' names had to be reported to the International Committee of the Red Cross, as was the case with prisoners of war – they would be able to act to invalidate whatever that agent knew. Even mentioning the names of Camp 020 detainees in internal government documents was prohibited for this reason. In one case, where a spy was captured in Gambia and sent to Camp 020, his name was accidentally included in a War Office circular about people arrested in the colonies. While its circulation was internal, it still caused enough commotion to ensure that such an incident was not repeated.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

But secrecy was also needed because Camp 020 was closely linked with other operations that had to remain completely clandestine. The first were the activities of the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) at Bletchley Park, which proved essential to successful interrogation. GC&CS provided vital signals intelligence to Camp 020 in the form of decrypts of the Abwehr's hand cyphers, known as ISOS (Intelligence Service Oliver Strachey, with Strachey being a senior cryptanalyst at Bletchley Park). Many of Camp 020's detainees had been apprehended after being mentioned in such messages. But if the Germans knew which agents were being captured and when, that could lead them to detect a pattern and realise that it was their own communications that were giving them away, with catastrophic implications for ISOS and much more, considering the wider cryptographic activities of Bletchley Park. And then there was MI5's Double-Cross System, turning enemy agents into British agents and using them to deceive the Germans, who still thought they were working for them. Camp 020 was an obvious recruitment pool for Double-Cross and so its detainees' names had to be treated with outmost secrecy in case they were later 'turned'. The man who was arrested in Gambia was not even considered for Double-Cross after his name appeared in that War Office circular.

These same concerns also meant that an individual could not simply be released or moved to a regular internment camp after Camp 020 finished their interrogation. What would be the point of all the secrecy around the camp, if once released detainees themselves would be free to spread the news – about what they were asked, what information was known about them and who else they saw detained there? The solution was the creation of a network of camps for the long-term detention of those who at one point passed through Camp 020. Initially these were segregated sections in places such as Stafford and Dartmoor prisons. After Camp 020 was hit by a bomb in late 1940, building work started for a spare camp near Nuffield in Oxfordshire in case Latchmere House was more badly hit and operations had to be moved elsewhere. When the spare camp was ready – called Camp 020R, with R standing for Reserve – it conveniently became an internment camp for those whose interrogation had been completed. These developments also meant that the number of people working in Camp 020-related activities multiplied over the war years. For Camp 020, the increase was more than fourfold – it went from an initial 53 staff to 245. For Camp 020R, it almost doubled, from 170 to 330.[27]

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

1.2 INDEFINITE DETENTION

None of this was foreseen when Camp 020 opened in the summer of 1940. At that point, the idea was for it to be the place where suspects would be taken briefly for interrogation and to have their conversations monitored. Then, depending on the resulting evidence, they would either be prosecuted, moved to a regular camp or released. These three options remained open throughout the war, but release was seldom used, and surprisingly prosecution was also largely avoided. At first it seemed obvious that anyone who had come to Britain to spy would be prosecuted. Other than punishing them, there was a desire to make an example of them and deter others from doing the same. This was the assumption with the first four spies arrested in September 1940 in Kent – in the grass, in the pub, by the shore – when there was little question that they would end up in front of a judge. In Camp 020 they initially refused to talk, convinced that the Germans would invade by the middle of September and free them. Their conviction disappeared as the middle of September came and went. In secretly recorded conversations between themselves, they expressed resentment towards their handlers for sending them wholly unprepared for any mission that would last more than two weeks. Even the instructions they were given for how to surrender to the invading army now seemed ridiculous – to wave a handkerchief to any German officer. They confessed and gave other information that was considered valuable.[28]

Things moved quickly from there, and in November they were charged under the 1940 Treachery Act for offences that carried the death penalty. The trials moved quickly as well, yet the verdict was not a foregone conclusion. With cases being heard not only by a judge but also a jury, the latter threw a massive spanner in MI5's works by finding one of them not guilty. His name was Sjoerd Pons, a member of the Dutch Nazi Party who claimed that he was coerced into becoming an agent by the Gestapo, after they had discovered that he had smuggled money out of the Netherlands.[29] His three companions were found guilty, and were executed in December. What to do with Pons proved a difficult matter. He could not be released because he was an enemy agent, and whether coercion influenced his decision mattered much less to MI5 than to the jury. As soon as the not-guilty verdict was announced, he was rearrested on the spot and detained preventively under Defence Regulation 18B. The question then became where

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

to keep him. He was first taken to Pentonville but, although he was prohibited from writing or receiving letters, it was suspected that some of the prisoners there had links to Germany and would help him re-establish contact.[30] He was therefore moved to a different camp, but it was from there that he actually managed to write to his family. While Pons's letter did not discuss his court case, the very fact that his family now knew he was detained was seen as a serious leak. Up to that point, nothing had been shared about his fate; the fact that he was arrested was not known and his trial (heard in camera) was not reported in the press. This is why it was seen as vital to prevent Pons from contacting anyone.[31] When it emerged that he was being detained, this also brought the International Committee of the Red Cross into the picture. It too had questions about his whereabouts. And it also brought more letters from Pons's wife wanting to hear more from her 'fat scallywag' and 'little ragamuffin'.[32]

The Pons acquittal left a bad taste around prosecutions, not just for the trouble his subsequent handling created but because his acquittal was a humiliating outcome, even if few knew about it. Yet had MI5 charged him with a lesser crime rather than one carrying capital punishment, the jury may well have found him guilty: it was believed that the jury acquitted him not because they thought he was innocent but because they thought he did not deserve the death penalty, which would have been automatically applied if their verdict was 'guilty'. But what would be the point of going through the courts to secure a spy's imprisonment, when spies could already be imprisoned through wartime powers and without the need for trial – like Pons himself now was? The effort of building a court case was not regarded as worthwhile, and legal proceedings also carried the risk that information about intelligence activities could find its way outside the courtroom. For this reason, the initial desire to prosecute enemy agents gave way to a preference to prosecute cases only where both the death penalty had a high chance of success and for which the risk of leaks was minimal. This translated to fifteen prosecutions of Camp 020 detainees during the war, with Pons being the only one to have escaped death.[33]

For a capital offence to have a chance of success, MI5 had to prove that an agent had committed an act of espionage in or against Britain, or was about to just before they were captured. Yet most people were captured without, or at least before, having done anything subversive. One of those was Florent Sylvestre Steiner, a Belgian who

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

was sent to Britain in 1941 with secret ink which he was to use to report on military matters, bomb damage and morale.[34] Once Steiner arrived, he settled in Liverpool and decided not to carry out his mission. He had been living there for some seven months when his name was given to Camp 020 by another detainee. Without evidence that he had communicated anything to anyone, the capital punishment was a disproportionately harsh sentence and thus an unlikely outcome if Steiner was taken to court; he was therefore not tried. A few other suspects were in the same position as Steiner. Some claimed that they had agreed to spy only as a way of escaping occupied territory, and some had even destroyed their espionage equipment before being arrested (Steiner was still holding on to his secret ink). As with Steiner, such people were simply detained without trial until 1945.

Even when the death penalty was likely, the risk of Camp 020 being brought up during proceedings had to be factored in. Several agents may have been executed had it not been for the need to preserve Camp 020's secrecy. When Nikolai Hansen parachuted into Scotland in 1943, he gave himself up with two wireless transmitters. He said that the Germans had asked him to bury one of the transmitters, surrender to the British with the spare one, gain their trust and be recruited as a double agent. Once he was recruited, he would dig out the other transmitter and use it to contact the Germans. But he wanted to come clean, he claimed, so he told the whole story and offered his services to the Allies. It was quickly decided by MI5 – before Hansen was even taken to Camp 020 – that he would not be prosecuted, likely due to his potential use as a double agent. He was then sent to Camp 020 to ascertain his suitability.[35] There it emerged that he had not told the truth. He was found to be in possession of secret ink and cover addresses to which he would be sending his reports. It seemed, therefore, that his plan was still to fool MI5 into recruiting him. With this revelation, there was new discussion about whether Hansen should, in fact, be prosecuted. 'Hitherto no prosecution has ever been launched where its success has been dependent upon the evidence of a witness from Camp 020', Stephens wrote, continuing that 'on the contrary matters have always been so arranged that such evidence was unnecessary and irrelevant'.[36] He was referring here to the fact that the evidence that would secure Hansen's conviction was the discovery of the secret ink in Camp 020. In the few cases that were prosecuted, tangible evidence had already been found by the police – transmitters, parachutes and

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

guns. But in Hansen's case, how would a jury find him guilty if they were only told the part of the story where he voluntarily surrendered his transmitters? No risk was taken, and Hansen was detained with everyone else until 1945.

Releasing detainees was also an infrequent outcome. Only fifty men were released from Camp 020 during the war. There were first those who proved after investigation to have no connection to enemy intelligence. One such individual was Eugene van Ackere from France, who crossed the Channel on a small boat with his fiancé and two others in February 1942. All four were interrogated at the Royal Patriotic School, where they satisfied the authorities that they were genuine refugees, so much so that van Ackere's fiancé was given work with the Auxiliary Territorial Service almost instantly. Yet on his way out of that camp, van Ackere asked for a 'Colonel Barry' for whom he had a message. Whatever that message was, it was 'of such a highly suspicious character' that he was taken straight to Camp 020. What happened was that van Ackere did indeed have a message, potentially for SIS. It had been trusted to him by members of a French resistance group whose leader had disappeared, and who were now cut off from Allied intelligence. They therefore wanted to send a coded message to the man they thought was their leader's contact in Britain and chose van Ackere as the messenger. But van Ackere kept changing the story, something that proved to be the case for how he generally told stories – never the same twice.[37] He was released after being in Camp 020 for some five months.

Another case concerned two agents from Iceland who hid their wireless transmitters and code with two friends, apparently without telling them what they were asking them to hide. The friends – a university student and a lorry driver – were arrested in Iceland and delivered to Camp 020, where Stephens was certain they too were spies. 'It is almost unbelievable that two creatures should have acted so stupidly' in safekeeping something without checking what it was in time of war, was his reasoning. But after interrogating them for a month, he revisited his conviction: 'I feel I am justified in writing them off as guileless buffoons.'[38] Elsewhere in MI5, there was almost a feeling of remorse towards the university student in particular, because his wrongful imprisonment for three or so months delayed his ability to graduate and find a job. For this reason, the exceptional decision was taken to give him £100 and call it an 'advance payment' for any

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

intelligence he might provide once back in Iceland. In reality, it was an apology. His name returned on MI5 desks in 1945, when he was applying for a British Council scholarship to study history at Oxford or Cambridge. 'He thoroughly deserves' a scholarship, thought Helenus 'Buster' Milmo, at the time a lawyer and later a judge, but who for much of the war was serving as a kind of link between Camp 020 and the outside world. 'It would be fitting compensation for the interruption in his studies … if this young man were now to benefit by the generosity of the British Council.'[39]

Another of the few released was Robert Wassilieff, a Belgian (with a Russian father) who arrived from Algiers in January 1943. Prior to that he had been in Belgium, France and Spain, and then allegedly walked from France to Italy, movements that made him look suspicious. Camp 020 concluded that he had nothing to do with enemy espionage and should be released into the Allied forces. Stephens suggested to him the Belgian Army, but Wassilieff wanted to fight for the Soviet Union, forcing Stephens to write, 'This prisoner has been struck by the bright idea of enlisting in the forces of the U.S.S.R. His application is attached hereto'.[40] There were delays on the part of the Home Office in approving his release however, and Wassilieff started to threaten that he would kill himself. The threat was relayed to the Home Office and he was released the next day, in January 1944.[41]

The tendency was nevertheless to err on the side of caution and simply detain people, Stephens's mantra being that 'in war doubt should be resolved in favour of the State'. This logic was applied even to cases that were highly likely not to be connected to espionage. A key example was Theodor Skorzisko, a Communist German politician who escaped Nazi Germany in the mid 1930s. He arrived on a dinghy from France on his own during the war, and although his escape story sounded 'probable' to the Admiralty, it was still thought unlikely. He was moved to Stafford Prison.[42] A similar logic was applied to Alfred Charles Lagall, who reached Plymouth from France in 1942. At the outbreak of war, Lagall, who had previously been convicted of some kind of crime, fought with an infantry battalion in Tunisia for those with criminal records. After he was demobilised, he returned to France and tried to make himself useful to resistance groups but eventually decided to escape. In Camp 020, he was found to be 'exceedingly frank and helpful and … a patriotic, loyal Frenchman'.[43] Suspicions were raised about the time Lagall was briefly imprisoned by the Germans in

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

France: he had shared a cell with a man called Pelletier who asked him to pass a message to someone else. A man with that surname was a Free French agent known to have double-crossed to the Germans. Was this the same Pelletier? If so, why did he ask Lagall to relay a message? Nobody ever ascertained who exactly Lagall met, and when Pelletier in turn was sent to Camp 020, he denied knowing him. Still, that shred of doubt about what happened and the fact that Lagall had a criminal record kept him detained until April 1945, despite being seen as a 'patriotic French', anxious to join the Free French.[44]

Occasional administrative failures also led to individuals who were very likely not spies still being detained in Camp 020 for years. This is what happened to Jan Roelof de Jonge, a Dutch man who applied from Tangiers to join the Dutch Forces in Britain. Concerns were raised about him, including by SIS. When he reached Britain, he was taken to Camp 020 where he admitted to being involved in fraudulent activities in the past although these were connected to gambling and had nothing to do with the war.[45] With no evidence against de Jonge, Camp 020 kept asking SIS to give them more information so that he could be interrogated properly. It took a full three years for SIS to respond and confirm they had 'nothing adverse' against him after all. He was released in December 1944, with Milmo attempting to place him with the Dutch Forces who refused to take him. He then tried to make de Jonge look appealing to the Free French, telling them that although he was not 'a particularly attractive personality' and tended to take 'more liquor than was good for him', this 'does not mean that he might not be turned into a good soldier'.[46] It is unclear whether they were persuaded.

Detention without trial came to define Camp 020's purpose. While it was set up in order to collect evidence against suspected spies, it ended up collecting suspected spies themselves. Once it had extracted any useful information from a suspect, Camp 020 then became almost like a court for them, in which a combination of Stephens's opinion and other MI5 considerations would determine what was to be done with them. Too often, the answer was to simply detain them. And at that point, Camp 020 became their prison.

1.3 INTERDEPENDENCE

Intelligence considerations turned Camp 020 into a kind of black hole: its exact purpose was known only to a few, and after

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

entering it there seemed to be no way out. But while the existence of the camp was secret, this does not mean the place was unregulated. The premises were inspected by the War Office, with occasional visits by the Director of Military Intelligence as well as figures such as Duff Cooper, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Lord Swinton, head of the Home Defence (Security) Executive. And although detainees were held incommunicado, they were allowed to write petitions. Several of them exercised this right – much to Stephens's annoyance – as the only way to challenge their detention. Their recipients included Cabinet members, King George VI, the King of Norway and the Queen of the Netherlands. On one occasion, when a prisoner did not write petitions to the Home Office protesting his detention, the Home Office almost saw it as evidence of his guilt (he was, in fact, not believed to be an enemy agent by Camp 020 and was soon released).[47]

It is significant that the petitions were not suppressed. A key example is the case of Hungarian Janos Salamon (also called Jose Salamon in some correspondence). An agent of both the Germans and the Hungarians, a member of the Hungarian National Socialist Party and then of Arrow Cross, Salamon was in Britain in 1942 on a diplomatic passport even though he was not really a diplomat; he was given this status by the Abwehr as a cover.[48] Despite clear evidence that he was an enemy agent, Salamon had not committed an act of espionage against or in Britain, and so the two options were either to release him or detain him without trial. He vehemently protested against the decision made, which was for the latter of these options. He wrote to people such as Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons, King George VI and to the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison. His letters were laced with quotes from the Bible and odd remarks, comparing his situation to slavery; when he addressed a petition to 'His Gracious Majesty George VI, King-Emperor of the British-Empire' and signed it with 'Amen', Stephens asked a psychiatrist to examine him and confirm that he was sane.[49] But Salamon's petition to the Home Secretary in August 1943 included some disturbing comments. He complained about his cell having no windowpanes (he had broken them himself, he admitted).[50] But he also mentioned that when being driven to Camp 020, he was gagged and blindfolded. This is what alarmed the Home Office, and the matter was taken to David Petrie, Director-General of MI5 who had to admit that Salamon had indeed been blindfolded and gagged. The blame was

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

put on the police officer escorting him. Both Salamon and one of his associates were being taken to Camp 020 that day, but the officer did not want them to see that they were being taken to the same place; to avoid two car journeys, he decided to treat them in this way. The response from the Home Secretary's office was that it would 'have been far better to incur the expense and trouble of two journeys' than risk the Home Secretary having to defend this if it reached Parliament or the press. They asked Petrie to ensure nothing similar was to happen again.[51]

Petitions were one way through which Camp 020 was not cut off from the world. More than that, though, the camp's functioning depended on other agencies and departments, even if they did not always know what exactly Camp 020 was. These included the police, who were often the ones arresting agents; the Colonial Office, who were the ones arresting agents in the Empire; and the Admiralty, who were the ones responsible for agents captured at sea. The link between these various others and Camp 020 was usually MI5's Milmo. The relationships Milmo maintained were smooth and effective, and MI5's requests were adhered to even when they were not fully understood. An example of puzzled obligation came from Ramsgate Police Station over two Dutch brothers who reported there as refugees in October 1942. When they were taken to the Royal Patriotic School, it was discovered that they were on a spy mission and were reallocated to Camp 020. They claimed that their only espionage material was a matchstick infused with secret ink, but this was nowhere to be found. The brothers said that they may have accidentally (or not, MI5 thought) destroyed it while at the police station, where they were offered cigarettes, but lit them with their own matches. In desperate need of the match, not least to make sure that it was not left for someone else to find, MI5 kept asking Ramsgate police to look for it – though without telling them why. 'Frankly, we are all rather in the dark about the whole match question', was the response, 'but I take it that more hinges on the matter than meets the eye'.[52] They kept looking, and they kept sending MI5's Scientific Section matches they found in and around the station. Even two months on, and 'with commendable patience', Ramsgate Police Station assembled a 'packet of match sticks' and sent it to MI5 for testing.[53] The offending match was never found.

Tensions inevitably existed, usually caused by the fact that each service had different standards for how to deal with suspects.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

When the Pons group was arrested in Kent and taken to a police station, they were not searched properly, and so when one of them was allowed to go to the lavatory, he flushed down a piece of paper with German codes on it. Far more infuriating was the case of Jacobus Grobben, a Dutch sailor forced by the Germans to undertake a mission. But Grobben was on the side of the Allies, and had even helped a Free French pilot escape occupied territory. In deciding what to do, he sought the advice of a doctor whom he trusted, and whom MI5 believed to be 'a reputable and loyal Dutchman, who is known to have organised escapes from that country'.[54] He advised Grobben to accept the mission, get as much information about German intelligence as he could and then double-cross. This is what he was in the process of doing when his name was intercepted in German communications and the Royal Navy was instructed to arrest him at sea. Yet he was arrested before a crowd of witnesses, which defied all efforts to maintain the secrecy surrounding suspected agents. 'It is entirely wrong for the Navy to take it upon themselves to handle this class of case', wrote Milmo in criticising Grobben's public arrest, continuing that 'MI5 and/or MI6 might just as well embark upon the handling of battleships with no less prospects of success'.[55] The reason for this reaction was because the Germans had assigned Grobben a mission to the US. The Royal Navy had therefore frustrated an opportunity for MI5 to possibly establish a double agent there. After being detained for six weeks in Camp 020 – where he gave so much information that it was difficult to write it down – Grobben was released, and the only option was for him to join the Dutch Merchant Marine.

Then there were the Allied governments whose nationals made up most of Camp 020's population; they too were largely in the know and overall the relationship with them was good. Unlike the Home Office, the Dutch and the Norwegian governments in exile, as well as the Free French, were usually told when one of their nationals was detained, though they were not always told where. They were also able to interrogate their nationals themselves – the Norwegians are thought to have interrogated all Norwegians who passed from Camp 020 – but would normally do so in the Oratory School in Chelsea. Beyond the Allied governments, there was also the exchange of information with the FBI, particularly over agents with links to North and South America and the Caribbean. This willingness to involve foreign intelligence services had nothing to do with linguistic needs; the in-house

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

capacities of Camp 020 covered French, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch, Danish, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish.[56] Rather, it took place because good working relations allowed both sides to check information on and impressions of the individuals concerned. If anything, it was the lack of Allied interest that was occasionally infuriating to MI5. In a case concerning four Polish men who had arrived on a visa issued by the Polish authorities, Camp 020 needed the latter's assistance in checking their stories. But this was not forthcoming: 'either because they are incompetent, or because they prefer to spend their time on internal bickering, they appear to be of little value even if they are not a liability', wrote MI5's Cyril Mills. 'In so far as this case is concerned', he continued, the Polish authorities 'have wasted the time, money and energy of the Security Service in a way that is difficult to describe'.[57] It follows that there seemed to be little grievance either on the part of the British Government or that of its Allies about the fact that people were being detained without trial, possibly because the numbers were small and because everyone was wary of infiltration.

Important as all these links were, the most important relationship for Camp 020's work was with SIS. Very often, it was Bletchley Park staff that would intercept the names and locations of German spies, with the information passed on to SIS's Section V for counter-espionage in order to decide how to use it.[58] MI5's own activities, including its agents in embassies and ports, also helped to expose German agents, but signals intelligence was still invaluable for identifying people. An example was the case of three Norwegians who reached Lerwick as refugees in July 1941. The three – Helmik Wallem, Georg Lunde and Ingard Nilsen – claimed to have pooled their savings, bought a boat and sailed it to Scotland. Their stories were believed in the Royal Patriotic School where all refugees were being interrogated, and they were released. But soon after, an ISOS message reported that an agent called 'Nilsen' had been dispatched from Norway earlier in July.[59] Suspicion immediately turned to Ingard Nilsen, even though he had appeared innocent not only to the British interrogators in the Royal Patriotic School but to the Norwegian ones as well.[60] All three men were nevertheless taken to Camp 020, which got to the bottom of the story. The real agent was not Ingard Nilsen but Helmik Wallem, whose alias was 'Nilsen'; he was on a mission to join the British armed forces as a radio operator. He was made to admit this in writing as well as in front of his two friends, who were genuine refugees and in

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

the dark about his plans. The reaction of the real Nilsen was 'a genuine expression of disgust [which] showed plainly on his face'.[61] Equally disgusted by the admission was Georg Lunde, who was 'stripped of his entire savings' in order to buy the boat they all escaped in.[62] Had it not been for ISOS, Wallem would have done 'incalculable harm, seated at the key of a wireless transmitter aboard a ship proceeding overseas in convoy'[63]; and had it not been for Camp 020, the wrong man may have been apprehended instead.

SIS did not have all the answers, especially if an individual was not captured by signals. In cases where individuals were captured by the police for example, SIS was often unable to help Camp 020 identify who they really were. This was a prominent problem with the first few cases in 1940 who were arrested due to their own blunders rather than signals intelligence. One of Pons's companions was twenty-two-year-old Jose Waldberg, a German who grew up in France. Or at least that was the identity he maintained until after he was prosecuted and sentenced to death. Following his sentencing, he changed his story and claimed to have been a Swiss milkman called Henri Lassudry. He also claimed that, like Pons, he had been coerced into spying, in this case in order to save his father's life: 'if I have undertaken this low profession it was not to come and spy on you as I confessed, but was indeed a work of self-sacrifice to rescue the life of a man who fought through four years of war and lost his health for the defence of his country and his family'.[64] Other 'self-sacrifices' he made for the Abwehr were believed to include denouncing his Jewish girlfriend to the Gestapo at the request of his handler, who then found him another woman to date.[65] Whether he was Waldberg or Lassudry, a German or a Swiss, was never established by either MI5 or SIS, and he was executed all the same.

The real identity of Waelti was also unclear, having arrived in Buckie with Schalburg and Drueke. He never tried to create any confusion about his identity, and it was only after he was executed that it emerged that he had lied about who he was. The story he told was that he was a Swiss national who had been coerced into working for the Germans after discovering that he was helping Jews cross from Belgium to France (motivated by how much they would pay him). After his death, the Swiss disputed his nationality.[66] His passport number belonged to somebody else and there was no record of his birth in the birth town listed on the passport. His actual passport was then inspected and

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

seemed to have been forged. The best conclusion that could be reached, almost a year after his death, was that 'the man who was executed under the name of Werner Heinrich Waelti was not a Swiss citizen and did very probably not own that name'.[67] Although Vera Schalburg had been asked what she knew about him when they were arrested, she told the same story he did, with the addition that he had an unhappy childhood and hated everybody.[68] When pressed in a different case to confirm another name, she gave the fair response: 'How can I know the correct names? Nobody never says the correct name.'[69] She would have personal experience of this, having used a handful of names herself. Upon arrest, the name she gave was Vera Eriksen or Erichsen. She then claimed that she was Baroness von Wedel, after her late husband 'Baron von Wedel', but then said his actual surname was Sturig. In this case, it was due to SIS that 'Sturig' and 'von Wedel' were discovered to be cover names for Hilmar Dierks, an Abwehr spymaster who likely married Schalburg in the late 1930s although she never offered details about their relationship. She was also still using her Russian mother's surname, Starizky, and her Danish father's surname, Schalburg.[70] On occasion, she was known as Vera de Cattani and claimed that this was through another marriage. This series of names was the result of a decade-long career in espionage, which started in Paris, where Schalburg was a ballet dancer. It was then, at the age of seventeen, that she married Ivan Ignatieff, a Soviet spy and drug trafficker, who started using her as a low-grade Soviet agent. He also got her addicted to drugs and then tried to kill her. At some undefined point Ignatieff was executed, and Schalburg married Dierks, who was around twenty-five years older than her although she never offered more details about their relationship. He too used Schalburg for espionage, this time for Nazi Germany, including sending her on a mission to Britain in early 1939 where her task was to become acquainted with British fascists.[71]

The few cases of disputed identity aside, if it was because of signals and other filters that German agents were being exposed, what was the value of Camp 020, other than effectively being a secret prison for them? The kind of intelligence the camp would secure did actually lead to the identification of several spies. One example was the interrogation of a Yugoslav Jewish man who accepted a mission from the Abwehr as his only way to escape occupied territory. As soon as he was able to, he gave himself up and gave plenty of intelligence in Camp 020. One outcome of his interrogations was the apprehension of a

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

German agent called Elie Haggar, a young Egyptian who was studying in France.[72] The presence of Florent Steiner in Liverpool was also something that was revealed by an agent under interrogation in Camp 020.[73] Joaquin Baticon was a similar case. A Spanish agent of the Abwehr in his late thirties, Baticon was working on a boat and used it to run 'a kind of post office for [German] espionage reports' – effectively taking letters back and forth between Spain, Germany, Brazil and Cuba.[74] He was arrested in the US in 1943, and from there the FBI sent him to Camp 020 for interrogation. Stephens was confident that his information would lead to the apprehension of nine other men; it led to at least two of them being detained in Camp 020 that year.[75] Spies were therefore identified and caught as a result of Camp 020's activities.

A more consistent value of Camp 020 was in helping to build a clearer image of the Abwehr's capacity. When reporting on Baticon's interrogation, Stephens asserted that 'the yield is rich', not only because of the nine other agents he identified but because his information helped build 'a valuable espionage background' of German activities in South America, Cuba and Spain as well as 'detailed descriptions of some 50 espionage contacts'.[76] This was possible due to the nature of interrogation. Unlike signals or captured documents, which would give glimpses into specific topics, interrogation was a way for people to elaborate, refine, describe and answer questions.[77] Other than providing a fuller picture, interrogation also enabled Britain to gauge who was being recruited by the Abwehr, which was also a useful intelligence exercise – that most agents were untrained and uncommitted was an indicator of the quality of those the Abwehr had to choose from. The fact that many were tasked with making their way to Britain on their own, without any assistance – like Wallem, who had to use his friend's savings to get a boat – also indicated that some specific Abwehr stations were disorganised and regarded their agents as expendable. Spy-catching was therefore not the sole aim of counter-espionage. The long-term aim was to understand the enemy's capacity and intentions, and no single source could deliver that on its own. Only a combination of sources could paint a clearer image of individual agents, espionage activities in specific regions and the Abwehr more generally, eventually allowing for a sense of confidence within Britain that as far as German war capability went, its espionage dimension was firmly in hand.[78]

Another use of interrogation was to provide cover for signals intelligence. An example concerns a spy ring operating from Lourenco

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

Marques in Portuguese Mozambique, a key port connecting Europe and Africa. In 1942, ISOS revealed that the Italian Consul there, Umberto Campini, was running a spy network. But with this information coming from ISOS, which could not be revealed under any circumstances, not much could be done to force Portugal to remove him. What if someone could testify against Campini instead? That could be presented as evidence to the prime minister, António Salazar. An opportunity along these lines presented itself when SIS intercepted a message that Campini was in contact with a Greek sailor, presumably to recruit him. An agent provocateur – also Greek – was promptly sent by SIS to convince the sailor that they were schoolmates and persuade him to agree to a plan to surrender an Allied ship to the Axis for money. As was hoped, the sailor took the plan to Campini, who gave it his blessing and the exact coordinates at which to surrender. On board the Allied vessel in the middle of nowhere, and as the sailor was getting ready to make contact with a German ship, the agent provocateur handcuffed him.[79] This was 'virtual kidnap', Stephens said when he received the sailor, but it was fair enough: 'An honest man would have rejected the proposition [to surrender the ship] out of hand, and the fact that the proposition was put to him by an agent provocateur does not, in my opinion, alter his position.'[80] Exactly as planned, Camp 020 secured a signed confession from the sailor implicating Campini. Meanwhile, SIS decided that the Campini network was not as dangerous as initially thought and so the plan of presenting the confession to Salazar was abandoned.[81] The Greek sailor was detained until the end of the war.

1.4 METHODS

What actually happened inside Camp 020 was partly mind games, partly standard procedure. The aim at the time 'was to create an impression of ruthless efficiency, to lower the morale of a guilty prisoner and to bring about an atmosphere for successful interrogations'.[82] As part of this ruthless efficiency, upon arrival an individual would have their photograph taken and their weight and height recorded, and notes would be made about their physical appearance. They would then be stripped down and searched, and their belongings would be carefully inspected. From late 1943 onwards, the physical examination became even more rigorous. This was after Hansen arrived with his two transmitters but then admitted that he also had a small rubber bag with secret

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

ink inserted into a hollow tooth.[83] His handler had first attempted to affix the tiny bag to Hansen's hair, his armpits and between his toes, but in all cases Hansen had managed to lose it and that is when he was taken to the dentist.[84] The dentist removed an existing tooth filling from a heavily intoxicated Hansen, replaced it with the secret ink bag and closed it up with a thin layer of dental cement. All detainees that followed Hansen had their teeth inspected.

After this examination, the next step was to demoralise the detainees. They were put into a cell incommunicado until their first interrogation (usually for a few hours), which was conducted by Stephens. An interrogator was never alone in the room with a detainee – there had to always be at least one other officer, both to create an intimidating atmosphere and to prevent abuse. In that first interrogation, however, Stephens would be flanked by several officers in order to intimidate the newcomer, who had to undergo the initial interrogation standing up. Any incriminating evidence they arrived with, together with a file purporting to contain all evidence against them, would be placed on the table in front of them. The aim of this critical first interaction was to 'break' them. This was done by establishing dominance over them, making them believe that much was already known about them and reminding them that they were at the mercy of the state. Thanks to the concealed microphones and some of the transcripts that have survived, we can get a good insight of the kind of effect this first interrogation had. Fifty-two-year-old Sigurjon Jonsson, one of the two Icelanders who hid his wireless at his friend's house, was interrogated:

> Q [Stephens]. I am going to be quite candid with you. You are in a British Secret Service prison, do you understand that?
> A [Jonsson]. Yes, sir, but I am not –
>
> Q. You keep your mouth shut. You are in the British Secret Service prison. Do you understand that?
> A. Yes sir.
>
> Q. … The second point that I want to make is that, if you do not tell the truth you will be hanged. You understand that?
> A. Yes sir.
>
> Q. Because you are a spy as far as this country is concerned. Do you understand that?
> A. No.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

Q. Well you are. That is my judgment of you. Your position today cannot be worse than it is. Your treatment here and your life will depend entirely on yourself. I make no promise, but if you want to try to help yourself you had better speak the truth. Do you understand?
A. Yes sir.

Q. And if I catch you out telling a lie you are finished, do you understand that?
A. Yes sir.[85]

The threat of execution affected some detainees more than others. For Vera Schalburg, it did nothing. Even though Stephens repeatedly pressed her on the multiple points on which her story did not hold up – about what her mission was, her past and the men she arrived with – she gave very little in response. Nor did she seem too startled by Stephens:

STEPHENS: … You have been keeping things back.
SCHALBURG: Yes. Some things I have kept back.
STEPHENS: Well let's have those.
SCHALBURG: But won't you be so kind [as to] wait till tomorrow, because I am so tired to-day.
STEPHENS: No. I'm not here at the convenience of German spies. You must quite understand that we are not here for spies to recuperate, so that they feel nice and fresh tomorrow, to answer questions when they deem it to be suitable. You come here in a time of danger, and I intend to get this information out of you, and it depends very much on you and whether you tell the truth, whether we shoot you or not …[86]

By contrast, others were much more affected by the threat of execution, such as Portuguese national and Abwehr courier Viana dos Santos who, after being interrogated, claimed to hear voices and was 'interpreting approaching footsteps as those of an execution squad',[87] a state which continued after he was sent to the Banstead Lunatic Asylum.[88] It was thought at the time that his mental 'derangement' (which apparently proved to be temporary) was caused by the belief that he was about to be executed.[89] Even the Foreign Office became involved, worrying that if dos Santos had 'gone off his head', the Portuguese might blame it on

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

his detention.[90] He also made two attempts on his life while in Camp 020. One detainee did die by suicide in the camp. The only mention of him in declassified material seems to be in an account of the camp written by camp staff, who said that '[Olaf] Saetrang, the spy from Panama [takes] the credit for the only successful suicide at Ham. His was the ingenuity of a determined man who defies all administrative precaution', before describing how he ended his life by hanging.[91]

Other than the threat of execution, another tactic was bringing the suspect's loved ones into the picture – usually in the form of Stephens asking for the address of a parent or spouse in order to notify them of their execution. That had more of an effect on Schalburg than the death threat itself. In ending her interrogation, Stephens told her: 'You know exactly what the penalty is … Do you want to shield your mother or do you want to shield [Drueke, who she arrived with], it's a matter of indifference to me. Where is your loyalty left now, with your mother or with some odd German …?'[92] She was put in a cell with Drueke immediately after, where she was recorded telling him, 'But I think it is disgusting that they are going to write to my mother … They are no better than the Germans, they are the same'.[93] On the point of using relatives as bargaining chips, she was not wrong. Some of those who ended up in Camp 020 had said yes to the Germans precisely to prevent a loved one from suffering the consequences of a refusal. Another case in which Stephens used this tactic was that of an agent who was 'extremely fond' of his wife, who was also detained in Britain. Throughout the husband's interrogation, Stephens had the wife's photograph on the table.[94] What exactly was implied is up for interpretation – that the wife would suffer reprisals if he did not cooperate? That he would be hanged, and she would be left on her own? Either way, this was psychological manipulation in order to induce him to speak (he did so). Other tactics included a change of interrogator with a different demeanour – the 'good cop, bad cop' technique – while the passing of time would more naturally weaken a prisoner's defiance.

The aim of these efforts was to reinforce the idea that the suspect was at the mercy of British intelligence, they had no bargaining power and their best bet was to cooperate. To make this impression stronger, another tactic was to make detainees believe that the cases against them were already substantial enough that they did not depend on what they had to say. In some cases, especially the early ones, such claims were sheer bluff. Take the case of Caroli, the first agent

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

to have parachuted into Britain in September 1940. 'We have 99% of the whole thing for understanding', Stephens told him. 'The little more necessary to understand this we shall discover in a few hours or days.'[95] This was a lie, plain and simple. Not only did MI5 not have '99% of the whole thing' but they were desperate for Caroli to explain anything he could about how his transmitter worked and what message he had been instructed to send upon arrival. So desperate was the situation that Stephens made him an offer to spare his life without Caroli even trying to bargain for it. But after those first months, interrogators did not need to bluff so extensively. A combination of information collected within Camp 020 and information from SIS painted a much more thorough picture of the Abwehr, including specific Abwehr stations, individual spy rings and individual spymasters. This knowledge would strengthen an interrogator's hand in convincing a detainee that much was known about them and speed up the process for all involved.

In cases where prisoners were particularly uncooperative, the next step would take the form of either 'Cell 14' or 'Cell 15'. These were ordinary cells with two important exceptions: the windows were higher than usual (and so prisoners could not see outside) and they were colder in the winter. They were also deliberately called the 'condemned cells', suggesting that they were the last step before execution.[96] Uncooperative prisoners would be taken there for a day or two, before being interrogated again. During that time, they were not allowed to see or talk to anyone. For one of the detainees sent there (who was later considered 'small fry'), the only pastime activity available to him was reading the obituaries of agents who had been hanged. He was then brought in to the interrogation room to be asked:

> if he liked the condemned cell. He was told it did not matter very much. He would not be there long, as he was going to die soon … He was then questioned about his marriage, and where his wife lived, and informed that this was in order that we could inform her of his death, and the fact that he had died as a spy against England. He was asked if he ever wanted to see his wife again, and was told that he had no chance of doing so unless he told us the entire truth. The Commandant makes no promises, however. He was informed that [on his ship] he had been followed by a British agent. He knew of all

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

> that he had done. He had been told this before, but despite this, he played us as fools, and produced all these untrue statements. Yesterday he crossed himself as an innocent, and then last night, out of the condemned cell, he produced the fresh statement. He is known to be a reliable agent, and he has done at least one service already for the Italians. He admits, in his statement, that he was asked to do another job for the Italians. [He was asked to write a new statement with specific details and he agreed.] The Colonel [Stephens] is very busy, and he has a lot of rats like MOREIRA to see. MOREIRA's time is very short, so if he wants to do himself any good, he had better get on with it this morning. No man is in a worse position than he is. The Colonel is not prepared to make any promises, but MOREIRA may be able to help himself. MOREIRA was then shown the obituary notices again.[97]

And then officers would revert to a more procedural approach, by asking detainees to write their confessions down. When and why they were asked to do that depended on the individual case. One use of written confessions was to provide a basis on which to conduct further interrogations, all the while making it difficult for detainees to change their stories as they went. Some of those unwilling to speak during interrogation proved willing to write what they could not say. In the few cases where prosecution was being contemplated, the written confession also eliminated the need for interrogators to appear as witnesses in court. At the end of the interrogation process, Stephens would gather all the evidence, including other interrogators' reports, and write what he called a 'Yellow Peril'. This was essentially his overview of each case, with a recommendation to MI5 about what to do with the individual. He wanted this printed on yellow paper, his reasoning being that if the character of a spy had a colour, this would be yellow.[98]

Intimidation was at the core of Camp 020's methods, and this was not taboo so long as it never had physical dimensions, from starvation to violence. When Pierre Neukermans's interrogation ended in February 1944, the rare decision was taken to prosecute him and he was sent to another camp to await trial. As a matter of procedure, upon being moved from Camp 020 he was asked to sign a standard form for prisoners being released, stating that he understood 'that an exceptional decision has been reached in my case, namely to transfer me for

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

detention elsewhere' and that he promised not to speak about Camp 020. But Neukermans was not truly being released; he was simply being transferred elsewhere for trial. He should therefore not have been given that form to sign. The worry was that his lawyer might argue that the form implied a promise of release to him, and use it to cast doubt on how his confession was obtained. At that point, Camp 020 suggested that if the issue arose in court, they could use the fact that Neukermans was visibly frightened and shaking after his final interrogation as clear proof that he knew his life was still in danger, proving that no promises were made to him. The fact that he was suicidal was also something they offered to use as evidence that clearly no inducement had been made to him if he still wanted to kill himself. They even got a signed statement from one of the guards saying that when he saw Neukermans handcuffed after his interrogation, 'the man was terribly frightened; I reckon he was scared'.[99] The issue did not come up in the trial.

The line between acceptable tactics and pure manipulation is not clear-cut, but the long-term treatment of Schalburg increasingly looked more like the latter. When it transpired that she and Drueke were actually having an affair and that she may have been pregnant with his child (following an examination, a doctor reported findings 'suggestive but not conclusive of abortion' having occurred in the recent past), this was quickly exploited. It took the form of Harold Dearden, Camp 020's medical officer and a psychiatrist by training. After she refused to cooperate with Stephens, Dearden became Schalburg's informal interrogator. His techniques not only crossed several ethical lines, they also led nowhere in terms of her giving intelligence. If anything, their conversations became stranger and stranger, with Schalburg once casually asking Dearden if he could give her a revolver to shoot herself. This, she said, would make Drueke tell all he knew. In a last-ditch attempt to persuade her to open up in December 1940, Dearden erroneously suggested that it was he who had helped Pons get acquitted. He could therefore help her avoid the death penalty, and perhaps he could help Drueke too. The fact that there no longer was a pregnancy was also something he exploited at this point:

> "It is a great pity", I said, in as casual a manner as I could assume, "that you had this miscarriage. If you were still pregnant it might be that [Drueke] would do more to save your child and yourself than he is prepared at the moment to do to

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

> save you only." She took me up immediately on this. "Would it not be a good thing," she said, "to tell him that I am still pregnant?". "If you feel like that about it," I said, "of course you must use your own discretion, but you must put it down on paper or he will not believe that the message has really come from you." I gave her a piece of my notebook, and urged her to make the appeal as strong as possible. She wrote, then and there, the letter which is attached.[100]

None of this led anywhere, in that Schalburg budged only a little, and Drueke never did. He admitted to spying for Germany but refused to discuss his mission or even the reasons he agreed to undertake it. What was more, with Dearden's lies about Pons, he unwittingly saved Schalburg from prosecution and death. If she was to end up in court and mention Dearden's suggestions, not only could she be acquitted, she could also jeopardise subsequent cases by creating suspicion around the free will of confessions. The risk was not taken. In contrast, Drueke was executed. What does appear, however, is that Dearden was rarely if ever used as an interrogator after this point, and instead reverted back to the medical duties of the Camp.[101]

So, while Camp 020 did not use physical violence – explicitly prohibited not only on legal or moral grounds but because it would produce false intelligence – the process was a mix of conventional interrogation methods, intimidation and mental manipulation. And almost everything was down to direct interrogation. Microphones were useful for recording direct interrogations and assessing an individual's motives and demeanour, but not for collecting information. Stool pigeons were introduced but were also not considered especially useful. A problem was that any evidence obtained by a stool pigeon incriminating a suspect could not then be put to the suspect, as this would blow the decoy's cover.[102] More useful was the use of stool pigeons to induce others to confess, rather than to obtain those confessions in conversation. This was the job of Jean Huysmans, a Belgian recruited by the Abwehr in the Netherlands. It was his own behaviour that made the camp realise they could actually use him as a stool pigeon. Whenever he met a new prisoner, he would tell them his story. He would say how the camp already knew everything about him, how British intelligence was 'all-powerful and … it was futile to struggle against it' and would end by advising whoever he was conversing with to confess like he did

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

because thereafter his treatment was fair. This worked with a few others, while it also seems that Camp 020 would ask Huysmans to 'advise' other prisoners on how to write their confessions.[103]

1.5 OUTLIERS

Like Huysmans, a small number of Camp 020's agents ended up working for Britain; probably close to 20, which is perhaps fewer than might be expected for a camp of some 400 German recruits. For about half of those recruited into British intelligence in some capacity, we know very little about what they did and with what success. A very small number were used for one-off missions. One of them was Jens Palsson from Iceland; he was the companion of Jonsson whose first interrogation with Stephens has already been mentioned. After his own first interrogation with Stephens, Palsson was sent back to Iceland on a one-off mission, but the details are unclear. In the case of Schalburg, whose story seemed never-ending, she too was eventually recruited, probably as an informant. With the scarce information available, it is not certain whether MI5 really saw an opportunity in her, or tried to make her think she was useful as a final attempt to persuade her to open up and talk about the mission she was on. It happened in early 1942, nearly a year and a half after she had arrived at Buckie and six months after Drueke and Waelti had been executed. At that point, she was in Holloway Prison, as Camp 020 and its offshoots detained only men. There she was suddenly told that she would be allowed a short 'holiday':

> you will be treated with consideration and you will find yourself among persons who are prepared to treat you kindly and who speak your language. These privileges are being accorded to you in the hope and expectation that you will show your appreciation by reviving every memory you have of the past … You need have nothing to fear and it is up to you to make the most of your unusual opportunity.[104]

The people she would stay with, she was told, were a Russian couple who would take her in as a paying guest. In reality, they were MI5 agent Klop Ustinov and his wife, painter Nadia Benois, something they must have then revealed to her in the process.[105] The fact that a German spy would be going on a countryside sojourn somewhere in Gloucestershire – but

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

not before being taken to Oxford Street to buy new clothes and to have a haircut, courtesy of MI5 – was recognised as 'thoroughly irregular'.[106] But it had the blessing of both MI5 and the Home Office.[107] During the stay with the Ustinovs, Klop interrogated Schalburg afresh under the guise of friendly conversation in Russian, their native language, and concluded that she was not hiding any significant information.[108] As for the mission she was on, it was concluded that the most likely scenario was that she was sent to accompany Drueke simply in order to help him survive; he spoke no English so even buying food would be a challenge. Drueke would then be free to focus on using his wireless to communicate his observations about the weather and military movements. After all, the impression when they arrived was that such activities would only last for a matter of days, until the Germans invaded.

Shortly after Schalburg was returned to prison – this time Aylesbury Prison – Ustinov paid her another visit. He told her that she had 'made her peace with us [British intelligence]' and that 'she had now a chance to live up to the trust put in her by showing that she wants to collaborate loyally with the people who have shown her consideration'. It was then, on a walk around the prison, that she was given instructions to work as an agent in one of the Isle of Man camps, presumably informing on other detainees. She promised Ustinov 'to make a success of her new mission' and 'swore that [his] name will never pass her lips'.[109] Her subsequent activities are unknown, although her name emerges in letters from Isle of Man detainees. From one such mention, it appears that she was running the camp canteen (an apt spot for an informant), a role she maintained when she was moved to the Royal Patriotic School in 1945 and before she was deported. Yet for all the people who interrogated and opined on Schalburg, there was one significant piece of information that seems to have gone undetected until 1943. This was the fact that her brother was Christian Frederik von Schalburg, a Danish collaborator who served in the Waffen-SS before becoming commander of its Free Corps Denmark unit.[110] Her brother's first name and the fact that he was a Nazi had already reached MI5 through other sources – notably her uncle, who was also interrogated – but who exactly he was seems not to have been discovered until mid-1943, showing how difficult it was to identify people accurately. Much about Schalburg's past, as well as her fate after the war, is still contested today; the most likely explanation is that she was deported to Germany in late 1945, and died there of pneumonia in early 1946.[111]

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

Other than the handful of ad hoc agents, some five of them seem to have joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the rest the Double-Cross System. Since the latter selected people with a view to using them in more elaborate and long-term deception schemes, its bar was high and although many were considered for it, only eleven detainees seem to have been recruited. The slightest doubt about their intentions was enough to reject them. Take for instance the case of Pierre Morel, a French pilot who was recruited by the Abwehr in 1941. In mid-1942, he was tasked with getting to Britain either to infiltrate the intelligence services or to join the RAF and fly one of its newest planes back to Nazi Europe for 1 million francs. He was in the process of obtaining a visa for Britain in Spain – in line with the fact that many agents had to make their own way to Britain, with no support from the Abwehr – when he confessed his mission and offered to work for the Allies. His offer sounded genuine and this was supported by SIS, who had intercepted that the Abwehr were concerned about changes in Morel's behaviour. This led John Cecil Masterman, in charge of Double-Cross, to think that Morel 'might become a most valuable double agent working for us'.[112] But Masterman had a nagging concern about Morel, who was then sent to Camp 020 and found to be untrustworthy and unreliable. Not only did he confess to missions he had not disclosed before, Morel also refused an offer to have his wife escape to Britain. This suggested he believed she was safer with the Nazis, which would be the case if his intention was to triple-cross.[113]

Another reason why detainees were rejected for Double-Cross work was if they had strong incentives to betray the Allies. This was a concern with Pelletier, the Free French agent mentioned earlier for having double-crossed to the Germans. He was initially parachuted into France in spring 1941, where he was tasked with servicing the wireless transmitters of other Allied agents. But he was arrested by the Gestapo who turned him into a double agent. After a number of Free French and SIS agents linked to him were arrested, Pelletier was taken back to England where he was interrogated first by the Free French and then by Camp 020. The story as Camp 020 uncovered it was that he had doubled-crossed not for money or ideology but because his father – also a Free French agent – was detained by the Gestapo, and would suffer reprisals if Pelletier was to refuse. The fact that his father was still in captivity made Pelletier an unsuitable 'double agent double', even

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

though he offered: 'if a critical moment were to arise when [Pelletier] had to choose between duty and his father, he would falter again in his duty', wrote Stephens.[114]

Having a father in Nazi captivity precluded one from Double-Cross, but potentially being a Nazi did not. This was an initial concern in the case of Helge Moe and Tor Glad, two Norwegians who arrived in the village of Crovie in Aberdeenshire in April 1941. They turned themselves in and claimed that their intention all along was to join the Allies. To confirm this, their conversations were secretly monitored and officers from the War Office, SIS and the Norwegian Army interrogated them in order to form their own opinions.[115] The overall conclusion was that the two appeared honest in their desire to double-cross, but they also made a bad impression. Not only were they Nazi Party members but Moe was close to Yngvar Fyhn, leader of the National Socialist Workers' Party of Norway which had merged with Quisling's Nasjonal Samling in 1940. Meanwhile, Glad was viewed as 'a mixture of coward and bully … a typical young Nazi', 'chock full of German propaganda and … anti-Jewish' who 'has the most exaggerated ideas of the performance of German aeroplanes'.[116] His politics were no secret. A Norwegian refugee who was interrogated in the Royal Patriotic School months later mentioned that he knew by word of mouth that Glad was in Britain as a German agent, and described him as 'a prominent pro-Nazi and supporter of Quisling'.[117]

The decision was nevertheless taken to use them both, with their aliases inspired by the American cartoon *Mutt and Jeff* – Moe becoming Mutt and Glad becoming Jeff. Yet Glad, who was from the start seen as ill-tempered, quickly became 'a great nuisance and difficult to control' and was dismissed. It was instead Moe who imitated Glad in messages to the Germans for most of the war, on top of sending his own.[118] Thus, in reality, Moe was both Mutt and Jeff. While working in that capacity, he was at liberty, on a salary with food and accommodation covered.[119] But with the war nearing its end, his mental health suffered. In 1945, he was sent to a psychiatrist who concluded that 'nervousness and anxiety for the well-being of his mother in Norway' and about his own future there had taken their toll.[120] He was released from duty and surrendered his wireless set after four years. He was at that point commended for 'his initiative and determination' in helping to deceive the enemy 'and in providing a channel of important counter espionage of deception value to the Allied Cause'.[121] As for Glad, he

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

was imprisoned throughout the war and continued to be embittered and ill-tempered.

Similarly to an agent's politics, a criminal background did not preclude an individual from Double-Cross service. After all, the aim was to 'turn' those whom the Nazis thought most unlikely to betray them. This was the story of Edward (Eddie) Chapman, one of the very few Britons taken to Camp 020. A criminal imprisoned in Jersey when the Channel Islands fell under occupation, Chapman offered to work for the Germans. After being trained in Paris and Berlin, he was parachuted into England in December 1942 to collect intelligence and sabotage the De Havilland Works. But he gave himself up, and in Camp 020 he openly discussed his mission. It was decided to turn him. Precisely because he was a criminal, the Germans assumed he would not risk getting arrested and languish in a prison, let alone that he would give himself up. To make his work even more convincing, MI5 arranged for a notional sabotage of De Havilland to be reported in the press. Appearing both loyal and successful, Chapman was sent back to Germany in March 1943, where he was awarded 110,000 marks for his services. The Germans then gave him a new mission and parachuted him back into England in 1944, giving Chapman – suitably codenamed by British intelligence as 'Zigzag' – the odd honour of being the only agent to have been parachuted twice into the country.

Not everyone who was recruited into Double-Cross was a success. There was Nicholas Tikhmenev, 'one of the few cases where Camp 020 took too favourable a view of a prisoner'.[122] Raised in France by Russian parents, Tikhmenev was serving with the French in North Africa when he was recruited by the Germans. He confessed to the British Consul in Barcelona, but for some reason gave a fake name of Georges Fressay. He did not correct this in Camp 020 either, instead maintaining a made-up story about who he was. This rather substantial lie was not caught, and he was recruited as a double agent. His real identity was only uncovered months later and he was returned to Camp 020, where he remained until he was deported to France.

And then there was Caroli, who too proved an unreliable agent, although his failure was mitigated by the fact that it was because of him that Schmidt, who was considered 'an eminently successful double agent', was recruited.[123] While Caroli was trying to save Schmidt's life – he bargained with Stephens to save both his own and Schmidt's life in exchange of information – this is not how the story was put

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

to Schmidt in Camp 020. Instead, Schmidt was told that Caroli had betrayed him. 'When faced with the fact that he had been betrayed by his friend, he entirely lost his composure and burst out that he would tell the truth.' After doing so, he was quickly transferred to B1A, the MI5 section managing Double-Cross agents. Soon after Caroli and Schmidt was Goose, the third double-cross agent to be recruited in Camp 020. But he was unable to make contact with the Germans and so was never actually used.

Of the remaining five Double-Cross recruits, very little is known. One of them was Albert de Jaeger, listed as being in Camp 020 between October 1940 and August 1945 when he was returned to Belgium. At that point, MI5 was trying to ensure that double agents and informants were not to be prosecuted by their national courts. In de Jaeger's case, he was facing at least three years' imprisonment for working for the Germans in 1940. But MI5 put 'a strong case in his favour', and it does look as if the Belgians were planning to drop the charges.[124] Then there was Werner Janowski, a German on a mission to Canada which he reached on a submarine. When he checked himself into a hotel, he tried to pay with dollar bills that were no longer in circulation and also threw away a matchbox marked 'made in Belgium', a rare sight in Canada during war. He was sent to Camp 020 in September 1943 and 'was in a position to give considerable information on the subject [of the Abwehr]'.[125] There was also Ib Riis from Iceland, who spent three days in Camp 020. He was released in May 1942 with a view to sending him back to Iceland in June, under the codename COBWEB.[126] For German Hans Ruser, who was in the camp briefly between November and December 1943, not much information has been declassified. Little is also known about Hans Bertrand; of unknown nationality (possibly a Belgian pilot), he was in the camp for a week in November 1943 after which point he is listed as having been transferred to the section managing Double-Cross.[127]

Double-Cross and numbers aside, what Camp 020 achieved in intelligence terms was remarkable. Without a precedent to guide its staff, the camp managed to extract both a confession and information from almost all of the people it detained. Its intelligence did not function as a discrete source, but rather as an additional stream of intelligence that complemented other sources, from signals to captured documents, covering enemy espionage activities from South America to the Middle East. The resulting in-house registry Camp 020 built from

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871

scratch came to include some 100,000 individual entries with information on people, codes and places. This work was supported both by insiders, particularly SIS and the Home Office, and near-insiders, including the police and Allied intelligence agencies.

The unsettling aspect of this history is in the how: *how* prisoners provided all this information. It is to be expected that interrogation would rely a great deal on psychological tactics. Here, it seems that as long as prisoners were fed and spared any punches, everything else was acceptable. Both the successes and the shadows of this legacy have much to do with Stephens, who was omnipresent in the camp. He took this operation not only seriously but personally. 'The interrogator must treat each spy as a very individual case … a very personal enemy', was his view, while he understood an 'implacable hatred for the enemy' to be a necessary quality for a good interrogator.[128] Even other interrogators' voices are difficult to capture consistently due to his prominence. Each interrogator wrote a report for each prisoner they interrogated, but it was ultimately Stephens's 'Yellow Perils' that would allow MI5 to decide what to do with them; his judgement, although not always upheld, carried much weight. While of course the running of such an establishment was hardly down to a single individual, he set the tone for much of what went on in the camp.

The 'how' also extends to the question of detention without trial, which Camp 020 clearly shaped. The few agents executed were not any more dangerous than those who were spared.[129] Rather, they were either captured early on in the war – before the potential complications of legal proceedings were realised – or were apprehended in a relatively public way, which made their use as double agents impossible and created the pressure to show that spies were being dealt with. Oddly enough, however, this also meant that the need to maintain Camp 020 spared some lives. There remained a minority of cases, such as Lagall, who were detained without strong evidence; in such instances, a court might have reached a very different conclusion. But in war, the logic went, the interests of the state outweighed the liberty of a small number of individuals. As long as the Abwehr sought to infiltrate Britain, the aim was to stop them. Everything else was secondary.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 17 Nov 2026 at 20:26:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009448871