

74

DISCLOSURES
of a
GERMAN STAFF OFFICER

**THE LETTER OF PAUL EHRHARDT
MERCHANT, SOLDIER, AND SPY**
With Facsimiles of his Handwriting

*Revised and brought up to date from the original
article in "THE FIELD" of February 9, 1918*

LONDON:

THE FIELD & QUEEN (HORACE COX) LTD.
WINDSOR HOUSE, BREAM'S BUILDINGS, E.C.4

1918

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DISCLOSURES OF A GERMAN STAFF OFFICER

INTRODUCTORY.

Ehrhardt's Death.

IN the *Daily Telegraph* for August 11, 1914, the following paragraph appeared: "The Military Governor of Antwerp has decided that all Germans who have not registered themselves at the expiration of twenty-four hours will be regarded as spies and shot."

Telegraphing from Brussels to the same newspaper the day before, Dr. E. J. Dillon reported that

"the German military captain Ehrhardt was arrested at Ostend on suspicion. On his person was found a sum of four thousand francs and a written order, 'Remain Ostend observant,' also the key to a cipher with which he corresponded with the German Staff. After his arrest a letter to him was intercepted from a Belgian offering him important information concerning the plans of national defence. The writer of the letter has also been apprehended."

Ehrhardt was shot as a spy in the first week of September. No details of the court-martial which resulted in his execution have been recovered, as they were seized when the Germans took Antwerp.

On July 30 Ehrhardt had written a remarkable letter to an English business friend. Before reproducing the text of that letter and examining the evidence it provides, it is

desirable to furnish the reader with proof of its authenticity, and with a short description of the man himself and of the significance of what he writes.

Authenticity of the Letter.

In order to prove that Captain Ehrhardt's letter is genuine, a few lines from two previous letters in his handwriting are reproduced on p. 12 (Facsimiles I. and II.). The first of these (with his full signature) was written from Hamburg in June, 1906, the second from his newer business in that city in November, 1912. A comparison of these two specimens with the extracts from the historical document of July 30, 1914 (Facsimiles III. and IV., p. 13), will show conclusively that Paul Ehrhardt was the writer of all three letters.*

Ehrhardt in Business.

Paul Ehrhardt was a man whose personality inspired the sense of great physical strength and whose mind was that of the typical Prussian, with all the true Prussian's tyranny of thought and relentless energy of purpose. His business integrity was above reproach, and it was not until war broke out that anything could be said against his personal honour. Then—as was the case with most, if not with all, Germans—the belief that Germany was right and everyone else wrong became his excuse for actions which are incompatible with English friendships.

He wrote the long letter of July 30, 1914, when he was dead tired and had only an hour left for sleep, because he had no doubt been instructed to send "propaganda" to his English friends. The typical instance of such letters is Ballin's to Lord Haldane, published in the *Times* early in August, 1914. The same thing happened no doubt in thousands of other cases. Prussia had determined to persuade England—by any and every means—to "stand out." But Ehrhardt was well used to the particular form of propaganda which he was to employ in this letter for the last

* The originals of these letters are in *The Field Office*.

time, and it was no doubt largely due to his intimate knowledge of several foreign languages and to the fact that he had lived in India for some time and thereon founded his close connection with a well-known London business, as well as to his innate love of all things military, that he was originally selected for the General Staff. He wrote to London several copious dissertations in the period of the Agadir crisis, during both the Balkan wars, and at the time of Lord Haldane's famous visit to Germany. The whole correspondence (still preserved in London) betrays the same inspiration, from the same source, as is shown in his letter of July 30 (see pp. 7-14).

He represented the London firm's interests first in Antwerp under the name of C. Kapp & Co., and later in Hamburg under the name of Ehrhardt & Co. When the latter firm got into difficulties, his London friends showed their appreciation of his services by assisting him to form the new company of Ehrhardt & Co., G.M.B.H. (*i.e.*, Ltd.). This business was later largely expanded under a partnership with a famous London-American house. Ehrhardt was a frequent visitor to London and had several times invited his English friends to witness the German Imperial Army manoeuvres, and to deerstalk, or shoot buck, as he would say, in the Black Forest.

He was no doubt both a capable and an influential representative, for he had married an heiress, the daughter of Herr de Freitas, who had very large shipping and trading interests between Hamburg and South America and was the largest shareholder in the German syndicate, which several years ago bought some coal mines in South Wales but eventually proved unsuccessful. We hear that his wife was at Bayreuth for the Wagner Festival when the international crisis grew acute, and that she missed saying good-bye to him in consequence. Her "inheritance" was substantial, as he proposed to raise a loan of 350,000 marks (£17,500) in a private bank at Hamburg on securities of hers for 2,000,000 marks (£100,000), a margin sufficiently large to suggest that such operations had become difficult in Germany even before

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July 30, 1914; and it is to be noted that he was not sure that he would get even this amount.

Scandinavian Trading.

The position held by Ehrhardt himself is sufficiently indicated by his large staff of employees in Hamburg, and especially by the fact that some two months before the war he had founded the Scandinavian Trading Company in Stockholm, which was ultimately to provide the German Empire with invaluable raw materials and food for more than three years after the war had begun. Shares in this company were offered to his business associates in the City of London and unsuspectingly accepted.

The London business finally sold out of all concerns in which they were associated with Ehrhardt. It was not, however, any fear of loss which prevented the London firm from continuing to support any concern in which Ehrhardt had a share. They refused to deal with an enemy; and when they inquired of our own authorities about the Scandinavian Trading Company they were informed that, as might have been expected, this company was one of the worst offenders in smuggling goods and food into Germany.

There is not the slightest doubt that Ehrhardt founded it for this very purpose and hoped to use the capital of his English associates in a way directly contrary to the interests of their country. In this he failed. He succeeded, however, in getting at least that of his American friends, who were then neutral, and the whole episode is very characteristic of what was going on all over the world at that moment.

Ehrhardt as a Patriot.

He may have hoped to return to Hamburg for business purposes after his visit to Berlin in July, 1914, but his real heart was in the possibility of fighting, and it might have been better for him had he been able to restrict his activities to the military side; for this letter shows that, with all his

resolute qualities, he was not clever enough to avoid giving himself away very seriously on paper. What he implies is even more valuable to us to-day than what he actually says. In any case, his methods as a secret intelligence officer of the German General Staff were not sufficiently subtle to deceive the Belgians, who arrested him in Ostend before he had been at work a week, sent him to Antwerp to be identified by those with whom he had been previously connected in business, and shot him as a spy in Antwerp in the first week of September, 1914. He had at least been wise enough to make his will before he left Hamburg for Berlin.

“Divide the World Together.”

It is difficult to say where the sincerity of his desire to impress his London friends with facts may be said to end and where his passionate Prussian propaganda (which was notoriously regardless of the truth) may be said to begin. But his whole attitude both to England and to England's relations with other countries is precisely that which had been inculcated for the last twenty years by the Prussian General Staff and by the baneful system of education it so remorselessly controlled.

It will be observed, for instance, that the highest motive ever dreamed of in his practical politics is the invocation of Teuton hatred for the Slav — a battle-cry which certainly roused all Germany, and which Ehrhardt imagines should rouse England too. But the details are infinitely more sordid. He imagines (and he echoes Bernhardt, Frobenius, and the highest Prussian statecraft in the thought) that Russia would be England's greatest enemy in the future were she not crushed now; that any feeling of obligation on the part of England towards France would be a mistake; that even if the German fleet were disastrously weakened England would be at the mercy of future machinations from “Russia, France, and Japan”; that if Germany wins the war England will be her friend, and

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"we can divide the world together." In that sinister phrase the cloven hoof shows unmistakably.

Ehrhardt's view of the general political situation proves how carefully every Prussian had been educated up to the proper frame of mind for "The Day," and is especially significant for its emphasis on the fact that the Prussian General Staff were determined upon war *whether the Kaiser wanted it or not*. Their attitude was that, whatever the Kaiser may cable to President Wilson, "the facts are there," and the General Staff, which manufactured so many of them, was not likely to allow its labours to remain unfruitful.

The implications of Ehrhardt's letter *as to the date of the German preparations for war* are even more damning: they are dealt with fully in the Analysis (see pp. 16-19).

THE LETTER OF PAUL EHRHARDT.

[Belgium*] July 30, 1914.

You will have asked yourself why I have not written before and even to-day I have only a few moments. I cannot say from obvious reasons where I am writing from and how I am getting the letter posted but I can pass it now the Belgian frontier and so you will have it in two days or so when matters will be much farther. The fact is that on Sunday I have been asked to join my place in case political position becomes strained. When I left I had no idea that I could not return to Hamburg a day or two, but the position became hourly more dangerous and I am on the move in the train of a big animal† and am so busy that I scarcely ever get sleep but soon we shall have the decision. I am in hope to succeed to forget that I had business. I only had time before leaving for Berlin to see on Sunday morning at 8 o'clock my lawyer-notary to make my will and to give him power of attorney, then I saw K—— for a few minutes and since I only got two telegrams and one letter from him and a letter from my wife who was in Bayreuth for the Wagner festivals and who by now will have returned to Hamburg to find that I am gone. I also have

* It seems clear that the letter was written in Belgium: see p. 25.

† *i.e.* "An important personage." Ehrhardt's "big animal" is the literal translation of the idiomatic German expression "*ein grosses Tier*."

no idea how the office is as of the 45 German male employees I guess that 35 have since joined the army. I also had finished all my negotiations with a private bank in Hamburg to get an advance of 350,000 marks on the securities of 2,000,000 of my wife's inheritance but I suppose that this amount has not been paid. If in spite of my fear the money has been paid I told K—— before my leaving to remit you the premium of M 5000, but the catastrophe is such that you will excuse and understand if the remittance has not been made. I hope that you will also tell this to Mr. C—— and show him this letter which is just as much for him as for you. I have often thought of you all and also of my other English friends. You know that I had the privilege of being appointed already 12 years ago to the General Staffcorps in case of mobilisation. This also explains that I had been called in before the actual mobilisation began. In the course of my 9 days activity in the Staff I have seen a lot of enormously interesting information and though we still hope that it is not coming to general conflagration and that we shall have to fight with practically the whole of Europe and this almost alone I am afraid that a war with France and Russia is not avoidable. I have seen and heard a lot and you can take my word that this has come quite unexpected and Germany certainly is not the seeker of war. That we shall have to do over short or long with Russia and certainly with France is and has been always my conviction and it will be a great fight. Austria had to give Servia a lesson. Since 8 years there has been a systematic sedition by the Servian Government against Austria. Russia is at the back of it. Dozens of Austrian officials

have been assassinated. Always the trace went back to Servia and Austria had to stop it. What we see now is simply the great fight which has waged for hundreds of years between the Slaves [*sic*] and Teutons (say Germans). That France joins is merely an incident as they have not forgotten 1870. If we had left Austria alone it would only have meant that we shall have to fight later on and perhaps in five years perhaps in fifty only alone against the Slaves. Whether we shall be victorious is a matter we must see — we have confidence. The Italians will probably try to get out. We have discounted that since 12 years so there will be no surprise. But what we know is this that during [*? the crisis*] our Government and particularly our Emperor and last not least your Government have done everything to prevent a general war. Russia has made excuses, and always has negotiated but during the whole time mobilised and made preparations against Austria and against us. Even I think that the Czar has been either a dupe to various influences or a liar for as far as I could see he personally interfered with our Emperor to deny that in his empire military preparations were made and during all this time full mobilisation in Russia has been ordered by him. Our Emperor will not yet believe our absolutely reliable reports, but we the Staff can prove it to the Emperor and in the interest of the German Empire the Emperor who is earnestly religious and for peace must put the question to Russia — we cannot wait any longer. Till you receive the letter possibly the question is decided, and as France is the ally and waits for the only possibility we must put the question to France too, to know where we are. Bismarck and the first William has always told our

Emperor to keep friends with Russia and it is a creed of the Hohenzollern to be friends with Russia though it has been difficult for years. It is going against our Emperor's nature, but facts are there.

The one great question which interests me personally more than anything else is what does England. You know that I and the majority of every thinking German are admirers of your nation and consider the English the only nation for which we have a natural sympathy. But if we have to believe the reports from France England will at once go for us when we force the declaration from Russia and France. I cannot think it and would consider it a great mistake of your Government apart from the reasons this will have in the struggle for Germany. The fight is a fight between Slav and German and blood feeling and reason ought to find you on our side. The French are latin but on the decline and a dying nation. Should we loose [*lose*] the Russians will be the dangerous and uncivilised and unscrupulous power and they are neighbours to you and your natural enemies. Your children will have to bear the consequences and will have the same fight we have now. Creed, Race, Religion everything would count for nothing if your Government were joining in this fight against us. If your Government has undertaken to prevent our fleet to attack the French coast let them say so but say that this is the only one condition to remain neutral. This obligation is already a mistake but if you say so openly we know where we are and can go with our fleet against Russia and will leave the French alone with our fleet. What we cannot have is the uncertainty and the constant danger of

the threatening presence of your fleet. We must expect that at any moment she may fall upon us. Remove this danger and everything will be allright. We must know where we are this at least is the feeling. True you may get rid in this general war where we have to fight everybody to get rid [*sic*] of our fleet but what then? You will be weakened in the struggle to the benefit of Russia France and Japan. You will have to spend much more on your fleet than before to get even with the others who had not to fight, if your Government keeps aloof in this fight and we win and we shall you shall have friends in Germany and we can divide the world together.

I have written much more than I intended, but show this letter to Mr. C— and also to Messrs. E—. I shall write to Mr. W. S— a few lines but excuse the bad writing I scarcely can hold the pen any longer and I must have an hour's sleep.

Write me if you can. I shall write you from time to time when I can. You may use my letter where you like if it is any good, you have the truth. I have seen hundred thousands of Germans and also Austrians to join and I know that a great part of them will soon be under ground but all have the same feeling about this fight from the rich to the lowest workman. You will see that a nation is responding to the Emperor's call as it has never done in the world before, for never since history has been written a greater fight has taken place and there is amongst the Germans no fear—everyone will be there. I am only sorry that I see too little of this.—What to write about business? I have given K— as much as I could instructions and will possibly be able to assist him as I think that

SPECIMENS OF PAUL

C. Kapp & Co.
Hamburg — Antwerpen

Hamburg, den ¹² June 1906
AIsenhof.

My dear

I have to thank you
for your kind words of 6th

*

was a strong united army
in spite of the bad government.

FACSIMILE I.

Sincerely yours

Paul Ehrhardt

EHRHARDT & CO.
G. M. B. H.
HAMBURG

HAMBURG, den 5. Nov. 1912

FACSIMILE II.

My Dear

* *

I have been very pleased
to have your letter of 1st. I also

ARDT'S HANDWRITING.

30 July 1914

FACSIMILE III.

~~My dear~~

You will have asked yourself why I have not written before and even today I have only a few moments. —

* * * *

to my office - they will forward the letter to the following address

V. 5

Hauptmann D. Res

Tronsee Generalstab

Berlin,

* * * *

FACSIMILE IV.

This also explains that I had been called in before the actual mobilization began. In the course of my 9 days activity in the Staff I have seen a lot of enormously interesting

when the mobilisation is over I have a few days time though I probably shall also have to go in the field. You may write me occasionally to my office and they will forward the letter to the following address:

P. E.

Hauptmann d. Res

Grosser Generalstab

Berlin.

From there it will be forwarded where I may be. My best compliments to Mr. C—— and yourself.

Yours very sincerely,

PAUL EHRHARDT.

ANALYSIS OF THE LETTER.

CAPTAIN EHRHARDT'S letter is a contribution to history of extraordinary interest, since it is the first document to reach the world from the interior of the Great General Staff, written while that relentless body was struggling, against the combined efforts of European diplomacy and the opposition of certain moderate influences in Germany, to plunge us all into Armageddon. Its writer was not of high rank, being only a captain in the Reserve; but two of Germany's most famous intriguers, von Papen and Boy-Ed, were also captains, and there is abundant proof in the letter itself that this unfortunate reserve officer knew most of the secrets of the vast and sinister machine of which he was a part.

It is our good fortune that Captain Ehrhardt, unfitted as this letter seems to prove him for trickery and deception, writing, as he says, when "I scarcely can hold the pen any longer and I must have an hour's sleep," after days and nights of exhausting labour, said more than he intended to say—fastened, in fact, upon his own associates the most damning proof of their deliberate guilt in provoking the war, while he thought he was only using his influence with a member of an important English business house to keep Britain out of the struggle.

Under headings given below, Captain Ehrhardt is summoned as witness for the prosecution to give evidence on several points of the indictment presented by civilisation against Germany. Sometimes his testimony will be found damning, direct, unanswerable; sometimes circumstantial; sometimes merely inferential. The reader is asked to remember that his letter was written on Thursday, July 30, 1914, the day before the German Ultimatum to Russia, two days before the declaration of war on Russia, five days before Belgian territory was violated and Great Britain entered the war.

Mobilisation.

The Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia was despatched on July 23. The German White Book declares that "We . . . have not participated in her [Austria's] preparations"; and German diplomats on many occasions pledged their word that they knew nothing of Austria's intentions (*e.g.*, French Yellow Book, 15). So closely guarded was the secret that on July 20 the Serbian Minister at Vienna reported to the Prime Minister at Belgrade (Serbian Blue Book, 31): "It is very difficult, indeed almost impossible, to ascertain here anything positive as to the real intentions of Austria-Hungary."

Now Captain Ehrhardt, writing on Thursday, July 30, says: "The fact is that on Sunday I have been asked to join my place in case political position becomes strained. When I left I had no idea that I could not return to Hamburg a day or two, but the position became hourly more dangerous . . ." He states that before leaving Hamburg he "only had time . . . to see on Sunday morning at 8 o'clock my lawyer-notary to make my will . . ."; and that, at some time before he left, he had finished "all my negotiations with a private bank in Hamburg to get an advance of 350,000 marks on the securities of 2,000,000 of my wife's inheritance."

Captain Ehrhardt, then, was called up on Sunday. Was this on Sunday, July 26? The fact that there is a letter* written by him on the Hamburg office paper, and dated July 24, certainly suggests that he may not have left for Berlin till the 26th: for he implies, *though he does not actually say*, that, when once his work on the General Staff had begun, he had been too busy to return to Hamburg. ("When I left I had no idea that I could not return to Hamburg [*for*] a day or two . . .").† On the other hand, a little further on in the letter of July 30 we read: "You know that I had

* The original of this letter is in London.

† It seems most probable that Captain Ehrhardt meant *for* (not *in*) a day or two.

the privilege of being appointed already 12 years ago to the General Staffcorps in case of mobilisation. This also explains that I had been called in before the actual mobilisation began. In the course of my 9 days* activity in the Staff I have seen a lot of enormously interesting information”

From this statement it follows that Captain Ehrhardt's "activity in the Staff" (to which he as a reservist was called from his important business of arranging the affairs of the Scandinavian Trading Company, organised in the early summer of 1914 to break the approaching British blockade) *began not later than July 21—that is, two days before the dispatch from Vienna of the Ultimatum* designed to set Europe ablaze, of whose terms Berlin then and since claimed total ignorance. And it would thus appear that the Sunday on which he was unexpectedly summoned from Hamburg, expecting to return for "a day or two," could not have been Sunday, the 26th, after the Serbian Ultimatum had been dispatched and the storm-clouds began to gather. It must have been Sunday, July 19, a date when nobody in Europe outside the Prussian war-camarilla suspected trouble, when not even great financiers and statesmen in Allied countries had learned of the plot which Captain Ehrhardt (too exhausted to realise what he was divulging) obligingly informs the future historian had then been matured. The first dispatch in the British Blue Book is dated the following day, July 20, and here we find Sir Edward Grey telling the German Ambassador, "I had not heard anything recently, except that Count Berchtold . . . had deprecated the suggestion that the situation was grave. . . ."

If Captain Ehrhardt was summoned to his work on the General Staff on Sunday, July 19, we must account for the fact that he wrote a letter on the Hamburg office paper, dated July 24, by supposing *either* that he returned to Hamburg

* The figure "9" in the original manuscript is quite unmistakable: see Facsimile IV.

for a few hours on the 24th, *or* (more probably) that he had taken some of his office paper with him to Berlin.*

It is indeed true that Captain Ehrhardt's letter of the 30th shows that he must have been in Berlin on July 29, if not even on the very morning of the 30th†: and this would lead to the conclusion that he left Hamburg on July 21, or at the earliest on July 20. Some discrepancy there undoubtedly is between the statements that he left Hamburg on a *Sunday* and that his activity in the Staff had lasted for *9 days*. But, tired-out as the writer was, it is not difficult to suppose that he wrote "9 days" in mistake for "10" or "11 days": whereas it is incredible, however great his exhaustion, that he should have written of his "9 days activity in the Staff," if he had not been called up till Sunday, the 26th—*i.e.* 5 days before he wrote the letter.

In any case, whether Captain Ehrhardt left Hamburg for his work on the Staff on July 19 (as his letter certainly seems to prove) or on the 26th, one point emerges clearly from his statements. He was not merely warned to hold himself ready. M. Jules Cambon, French Ambassador at Berlin, in a dispatch dated May 6, 1913 (French Yellow Book, 3), wrote: "The mobilisation of the German Army is not restricted to the recall of reservists to their barracks. There

* There is no difficulty in either supposition. For in pre-war times the best trains between Hamburg and Berlin took less than four hours; whilst, if the letter of the 24th was written in Berlin, the business details which it contains could easily have been communicated to Captain Ehrhardt by telephone from the Hamburg office. The reader must bear in mind that, in writing to his English correspondent on July 24, Captain Ehrhardt would certainly not have forgotten the desirability of concealing the fact that he had been called up for work on the Staff. That he blurted out the secret in his letter of the 30th was no doubt due to his partial collapse under the heavy strain of his "9 days activity."

† It is clear from the letter that Captain Ehrhardt knew of the telegram sent off at 1 p.m. on the 29th by the Czar to the Kaiser concerning Russian mobilisation, and that he was aware of the fact that the General Staff would so manipulate the general position as to force the Kaiser into war with Russia. In other words, he must also have known that on this same day Bethmann-Hollweg had conveyed to M. Sazonof in Petrograd, through the German Ambassador, Pourtalès, the fatal threat that "any further progress of Russian military preparations" would involve war, and "Germany would immediately attack," a threat which really rendered unnecessary the clumsy lie about German mobilisation published (and contradicted) by that submissive *agent provocateur*, the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, on July 30.

is in Germany a preliminary measure which we have not got, and which consists in warning officers and men of the Reserve to hold themselves ready for the call, in order that they may make the necessary arrangements. It is a general call to 'attention,' and it requires an incredible spirit of submission, discipline, and secrecy such as exists in this country, to make a step of this kind possible. If such a warning were given in France, a thrill would run through the whole country, and it would be in the papers the next day."

But the summoning of Ehrhardt to his post in the Great General Staff was more than a preliminary measure. He was not warned; he was called up; and before he left for Berlin, whether or not he is sincere in saying, "I had no idea that I could not return . . . [for] a day or two," he at any rate made his will, and, man of business to the last, finished his negotiations to get 350,000 marks in cash from a bank on some securities, doubtless attempting to use his advance information of what his colleagues were planning in full knowledge that a great financial crisis was coming and that he must act quickly before his bankers got wind of it.

Lastly, one sentence in the letter, considering the source from which it comes, is extremely significant. For Ehrhardt, writing on July 30—and writing, it must be remembered, with special knowledge—says: "I also have no idea how the office is as of the 45 German male employees I guess that 35 have since joined the army." Yet the Germans have persistently denied that their mobilisation had already begun before it was officially announced, and on July 30, the day on which Ehrhardt wrote his letter, the German Foreign Minister, von Jagow, assured Sir Edward Goschen (British Blue Book, 98): "Beyond recall of officers on leave . . . Imperial Government had done nothing special in way of military preparations."

It was not till July 31 that the German Government proclaimed the *Kriegsgefahr*, or danger of war; and full mobilisation, which was at once followed by a declaration of war against Russia, was officially announced on August 1.

How the Staff forced War.

On the day when Ehrhardt was writing in Belgium, M. Cambon wired from Berlin to Paris (French Yellow Book, 109): "I pointed out to the Secretary of State [von Jagow] that he had himself told me that Germany would only consider herself obliged to mobilise if Russia mobilised on her German frontiers, and that this was not being done. He replied that this was true, but that the heads of the army were insisting on it, for every delay is a loss of strength for the German army. . . ."*

The unusual candour of this remark is made clear by what Ehrhardt wrote on the subject. "Russia," he says, "has made excuses, and always has negotiated but during the whole time mobilised and made preparations against Austria and against us. Even I think that the Czar has been either a dupe to various influences or a liar for as far as I could see he personally interfered with our Emperor to deny that in his empire military preparations were made and during all this time full mobilisation in Russia has been ordered by him."

Here what Ehrhardt says is of the greatest importance, for it enables us to test the competence of this business man, only a captain in the army, to speak on these high matters. Was he simply repeating office gossip, or did he know?

A few days before Ehrhardt stood before a firing squad outside the fortress of Antwerp the German White Book was published, a month after the letter we are considering was written. From this White Book the world learned for the first time of the exchange of telegrams between the Kaiser and the Czar. The first message from the Czar was dated "Peterhof Palace, July 29"; Nicholas begged William to restrain Austria, and said, "I fear that very soon I shall be unable to resist the pressure exercised upon me and that I shall be forced to take measures which will lead to war."

* Even by July 21 Germany had sent out the warning that precedes her actual mobilisation; and by the next day the French Ambassador in Berlin noted that "the weakness of the Berlin Bourse continues," and that "pessimistic rumours are current" (French Yellow Book, 15 and 17). Germany, in fact, knew very well that her own military party would prevent any peace, and would proceed forthwith from mobilisation into war.

Ehrhardt, a day later, evidently knew the gist of this telegram. Our captain regards the Czar as a liar or a dupe, because: "during all this time full mobilisation in Russia has been ordered by him." The Allies, until within the past few months, would have said that Ehrhardt had been misinformed, that full Russian mobilisation was not ordered until some hours after the Ehrhardt letter had been written. But the revelations of the Suchomlinof trial in Petrograd in the autumn of 1917 proved that the Czar had sanctioned general mobilisation on the night of the 29th, though he afterwards unsuccessfully attempted to rescind the order by telephone. Ehrhardt apparently at once learned this, which we have only just found out. His letter continues:

"Our Emperor will not yet believe our absolutely reliable reports, but we the Staff can prove it to the Emperor and in the interest of the German Empire the Emperor who is earnestly religious and for peace must put the question to Russia—we cannot wait any longer. . . . It is going against our Emperor's nature, but facts are there."

The world knows what followed. This paragraph is probably the best piece of direct evidence yet available in favour of the theory that war was forced by the Staff against the will of the Kaiser. The whole difficulty in negotiating with Germany has always been that we never knew the exact powers of those with whom we treated; and the General Staff were always capable of throwing over any other authority. As Sir Edward Grey said, speaking of Prince Lichnowsky, in the House of Commons on August 27, 1914: "The German Ambassador worked for peace; but real authority at Berlin did not rest with him and others like him; and that is one reason why our efforts for peace failed."*

Special Information.

If further proof is needed that Ehrhardt knew the most closely guarded secrets of European diplomacy, it is to be found

* Sir E. Grey's statement has since been confirmed by Prince Lichnowsky himself: see *My Mission to London, 1912-14* (London: Cassell & Co.), pp. 29-30.

in the passage in which he is pleading with his English correspondent to help to keep Great Britain out of the war: "If your Government has undertaken to prevent our fleet to attack the French coast let them say so but say that this is the only one condition to remain neutral. This obligation is already a mistake but if you say so openly we know where we are and can go with our fleet against Russia and will leave the French alone with our fleet. What we cannot have is the uncertainty and the constant danger of the threatening presence of your fleet. We must expect that at any moment she may fall upon us. Remove this danger and everything will be allright. We must know where we are this at least is the feeling."

Ehrhardt politely uses the phrase, "if your Government has undertaken," but the rest of the paragraph shows that he felt sure of his ground. He thought that the British Government had so undertaken. Yet this secret had been most closely guarded. It was not known to the British Parliament, who received their first intimation on the subject in Sir Edward Grey's speech on Monday, August 3. What is still more remarkable, the actual official assurance, given by Sir Edward to M. Paul Cambon on August 2, three days after Ehrhardt's letter, is couched in language which recalls that used by Ehrhardt. The assurance was that, subject to the support of Parliament, and subject to the German Fleet actually taking such action, "if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against French coasts or shipping, the British Fleet will give all the protection in its power" (French Yellow Book, 137, and British Blue Book, 148). Sir Edward quoted this passage in the House on August 3, 1914.

On the same date Sir Edward Grey read to the House of Commons a letter he had written to the French Ambassador, in which he pointed out that "consultation between experts" did not bind either country. "The disposition," he went on, "of the French and British Fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war." The letter further stated that either Government

should immediately confer with the other if there "were grave reasons to fear" an attack on one or both from a third Power. In the House, Lord Charles Beresford at once asked, "What is the date of that?" Paul Ehrhardt might very likely have been able to tell him.* Sir Edward Grey replied, "The 22nd November, 1912." The letter was reprinted in the British Blue Book, 105, Enclosure 2.

But there is an even more significant intimation of Ehrhardt's knowledge of the bearing of all this on immediate events. The council held at Potsdam on July 29 was expected by the General Staff to result in immediate war in accordance with their celebrated Time-table. It did not, for two main reasons, the chief of which, for our purpose, was that only that afternoon had Bethmann Hollweg begun to suspect, from the reception given to his "bargains" by England, that all the cards were not so fortunately placed as he had hoped. Those bargains were closely connected with the use which might be made of the English Fleet to protect the north and west coasts of France.

It may have been an axiom of the higher diplomacy that, inasmuch as France's friendship with England had enabled her to concentrate her fleet in the Mediterranean, and thereby allowed the English Fleet to concentrate in the North Sea, England was bound, by that very fact, to protect the coasts which France's confidence in her had left so undefended. But this axiom, it is no exaggeration to say, came as a surprise to very many Englishmen when Sir Edward Grey enunciated it in the House of Commons on August 3. It was indeed one of the main arguments which prevented Englishmen from standing out, and it would no doubt have operated (though M. Cambon was warned not to count on it) even if the Kaiser had not violated the neutrality of Belgium. But it was far from being common knowledge. To Ehrhardt in Berlin, however, it was a simple truism five days before the English Foreign Minister had mentioned it at all.

* And yet even the German Ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, was kept in ignorance of this Anglo-French Agreement "till the last days of July, 1914": see *My Mission to London*, p. 30.

Ehrhardt was also evidently aware of the importance attached to the British Fleet by Bethmann Hollweg, whatever the General Staff may have thought of it; for he seems quite cognisant of the terms of the offer alluded to in Sir Edward Grey's speech of August 3, that the German Fleet would not attack the north coast of France if England remained neutral.

But, as Sir Edward pointed out, honour and interest alike forbade England to stand out. If France had to withdraw her Mediterranean Fleet to meet a menace in the North it would endanger English trade routes; and if England had to send a fleet to the Mediterranean it would weaken the defence of the English Channel. That England should remain impassive while French colonies were taken and France was beaten, so long as Germany did not take French territory as distinct from colonies, was incredible. It would involve the loss by France of "her position as a Great Power." Apart from that (British Blue Book, 101), "it would be a disgrace for us [England] to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover."

No wonder that on August 6, 1914, Mr. Asquith, speaking as Prime Minister in the House of Commons, characterised it as an "infamous proposal," pointing out that, in return for "the betrayal of our friends and the dishonour of our obligations," England was only to receive a promise "given by a Power which was at that very moment announcing its intention to violate its own treaty and inviting us to do the same." In a later passage he spoke of the same proposals "which we might have thrown aside without consideration and almost without an answer." Ehrhardt's attitude with regard to them is precisely the same as Bethmann Hollweg's, at a time when this was scarcely possible had he not shared the most essential knowledge of the Imperial Chancellor's policy.

There had been public discussion for years in England and France regarding the obligations of the Entente Cordiale, but the proposal to protect the French coast, without going

to war, does not seem to have been suggested in Press or Parliament. Captain Ehrhardt's remark indicates that in Franco-British conversations previous to the war, as yet unpublished, the point had been raised, and that the German General Staff had learned this and was anxious to buy England's neutrality at the comparatively low price of guaranteeing the safety of the French coast.

The Rape of Belgium.

Captain Ehrhardt's letter was written, it seems clear from the context, in Belgium. He says: "I cannot say from obvious reasons where I am writing from and how I am getting the letter posted but I can pass it now the Belgian frontier . . ."

Had the letter been written in Germany, the day before the "danger of war" was proclaimed, there would have been no difficulty in posting it. And, in any case, *it would not have had to pass the Belgian frontier*. It would go through Holland. The writer must have been too tired to think, to give himself away so completely. Even without the further fact that we know that Ehrhardt was arrested in Ostend as a spy, in the possession of instructions and a code, and shot in Antwerp, the phrase quoted would admit of no other explanation.

There is no indication in the letter when he entered the inviolable territory of neutral Belgium to "spy out the land" for the army that was to follow. His long years of business in Antwerp evidently led to his being chosen to do whatever the work assigned him may have been. From his remark about his "9 days activity," and from the extraordinary knowledge he shows of events which on July 30 had just happened, we may infer that he wrote the letter almost at once on reaching Belgium, perhaps in the train on his way from Berlin.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note that Ehrhardt, leaving Hamburg on Sunday, July 19, in a great hurry, made his will. Would he have done this had he been simply going

to Berlin to carry out Staff duties in the capital? Or had his share (not without danger) in the rape of Belgium been assigned to him long ago, so that, when he was called up, he was simultaneously warned to be ready to cross the frontier?

On July 31, when Ehrhardt had already been in Belgium at least one day, the Secretary-General of the Belgian Foreign Office asked the German Minister at Brussels about Germany's intentions, recalling Bethmann Hollweg's promise to the Belgian Minister in Berlin in 1911 that "Germany had no intention of violating Belgian neutrality." The German Minister replied "that he was certain that the sentiments expressed at that time had not changed" (Belgian Grey Book, 12).

The Belgian Grey Book also shows that, within two days of the pacific assurances given by the German Minister at Brussels, the German Government had sent its famous ultimatum, announcing, *in German*, that it intended to violate Belgian soil, "if necessary by force." It is a curious example of the complete lack of humour in German diplomacy that the German Minister should have chosen the day after this ultimatum (or rather the middle of the night) to complain to the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of all places in the world) of the alleged breaches of international law by France in Germany (Belgian Grey Book, 20 and 21).



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