

Papen Offered to Betray Hitler, Earle Asserts in Defending Intercession

George H. Earle explained yesterday why he interceded with a German court to free from jail Franz von Papen, that old and once sly fox who stands as the world's symbol of Adolf Hitler's system of diplomacy and-terror.

He did it, Earle said, because Papen twice offered to betray Hitler and the whole Nazi hierarchy to the Allies.

These offers were made in the grimmest years of the death struggle—1943 and 1944—and Earle believes they could have been exploited.

More than that, Earle said yesterday, he also believes that it was Papen who persuaded Hitler not to strike at Turkey and take the Middle East. Instead the German armies turned against Russia.

INFLUENCED COURT

Since Earle, in two forthright and aggressive tours of duty as U. S. Minister to Austria (1933-34) and Bulgaria (1940-42) made himself something of a world symbol of American hostility to Nazism, his affidavit "strongly influenced" the German court hearing Papen's appeal.

So the judges said, last Wednesday, when they let Papen out of jail, where he had served three years and four months, including the long

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Papen Offered to Betray Hitler Twice, Earle Says

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months of trial at Nuremberg, where the international War Crimes Tribunal freed him while condemning Goering, Ribbentrop, Keitel and the rest.

The lurid atmosphere of wartime Istanbul, a cockpit of high politics and low intrigue, was recreated vividly by Earle in telling the story of Papen's offer to double-cross his master.

WORKED FOR BOTH SIDES

Many of the details still cannot be publicly recounted, but as in all the books, there were lovely women agents, double-agents who worked for both sides, trigger-men to attempt or foil the necessary killings; all the apparatus of pressure and espionage of modern war.

Earle had a special status in that feverish city on the Sea of Marmora. Technically he was assistant attache for the U. S. Navy.

Actually he was President Roosevelt's special emissary to the Balkans with the specific mission of persuading Earle's friend, Czar Boris of Bulgaria, to desert the Germans and take Bulgaria out of the war; or, failing that, to keep the Bulgarians immobile.

Earle possessed an extraordinary background for the task, including, at that period, the absolute confidence of the two key men: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Boris.

WAS HARVARD MAN

Earle was, like Roosevelt, a Harvard man ('33), a millionaire, of impeccable lineage and social background, besides having a 20-year record as one of the best polo players in the country.

A hero of the First World War (Navy Cross), Earle left the Republican Party to follow Roosevelt in 1932 and as the first Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania in half a century (1934-38) became the architect of the Commonwealth's "Little New Deal."

Before and after that eventful term he was in the Balkans, as Minister to Austria during the tragic Dollfuss days, and later as Minister to Bulgaria during the equally tragic years when Nazism spread like leprosy over the map of Europe. He was there, in fact, when the Germans marched in, on March 1, 1941, to seize their 11th foreign capital in three years.

NEGOTIATIONS END

The Turkish mission did not go well. Hitler intervened too decisively, and Boris died, at the climax of his secret negotiations with Earle.

"I've checked what happened from a dozen sources," Earle said yesterday, "and this is the story. I warned the King that I could not indefinitely prevent Allied bombing of his capital and his country. I set a deadline—10 days, in fact—by which I must have his final decision. He answered that he would make his decision within that time."

HITLER WANTED THEM

"But Hitler summoned Boris to Germany, and instructed him to order Bulgarian troops into Russia. There were 300,000 fine Bulgarian soldiers, really crack troops, I think, doing nothing, watching the Turkish border, and Hitler wanted them. Boris refused. There was nothing else he could do. His soldiers thought of the Russians as the people who had freed them from the Turks."

"So they flew Boris home at 15,000 feet, gave him an oxygen mask for the altitude, and he died next day: there was poison in the mask."

Earle then informed Washington there was no longer any reason to defer air attack upon Bulgaria, and Sofia became a target.

ATTRACTED BY SPEECHES

Negotiations meanwhile had been opened between Earle and Papen. They knew each other slightly, from the tense days a decade before in Austria, where Earle was denouncing anti-Semitism and Papen was preparing for the coup of Anschluss.

"My attention was first attracted," Earle said, "by the extraordinary speeches Baroness von Papen was making throughout Turkey, ridiculing and denouncing the Nazi leaders as besotted men ridden by savage inferiority complexes. Papen and his wife were close, so I knew he must have approved."

"Papen was a devout Catholic. It was told, and no good Catholic could be a Nazi. He had signed the Concordat with the Vatican and was regarded as the leader of the German Catholics, their protector against the mad excesses of the Nazis."

The intermediary in these talks was another German Catholic: Baron Kurt von Lersner. Earle knew this man as an exile from Germany because he was pro-Jewish and so condemned under the infamous Nuremberg Code. He believed in his good faith.

NOTORIOUS CONNIVER

Now Papen was notoriously a conniver. He had bungled the job of directing German sabotage in the United States in 1914 and 1915, but there, as throughout his life, "he demonstrated a curious gift for survival," Earle said.

Earle knew, as did the world, that the Nazis repeatedly tried to kill Papen, did kill his secretary, sentenced Papen to death on "The Night of the Long Knives" during the Rohm Purge of June 30, 1934. So the Istanbul talks went on.

"Lersner hated the Nazis and loved Germany," Earle said.

Earle was, accordingly, pleased and excited but not surprised when a tentative offer of a separate peace was suggested in 1942.

"It was general, too tenuous, but encouraging," Earle remembers. He did not then know it but the anti-Hitler conspiracy which was to flare and collapse in the putsch of July 20, 1944, was taking shape.

Early in 1944, Papen made a hard offer.

"He offered to fly me secretly into

Germany, meet the generals with whom he was conspiring, and arrange for the capture and delivery of the Nazi leaders," Earle said.

"They would offer, he told me, 'unconditional surrender with a condition': the Russians were not to be allowed in Europe, either into Germany or the territory then controlled by the Germans. We could do what we liked with the Nazis, execute them if we pleased, and we could also use the German Army to keep the Russians out."

In effect, the Western Allies were invited to change sides, and begin fighting the Russians with a Germany purged of the Nazis.

REJECTED BY ROOSEVELT

This offer was explained to President Roosevelt at once, by courier, and rejected: the President ruled that all such attempts at negotiations must be made through the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower.

Earle then returned to Washington to press for deeper consideration of the plan—he had already decided that Germany must collapse and the enemy of the West would be the victorious Soviet armies.

"But the President explained that the Normandy invasion would soon be launched, that the Germans would be beaten in a few months and that Russia, made up of so many peoples speaking so many languages, need not be worried about and would, in fact, fall apart after the war," Earle said.

THREATENS RED EXPOSE

This disagreement over major policy flowered later into what the former Governor calls his "exile to Samoa." That happened on March 25, 1945, when he returned from Turkey and informed President Roosevelt that unless he were specifically forbidden within one week, he meant to begin telling the American people that Russia was a major threat to them.

"The President at once wrote in stern terms: 'I specifically forbid you to make public any information or opinion about an ally that you may have acquired while in office or in the service of the U. S. Navy.' The President also revoked our agreement I was to resign my commission as Commander, and turned me over to the Navy Department, which sent me to Samoa as deputy governor of 16,000 natives there."

CHURCHILL SAVES PAPEN

Earle said that he thinks Winston Churchill "actually saved Papen's life on his return from Turkey because Churchill made a taunting broadcast predicting that Hitler will now finish the job of murdering Papen which he has attempted so often before, or words to that effect."

As for Papen's role in keeping Turkey neutral, Earle offered this analysis:

"Turkey's foreign policy consists of the single objective of keeping the Russians out of Turkey and out of the Bosphorus. I respect and admire the Turks. But in the war they sold to both sides. And our policy was split. The British Foreign Office wanted Turkey to join the Allies for the moral effect."

FEARED BULGARIANS

"The British War Office dreaded Turkey coming in; that would have meant bringing the Bulgarians in as active fighters, the Turks had no air force and no mechanization, its cities could not have been saved, nor European Turkey held any more than Crete was held. The Germans would have got the bases to support Rommel, the Middle East would have fallen, the war been prolonged and hundreds of thousands more of Allied soldiers killed."

In all this tangle of twisted motives, as traced through agents who changed sides, Earle believed Papen's advice was decisive in Hitler's decision not to move against the Dardanelles.

"As it happens, I don't think that Papen urged the Russian campaign as a substitute, because he was a good friend of Count von der Schulenberg, the German Ambassador at Moscow, who was against that enterprise," Earle adds, "but in fact that was the alternative, and that's what Hitler did, with the results we know."

REASON FOR ACTION

In the circumstances Earle felt it his duty, when Papen's son appealed for a statement, to summarize in an affidavit his belief that Papen attempted to double-cross the Nazis. He is glad the German denazification court chose as it did, to classify the 70-year-old Papen as "an offender" instead of "a major offender" in the special categories of responsibility for the Nazi outrage.

Now 58, and currently in the middle of an ambitious diet in which he has lost 24 pounds in 30 days, Earle has devoted himself since the war to campaigning for an aroused opinion on relations with Russia.

RAPS ABANDONMENT OF CHINA

He regards "the abandonment of Chiang Kai-shek in China, the refusal to stiffen the Nationalists with American money and American officers," as "catastrophic," and he also said yesterday he is deeply upset "at the current opinion in Washington that nothing can be held against the Russians outside this continent; which may mean we'll wind up with 150,000,000 Americans against the rest of the world."

He thought the Russians were the major danger in 1944—bitter and anti-Nazi though he had proved himself—and time, he thinks, has justified him.

"Suppose," he says today, "we had accepted Papen's offer?"

The expose of Communist spy infiltration into the United States is told by Robert Stripling. It begins in *The Inquirer* today.