

Top Secret MI5 Files of First World War Go Online

EMBARGOED UNTIL Thursday 10 April 2014, London, 00:01 GMT – Today The National Archives is making over 150 top secret MI5 files of organisations and individuals involved in espionage or under surveillance during the period of the First World War available online for the first time.

They contain a wealth of material including interrogation reports, letters, postcards and photos relating to individuals and groups under surveillance. The files that have been digitised were created during the First World War period (1914-1919) but in many cases extend beyond that period, depending on the activities of the individual or organisation. They are part of the wider security service personal file series (file ref: KV 2) held by The National Archives.

They contain details of spies operating around the world, largely of British, German, Dutch or American origin, but also famous individuals such as Edith Cavell (File ref: KV 2/822), the British nurse who saved soldiers from German-occupied Belgium; Mata Hari, the notorious female spy and entertainer; Arthur Ransome, author of *Swallows and Amazons* and Ezra Pound, American poet and author (KV 2/875 and KV 2/876).

Dr Stephen Twigge, Records Specialist at The National Archives said: 'The files in The National Archives' collection reveal the importance of the security service in safeguarding the nation during the First World War. Now that we have made the files available online as part of our First World War 100 programme, people across the globe can discover the secret history behind the war for themselves.'

The files also contain intelligence reports and surveillance of organisations such as the Bolshevik Party, British Communist Party - and even the Boy Scout Association (KV 2/3576). There are also files on influential political figures including known fascists, communists and Russian leaders such as Leon Trotsky (KV 2/502) and Vladimir Lenin (KV 2/585).

This forms part of The National Archives' [First World War 100](#) programme of digitised releases and events to mark the centenary. For more on espionage and the First World War, The National Archives will be holding a conference on 28 June, entitled ['War and peace - Diplomacy, Espionage and the First World War'](#).

Highlights within the files include the following spies, famous individuals and organisations:

Edith CAVELL (KV 2/822): British Nurse, arrested, tried by German military court and executed. Contains photos of Nurse CAVELL's grave and other martyrs' headstones at the site of the execution in Belgium (pp4-6). The photos were sent by the French authorities to MI5 to pass on to her mother (p18). There is a letter in response from Edith Cavell's mother, thanking them for the photos (pp19-20). See also **Gaston George QUIEN KV 2/844:** French. Quien was put on trial in France in 1919 for his part in betraying Edith CAVELL's organisation to the Germans.

Mata HARI (KV 2/1 and KV 2/2): notorious female spy and entertainer, convicted and executed for espionage on behalf of Germany. The file includes photos from publications and newspapers about her arrest, conviction and execution including letters and an interrogation report.

George Veux BACON (KV 2/4 and KV 2/5): German spy in the First World War. An American journalist recruited in New York, he was sentenced to death in 1917, later commuted to life imprisonment. Bacon was found in possession of materials for writing invisible messages; these were discovered after chemical tests were carried out on socks in his possession. File includes a letter to the Home Secretary from Bacon begging for a pardon from the British Government. In it he states: 'The adventure for which I was punished was a foolish and theatrical one [...] not [done] through hatred of Great Britain or her allies, but simply for excitement.' He goes on to talk of his English ancestry and that Sir Frances Bacon is a relative of his. He also states that 'there is no financial reason for asking for a pardon [...] but the blood in my veins is English.' Contains a small passport sized photograph of Bacon (KV 2/4 p16).

Arthur Mitchell RANSOME (KV 2/1903) (author of Swallows and Amazons): British journalist. Went to Russia as correspondent of the Daily News. Considered an ardent Bolshevik. Married Trotsky's secretary (p89 and p147). Includes a small photocopy of a photo of Ransome (p42).

Leopold VIEYRA (KV 2/3): German First World War spy of Dutch origin. Originally from Amsterdam, he moved to London in 1909 via Paris as a manager of a troupe called 'The Midgets', later became a manager of a 'bijou cinema on Finchley Road' and became a film agent operating between England and Holland (pp48-49). He was discovered to be a German spy, passing naval intelligence to the Germans using secret writing. He reportedly scratched messages into the edges of his films. Sentenced to death in 1916, subsequently reduced to ten year's imprisonment. Includes photo of Vieyra (p52).

Sidney George REILLY (KV 2/827): British, so-called 'Ace of Spies', worked for British Intelligence in the Soviet Union after the Revolution, was lured back into the USSR in 1925, arrested and executed. The file reveals that Reilly was a Russian-born Jew who was engaged in business activity in New York in 1915, when he came under suspicion from the Russians as being a German spy. File includes a picture of him (p3) and his wife, the actress Pepita Bobadilla, in a newspaper clipping on their marriage (p96) as well as their marriage certificate and reports of bigamy (pp70-71).

Kurt JAHNKE (KV 2/755): German. Having reportedly served in the US armed forces before the First World War, JAHNKE became an ingenious and successful saboteur operating from the German Consulate in San Francisco in 1915 and 1916. When the USA came into the war he moved his base to Mexico City. Description of him having 'peculiar eyes like a pig' being 'very fond of woman' and a 'frightful snob' (p60). Photocopy of small photograph of Jahnke included with title 'The most deadly Sabotage team in history'. (p8).

Fritz Joubert DUQUESNE (KV 2/1953): African/American. Arrested in New York in 1918 masquerading as an Australian whose identity, it was reported, had been arranged by German intelligence. First came to the attention during Boer War. File contains report of bombing of British ship 'Tennyson' which Duquesne was behind (pp89-90), report confirming Duquesne a German intelligence officer (pp122-123) and group photo featuring Duquesne (p135).

Sir Roger CASEMENT (KV 2/6, KV 2/7, KV 2/8 and KV 2/9): British. Branded a renegade and traitor, he was hanged for his part in working with Germany and Irish nationalists in planning the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916. File includes: Reports from British Prisoners of War re: Casement visiting them whilst interned and recruiting for the Irish Free Brigade (KV 2/6 p113). Letter in which the British consul offers £5,000 for Casement's arrest (KV 2/6 p115).

BOY SCOUT ASSOCIATION (KV 2/3576) – Contains reports about the impact of the war on the German Scout movement and the political considerations concerning the relationship with the British Scouts and other scout organisations in Europe. There are letters noting objections to German scouts attending the international jamboree in London Olympia (p163), notes about the 'red' boy scout movement and its influence on British Scouts (p140). There is also a note requesting permission for French scouts to send courier pigeons with messages from England to France at the end of the war (p141).

For media enquiries please contact Rebecca Simpson, Press Officer at The National Archives on 0208 392 5277 or by email: press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Notes to Editors:

Spokespeople available:

Dr Stephen Twigge is Head of the Modern Records Team at The National Archives. Stephen joined The National Archives in 1999. Stephen was formerly a Post Doctoral Research Fellow at the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He has published a number of books and articles on cold war history including German Unification 1989-1990, Berlin in the Cold War 1948-1990, British Intelligence, Avoiding Armageddon and Planning Armageddon.

More on the [KV 2 file series](#): This series contains selected files from the First and Second World War periods and the inter-war years on suspected spies and double agents, renegades and suspected renegades, German intelligence (Abwehr) officers, Japanese intelligence agents, communist sympathisers and Soviet agents, and other groups in which the Security Service took an interest (including pacifist and anti-conscription groups).

First World War 100 - The National Archives First World War Centenary Programme
[First World War 100](#) - a new digital platform - has been created to guide people through the vast collection of historic records, letters, wills, maps, photographs, illustrations and artworks held by The National Archives. Adding content throughout the five year programme, [First World War 100](#) will be the central hub for the public to search and view official First World War records.

About The National Archives:

For the record, for good...The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archive of the UK government and England and Wales, we look after and make available to the public a collection of historical records dating back over 1,000 years, including records as diverse as Domesday Book and MI5 files. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk www.legislation.gov.uk