

WHY OTTO JOHN DEFECTED THRICE

Hugh Trevor-Roper seeks to explain the mysterious journeyings of a tragic German who died last week

TO CROSS the lines once in a time of ideological war is common enough, indeed part of the necessary lubrication of the secret service industry. To cross them twice looks like carelessness. To do so three times suggests a serious problem. In the 11 years from 1944 to 1955, the late Otto John defected, or seemed to defect, first from Nazi Germany to Britain, then from post-Nazi Germany to Russia, and finally back again. He was imprisoned in three countries — Portugal, Britain and Germany — and spent most of his last 40 years in a fourth, the guest of another distinguished exile, his old friend Prince Louis Ferdinand, heir to the phantom throne of Prussia. There he wrote two books explaining his actions which, however, remain a mystery.

The central mystery is his second 'defection', to Moscow in 1954, but if a solution is to be found, it must be sought in the first, to Britain in 1944, which at least is well documented.

Otto John was a cultivated and agreeable man, with a gift for making influential friends. In 1937 he began to study law in Berlin and so found himself one of a

group of young men, most of them lawyers in official posts, who were united by a determination to preserve or restore the *Rechtsstaat* which Hitler was systematically undermining. This group, which included Fabian von Schlabrendorff, the Bonhoeffer brothers and Hans von Dohnanyi, was a consistent intellectual nucleus of opposition, but in order to achieve anything they needed an alliance with the military leaders who, though they had helped Hitler to establish his dictatorship, were now frightened by his policy and alone had the power to frustrate it.

With them, though similarly ambiguous, were some members of the *Abwehr*, the German secret service, under the enigmatic Admiral Canaris, who enjoyed a safe haven for conspiracy in Franco's Spain. During the war, John was employed in the legal department of the Lufthansa airline, whose head was Klaus Bonhoeffer. This gave him a pass to travel freely on any Lufthansa flight, which would prove very useful. He became the emissary of the group to the British secret service in Spain.

When the conspiracy drew to its climax after the Allied landings in Normandy,

John was sent to Spain by Colonel Hansen, the more resolute successor of Canaris (who had been sacked by Hitler). His mission was to offer to Britain, on behalf of a post-Nazi government, a separate — and conditional — surrender on the Western front. He was told that only unconditional surrender on all fronts would be accepted. On 19 July, Hansen recalled him to Berlin, and the next day he was in the War Office in the Bendlerstrasse, where the conspirators awaited the return of Stauffenberg from his feat of tyrannicide. When Hitler was found to have survived, John escaped the general carnage thanks to his Lufthansa pass. He flew to Spain and the British secret service brought him from Lisbon to England.

The long agony of the conspiracy, its dismal end, the terrible fate of almost all his friends, were a profound shock to John. What, he asked himself, was the fundamental cause of that failure? He found it in the moral weakness, the lack of principle, the opportunism of its essential agents, the generals. In England he was employed largely in propaganda, advising the BBC and lecturing to German prisoners. He spent some time in a special camp in South Wales where some of the highest German officers were held, including Manstein, Brauchitsch and Rundstedt. Many of them had been his friends, but now he despised them, and perhaps they him. The German high command, he now believed, had been morally rotten, without civil courage or honour.

How different were Stauffenberg and his friends! Hitler was quite right when he described them, contemptuously, as a small aristocratic clique. Yes, they were very few, an elite, 'an aristocracy in the best sense'; they did not represent the General Staff — or indeed the German people. Afterwards, in 1948, John would assist the prosecution of Manstein and Brauchitsch for war crimes, and thereby make more enemies in Germany.

Among German generals in South Wales, with new English friends in London, John agonised over 'the burning question' of the moral decay of the German military leaders, how they had obeyed Hitler 'to the bitter end', although they had known, since the wholesale murders of 30 June 1934 'at latest', that he was 'a criminal'. The closest of his new friends was the historian Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, with whom he discussed the problem at length. It would be the subject of Wheeler-Bennett's next book, *The Nemesis of Power* (1953), in which he would acknowledge the documentary and oral evidence supplied by John.

Influential British support soon bore fruit for John. In 1950 he was appointed head of the new West German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution — protection, that is, against extremists of Right or Left, a German equivalent of MI5. In fact, he had been imposed by the British government, which vetoed all



'Any messages for me, Janet?'

of Scotland, occasionally calling in at remote fishing ports to receive news of his party's mounting disasters, which to his considerable pleasure included the defeat of Harcourt at Derby. Salisbury behaved more circumspectly. He spent several elections at one of his two French villas.

The ban on peers campaigning was in no way statutory, and Disraeli appears to have broken it when, in September 1876, he spoke at Aylesbury in the by-election resulting from his own elevation to the earldom of Beaconsfield (which he pronounced Beeconsfield) and produced one of his most memorable and typical anti-Gladstone mordancies. Of all the Bulgarian atrocities, he said, Gladstone's pamphlet denouncing them was the greatest. It was at once flippant and deadly and as such offended the earnest as much as it pleased those who liked mocking wit. But it was certainly not compatible with lordly non-intervention. Maybe he could have pleaded that he had only just become a peer, or that he was entitled to special dispensation for saying goodbye to his constituents, or that by-elections did not count.

When Rosebery was out of the way (as a party leader in 1896, although he lived until 1929), and Salisbury, with vastly greater achievements, followed him from leadership in 1902 (and died in 1903), that was the end of peer premierships, although not of the thought of them, as Curzon's false hopes showed in 1923, as did the flicker towards Halifax in 1940. Subsequent leaders campaigned more actively, although vigour was not exactly the right word either for Balfour's languid elegance or for Campbell-Bannerman's more rotund indolence. But at least they started with a large London meeting, generally in the Albert Hall, before retiring to their own constituencies, from which they made a few, but only a few, forays to other centres. Balfour's seat was in Manchester (where he lost) and Campbell-Bannerman's in the Stirling Burghs, where he was secure even on an ebb tide like that of 1900, let alone in the great Liberal flood of 1906.

Apart from any other differences, all those pre-1914 general elections, instead of being concentrated on a single national polling day, were spread over about a fortnight. Thus in 1905/6, the election straddled Christmas, which would be unthinkable today. Campbell-Bannerman delivered his Albert Hall launching address on 21 December, there was then a brief holiday respite before the campaign resumed, and the first results came on 12 January. Everything was complete, with the exception of Orkney and Shetland and the Scottish universities, by the end of the month. The pattern broadly was that the boroughs voted first and the counties followed in a leisurely way. This, like the first-past-the-post voting system itself, seemed almost hand-designed to exaggerate the extent of the swings. Thus Balfour's defeat, which came on the second day,

obviously had a bad effect on Conservative morale during the remaining dozen days of polling.

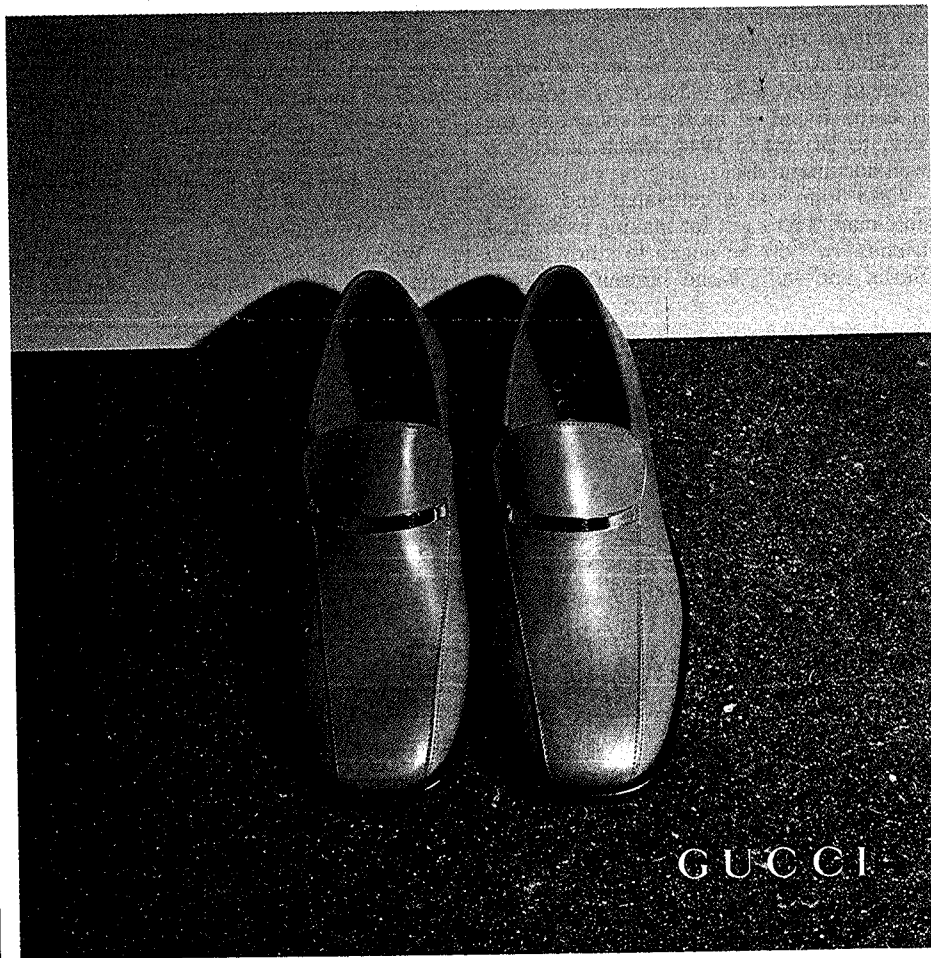
The first of the two 1910 elections followed almost exactly the seasonal pattern of the 1906 one, with, this time round, Asquith as Campbell-Bannerman's more powerful successor holding his opening Albert Hall rally before Christmas and polling beginning on 15 January. But this election, unlike that of 1906, produced a very evenly balanced result, the Liberals emerging with only two seats more than the Conservatives. The Liberal grip on government was at once made inevitable and more difficult to manage by the Irish Nationalists and the Labour party, who between them controlled 122 seats, being impossible allies of the Conservatives but difficult allies (particularly the Irish) of the Liberals.

It was also a more strenuously fought election. This was partly because of the injection of Lloyd George and Churchill dynamism into the campaign. Both of them were minor figures in 1906 who by 1910 had become major ministers and controversialists who attracted and loved attention. They also enjoyed rushing about the country infusing their activities with the drama of movement. In the first 1910 election, Lloyd George went to Grimsby (a highly marginal seat), held a great meeting there on polling day itself, which was thought rather bad form, and was rewarded

with a Liberal gain. In the second election of that year, Churchill, who had spoken in Cheshire in the early evening of a day when Balfour had addressed 10,000 people in the Grimsby fish docks, hired a special train, stopping on the way to have instalments of Balfour's speech handed to him, and replied in another Grimsby mass meeting at midnight. His Liberal eloquence was rewarded by the seat reverting to the Conservatives.

Not even this febrile atmosphere, however, could prevent the second election within 11 months being an anticlimax. The political situation was too tense for a reversion to the 1886 safety valve of a large tranche of uncontested seats. Instead, the same feeling expressed itself through a decline of nearly 20 per cent in the turnout. The result was an almost exact repeat of the first election of that year. The Liberals lost three seats and the Conservatives one to the minor parties. But within the stalemate no less than 60 seats changed hands between the major parties, thereby suggesting that there was much more room for local initiative and for candidate influence than in the two mass plebiscites of 1950 and 1951, when national campaigns, even before the television age, imposed like a great die-stamping machine almost uniform swings from John O'Groats to Land's End.

Lord Jenkins's most recent book is a biography of Gladstone.



the other candidates. And why not, for surely his credentials were good? But alas, it turned out badly. For by now the wartime Grand Alliance was dissolving and being replaced by the new alignments of the Cold War; Dr Adenauer did not like the purist Dr John and was quite willing to employ the opportunists of the past; and if the British had imposed their candidate as head of his new MI5, he would use the Americans to impose his candidate on his new MI6, the BND.

Even in Britain, MI5 and MI6 are sometimes at odds over jurisdiction and policy. In Germany it was far worse, for the head of the new BND was General Reinhard Gehlen, an unrepentant Nazi whose chief, indeed only, merit was that he had been Hitler's intelligence officer against Russia. He also had a particular hatred of Otto John as the persecutor of his hero, Field-Marshal Manstein.

For over three years, John and Gehlen faced each other in unequal contest. Then, on 20 July 1954, the tenth anniversary of the attempted putsch against Hitler was celebrated in Berlin. As one of the few survivors, John was there. After the celebration he withdrew to his hotel. Then he disappeared altogether. What had happened to him? Had he been kidnapped (for such things happened at that time)? Or — worse still — had he defected? Had the head of Germany's MI5 been a Russian spy all along? In Bonn and London embarrassed lips were sealed. Then the silence was broken by the voice of Dr John himself, broadcasting from somewhere in the Communist bloc, denouncing the rule of Dr Adenauer, his employment of former National Socialists in government, his policy of rearmament. To one man at least the news was welcome. 'Once a traitor, always a traitor,' was the comment of General Gehlen. To him, opposition to Hitler was still treason.

But the story did not end there. Eighteen months later, Dr John was able to give his own explanation. Suddenly, without warning, heavily disguised, he returned to West Germany in the car of a Danish journalist. He was arrested and put on trial. The prosecution demanded imprisonment for only two years. The court raised it to four, which he served in full. When he emerged he withdrew to the Austrian Tyrol. There he would write books and appeal, constantly but in vain, against his condemnation.

John maintained that after the celebration on 20 July he had called on an old friend in East Berlin (the Wall was not yet built), Dr Wohlgenuth. Dr Wohlgenuth, a versatile man, was not only a gynaecologist but also a jazz trumpeter, and he had recently widened his interests (though Dr John did not know this) by becoming a communist — jazz artists seem particularly susceptible to such temptations — an agent of the Stalinist dictator Walter Ulbricht. In Dr Wohlgenuth's flat, John

had been drugged and had woken up to find himself a prisoner of the KGB. He had been taken to Moscow and there had decided that his only chance of escape was to play along with the KGB and in the meantime work out a plan of deliverance — which he had ultimately achieved.

A likely story indeed! we may exclaim. But what are the alternative explanations? That he was a long-term communist secretly inserted, like Philby, into a vital position? This is hard to believe. In 1942-4 he had worked for a separate peace with the West. That was quite contrary to Soviet policy. Perhaps he had changed since then, but no evidence has been produced. The archives of the KGB and the Stasi have yielded nothing, and KGB officers have explicitly denied that he came willingly to Moscow. Dr Wohlgenuth has not, as far as I know, denied his story. There must be files on John in London and Berlin, but unless they yield clear evidence we can only say that his story has not been disproved. He had plenty of enemies, but apart from his broadcast they have failed to demonstrate any culpable collusion.

Must we then believe his story? Bizarre though it is, it seems, on the available evidence, the least improbable answer to the problem. But perhaps it is less simple than he suggests. John was clearly a man of courage and conviction. He was disgusted by the lack of such qualities in the German

establishment which he had trusted to overthrow Hitler and, being a passionate man, he reacted violently against them. His experiences in Adenauer's Germany, like the old agony of conspiracy, must have been frustrating. And then, on that evocative anniversary, what thoughts must have run through that intense mind! The communist leaders had joined in celebrating the martyrs whom Gehlen would still describe as traitors. Since the generals had betrayed their trust and the 'aristocracy in the best sense' had been slaughtered, may he perhaps have conceded too much in conversation as he drank, perhaps too deeply, with Dr Wohlgenuth and unconsciously put ideas into his head? After all, his brother Hans, who had been among those murdered as a fellow conspirator, had been a communist.

So, for Otto John, in 1954 as in 1944, 20 July ended in anticlimax, flight and disillusion. History, at first tragedy, had been repeated as something like farce. For of course in Moscow any illusions would be swept away — on both sides. The Russians got nothing further out of him and send him back to East Germany. Now that he is dead, perhaps new evidence will emerge which will confound me, but until then I shall see him as an example of Aristotle's tragic hero: a courageous and honourable man ruined by a damaging mistake, a fatal obsession.

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SOUNDING THE WRONG BELL

Neil Hamilton submits his personal financial records as proof that he didn't take Mr Al Fayed's cash

DOES Martin Bell know that being shot down in Bosnia is as nothing compared to being hunted down by the British press? There is nothing the media hates more than hypocrisy — in others. They will seek to find it in him. I hope he is as squeaky-clean as he claims. The sole object of the press now will be to expose anything which could be represented or misrepresented as dodgy — unless, as a ratpack member, he enjoys some diplomatic immunity.

Why is Bell standing against me as an 'anti-corruption' candidate when I have consistently denied any allegations of corruption? He should really be standing against Mohamed Al Fayed. But Fayed, of course, can't stand for parliament because he doesn't have a British passport — which is one reason why he has accused me of corruption.

British justice treats people as innocent unless proved guilty. How can Bell justify his corruption of British justice, inferentially denying me that presumption of innocence whilst popping up following a squalid, backstairs deal with Labour and the Liberals?

Bell's 'anti-corruption' candidature implies that I was corrupt. If I were, why has Fayed produced no hard evidence of his alleged cash payments? We know he has a penchant for secretly videotaping visitors to his office. Where are the tapes of me?

When cross-examined by Sir Gordon Downey, he indignantly denied any suggestion of bugging: 'This is bullshit, no disrespect,' he told a raised-eyebrowed Sir Gordon. Yet, within days, he submitted his secret videotapes of Carla Powell as supposed evidence of his false claim that Michael Howard took bribes of £1.5 million.

Fayed hands out wads of cash — but keeps no documentary records whatever. Cross-examined, he was preposterously confused even on the most fundamental question of all. When asked how much he allegedly gave me, he replied unhelpfully: '£40,000, £50,000, £60,000.'

So Fayed's evidence is full of inconsistency, contradiction and inaccuracy — lies would be a less polite description. But I

could not rely only on him discrediting himself. As he was known to be perfectly capable of acts of dishonesty, I had to prove my innocence positively.

Frank Johnson suggested the mechanism in *The Spectator* on 19 October 1996 — divulge details of all bank and credit card statements, property transactions and tax returns of my wife and myself. Thus I could prove there had been no suspicious deposits or alterations in spending patterns indicating receipt of large cash payments from Fayed.

I gave Downey all the surviving records from 1985. I even waived my right to taxpayer confidentiality to enable Downey's specialist forensic accountants to examine the Revenue's confidential files on me. There was an irony in all this — these Star Chamber methods were precisely what had irked Fayed in the DTI inquiry which had condemned him as a liar and a fraud.

Reversing the burden of proof was dangerous. Any unexplained deposits or gaps in the records could be damning and taken as proof that I had received cash.

I had, therefore, to identify and account for every single bank deposit — no mean feat. Deposits on my bank statements were often composite items. But the bank and I had discarded the pre-1990 paying-in slips. I had to do detailed detective work to plug the gaps in documents up to ten years old.

More than once I nearly had heart failure after some inexplicable discovery. For example, Barclaycard produced my credit card statements from 1985. I went through



'An orgasm pill and a cigarette, please ...'

them all late one night, checking the monthly payments due against debit items on my bank statements.

I had to correlate them all to avoid the inference that I paid the monthly bills with Fayed cash. Horror of horrors! Only one in 60 payments tallied with any of my cheque debits. At 2.30 a.m., after hours of worrying, I was feeling quite sick. How on earth was I going to explain this?

I could not bottle the problem up any longer. I woke my wife to share the burden. As she emerged groggily from slumber the answer emerged also. She paid her monthly Barclaycard bill and mine together with one composite cheque. Add the two together and the sums tallied. Blessed relief!

Again, in October 1996, just as my libel trial against the *Guardian* was due to begin, there were still several unexplained deposits on my bank statements. How was I going to explain these sums of up to £2,000 or so if I was cross-examined? Would the jury give me the benefit of the doubt?

Later, I was left with the same problem vis-à-vis Downey. After weeks of head-scratching, I had a brainwave. I vaguely recalled some tax refunds in the 1980s. I asked the Inland Revenue for details. Miraculously, the information they provided plugged the remaining gaps. At last I was able to explain everything. But I had worried myself silly about this for months after months.

My records do prove I made no deposits of cash and no suspicious alterations to my spending patterns, substituting cash payments for cheques. But that was not the end of it.

I also had to justify to Downey my accountant's tax advice and the deductions I claimed against my income tax liability. I wonder how many self-employed people would wish to experience a public examination on their tax returns for the last 12 years?

The *Guardian* then selectively leaked parts of my evidence, falsely claiming I admitted defrauding the Revenue. The editor of the *Times*, relying on the *Guardian*'s duff information, said I 'had not denied' this. He had not seen my full evidence to Downey, nor my tax returns, nor my accountant's advice; nor did he know the first thing about tax law. But he declared me, in consequence, unfit to be an MP.

The 'cash for questions' saga is largely a Fayed hoax which obtained credibility only because of the *Guardian*'s endorsement. The media have uncritically reported his lurid allegations and ignored the truth. When Fayed's stories are exposed as a farago of nonsense, as in Michael Howard's case, the truth gets minimal coverage.

I have endured an almost unprecedented scrutiny and invasion of my private life following dishonest and distorted media reporting of Fayed's false allegations. Martin Bell aims his 'anti-corruption' campaign at the wrong target.

OBITUARIES

Otto John, 88, Dies; German Spy-Catcher

Reuter

BONN—Otto John, 88, a top West German spy-catcher who caused one of the biggest scandals of the Cold War when he crossed to East Berlin and then fled back to the West a year later, died March 26 in a sanitarium in Innsbruck, Austria. The cause of death was not disclosed.

Mr. John insisted to the end of his life that he had been drugged and kidnapped by the East German secret service. But the exact circumstances of his disappearance in 1954 remain one of the great mysteries of the Cold War.

He portrayed his 1956 treason conviction and four-year jail sentence as an act of revenge by judges who had served the Nazi regime, which he had fought as part of the resistance.

Mr. John was named the first head of West Germany's counterintelligence service, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, in 1950.

He vanished in July 1954, reappearing a few days later in East Berlin, to the horror of his own government and Western allies. There he remained for more than a year before fleeing back to the West.

During his trial, the court saw speeches and statements made by Mr. John in East Germany, in which he vehemently criticized the policies of West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, as proof he had gone to—and remained in—the communist country voluntarily.

Mr. John insisted he had made the comments to guarantee his safety in East Germany. Certainly there were celebrated cases of West Germans being kidnapped to the East. Equally, there were hair-raising instances of very senior West German intelligence officers defecting to the East.

Mr. John was released from a West German jail in 1958 and began a long campaign to overturn his conviction and restore his tattered reputation.

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... remained unclear ...
the fall of the Berlin Wall and the release of previously secret files from East Germany's Stasi intelligence service.

Some members of the Stasi and the KGB who broke their silence after the end of the Cold War said Mr. John had come to the East of his own accord but stayed against his will.

Mr. John's fifth and last bid to have his case retried was rejected by a Berlin court in January 1996. The Federal Court of Justice ruled that Mr. John had voluntarily changed sides and then returned.

Mr. John had been a member of the World War II resistance movement against Adolf Hitler. After the abortive attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944, Mr. John escaped arrest and certain death by boarding a plane to Madrid. His brother was executed.

WILLIAM F. CURTIN World Bank Official

William Francis Curtin, 80, a retired World Bank chief procurement officer who was active in Catholic groups, died of arteriosclerosis March 28 at his home. He had lived in Silver Spring since the 1960s.

He worked for the World Bank for more than 30 years before retiring in 1978. In the 1970s, he had served three years as president of the Purchasing Management Association.

Mr. Curtin, a Washington native, was a graduate of St. John's College High School. He had attended Benjamin Franklin University. Before joining the World Bank, he had worked for the Franciscan Monastery in Washington.

Over the years, he had been active in groups at St. Bernadette's and St. John's Catholic churches in Silver Spring and at St. Aloysius Catholic Church in Washington. He had served as the official scorer of the Washington Catholic Duckpin League and was a member of the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name Society and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He had done volunteer work at nursing homes.

Survivors include his wife of 53 years, Joanna Herlihy Curtin, and a brother, Richard V., both of Silver Spring

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OBITUARIES

OTTO JOHN

Otto John, secret agent, died in Austria on March 26 aged 88. He was born in Germany on March 19, 1909.

Otto John was undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic figures in the history of Western and German intelligence. His bizarre story has become a classic spy case of claim and counterclaim, generating a mystery still unresolved at the time of his death.

Born in Marburg on the Lahn, John was educated in Wiesbaden before going on to study Law at Berlin University. In 1937 he joined the legal department of Luthfiansa's Berlin office. His immediate superior there was Klaus Bonhoeffer, brother of Dietrich.

As a key member of the courageous group of Germans involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944, he maintained close contact with the British secret intelligence service, M16, through Kim Philby. When, on July 22, the plot failed, John, still working for Luthfiansa, managed in the nick of time to secure a seat on a flight to Madrid. He thus evaded the Gestapo and the certain torture and death they promised.

From Spain he came to England, where he worked for British intelligence and the BBC. Charming, brave and debonair, he rapidly acquired an impressive set of friends: a talent exploited well in the Third Reich, where his circle ranged from Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, second son to the heir of the Hohenzollern dynasty, to leading Roman Catholic, conservative and left-wing members of the resistance. In London he became friends with John Wheeler-Bennett (for whom he did painstaking research work on the German army), Hugh Carlston-Greene and Maurice Oldfield (later to become a "C" of M16).

He then returned to Germany where he assisted with the trials of Nazi war criminals, including von Manstein, von Brauchitsch and von Rundstedt. By studying his war diary, John was able to prove that, contrary to his testimony, Manstein had known about the extermination of the Jews. At the same time he assisted in the defence of the former head of the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker (the father of the subsequent Federal President), on trial at Nuremberg for assisting in the Holocaust. There is some evidence to suggest that he began work for M15 at this time, helping Sir Roger Hollis to combat Soviet subversion.

In 1950, having returned to West Germany, John found himself appointed the first head of the West German security service (the equivalent of M15), the Bundesamt für Ver-

fassungsschutz. This post, it emerged thirty years later, had been given to John at the behest of British Intelligence. The West Germans had been invited to put forward names of candidates which the British would then consider. A dozen were advanced, all of which were, somewhat surprisingly, rejected, but the 13th — John's — was accepted.

It is hard to believe that references were not supplied by those British Intelligence officers whom John had befriended. Many West Germans considered him a peculiar choice for such an important job, and he soon turned to drink. John himself believed that a connection through marriage to the first President of the Federal Republic had landed him the prize.

In July 1954, however, while on a visit to West Berlin, John suddenly disappeared, only to re-surface in East Berlin, from where he proceeded to make several bitter and damaging public statements about the alleged ambitions of the new West German leadership and Konrad Adenauer, the first Federal Chancellor, whom he called a neo-Nazi renegade. Adenauer (at first inclined to believe that John had been kidnapped) was not at all amused.

Although it seemed obvious that John had defected, with all the serious implications for Western intelligence that such a defection carried, a decision was taken to play this down and to support the notion that he had been drugged, even though two zonal border officials had seen John and described him as "cheerful" on this trip East.

The circumstances of that incident have never been completely clarified; and because of the sensitive nature of John's work, many of his activities remain shrouded in mystery.

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Yet even upon this point confusion prevailed. Some friends, such as Clifton Child of the British Foreign Office, accepted John's version. Trevor-Roper, on the other hand, argued that John believed the things he was saying in East Berlin and genuinely feared a neo-Nazi revival. The British journalist Seton Delmer (who had worked with John during the war) attended one of his East German press conferences and had a private meeting with him; he was in no doubt at all that John was acting of his own free will. Yet Delmer was himself a shadowy figure when it came to Communist affairs and when John reappeared in the West, Delmer changed his testimony and said: "It was plain that John had been acting. There is no doubt that, whatever

his motivation, John had been deeply shaken by the decision to rearm West Germany, and by the way former supporters of National Socialism had been given important posts in the Bonn Republic. In particular, he resented the appointment of General Gehlen, Hitler's former Abwehr specialist on the Soviet armed forces, as head of the second German Intelligence Agency, the BND, or Federal Intelligence Service, at the insistence of the United States. When Gehlen was asked for a view on John in 1954 he replied curtly "once a traitor, always a traitor", a wholly unwarranted slur on John's part in the 1944 plot.

For many in the West, the verdict on John was either that he was yet another Communist mole injected into a Western intelligence service, or that he was the victim of a Communist crime and the harsh cruelty of the Cold War. For a few, John was something quite different: a German patriot who rejected Adenauer's vision of a West German partition, locked into Nato and the West, because (like a number of others) he saw this state as inhibiting rather than furthering unity.

Yet another explanation is no less plausible. John, like many others of his generation, found himself trapped by the title of history. Willingly or unwillingly, he may have been caught up in the macabre attempts of Soviet Intelligence to forge a bridgehead in the British secret services. There was no doubt that he fought against National Socialism; but there is no evidence of any great dislike of Communist totalitarianism. This, combined with an uncertain personal life, may have made him an easy prey to a more committed Soviet agent like Philby.

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John deserved credit for the things he did well, in particular his staunch opposition to Hitler and Nazi ambitions, sustained within the citadels of Third Reich Berlin. The final verdict on his actions after 1944 must await the opening of the former Soviet archives.

Otto John's wife, the singer Lucie Manen, predeceased him in 1991.

OBITUARIES

OTTO JOHN

Otto John, secret agent, died in Austria on March 26 aged 88. He was born in Germany on March 19, 1909.

Otto John was undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic figures in the history of Western and German intelligence. His bizarre story has become a classic spy case of claim and counterclaim, generating a mystery still unresolved at the time of his death.

Born in Marburg on the Lahn, John was educated in Wiesbaden before going on to study Law at Berlin University. In 1937 he joined the legal department of Luthhansa's Berlin office. His immediate superior there was Klaus Bonhoeffer, brother of Dietrich.

As a key member of the courageous group of Germans involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944, he maintained close contact with the British secret intelligence service, MI6, through Kim Philby. When, on July 22, the plot failed, John, still working for Luthhansa, managed in the nick of time to secure a seat on a flight to Madrid. He thus evaded the Gestapo and the certain torture and death they promised.

From Spain he came to England, where he worked for British intelligence and the BBC. Charming, brave and debonair, he rapidly acquired an impressive set of friends: a talent exploited well in the Third Reich, where his circle ranged from Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, second son to the heir of the Hohenzollern dynasty, to leading Roman Catholic, conservative and left-wing members of the resistance. In London he

fassungsschutz. This post, it emerged thirty years later, had been given to John at the behest of British Intelligence. The West Germans had been invited to put forward names of candidates which the British would then consider. A dozen were advanced, all of which were, somewhat surprisingly, rejected; but the 13th — John's — was accepted.

It is hard to believe that references were not supplied by those British Intelligence officers whom John had befriended. Many West Germans considered him a peculiar choice for such an important job, and he soon turned to drink. John himself believed that a connection through marriage to the first President of the Federal Republic had landed him the prize.

In July 1954, however, while on a visit to West Berlin, John suddenly disappeared, only to re-surface in East Berlin, from where he proceeded to make several bitter and damaging public statements about the alleged ambitions of the new West German leadership and Konrad Adenauer, the first Federal Chancellor, whom he called a neo-Nazi revanchist. Adenauer (at first inclined to believe that John had been kidnapped) was not at all amused.

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He then returned to Germany where he assisted with the trials of Nazi war criminals, including von Manstein, von Brauchitsch and von Rundstedt. By studying his war diary, John was able to prove that, contrary to his testimony, Manstein had known about the extermination of the Jews. At the same time he assisted in the defence of the former head of the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker (the father of the subsequent Federal President), on trial at Nuremberg for assisting in the Holocaust. There is some evidence to suggest that he began work for MI5 at this time, helping Sir Roger Hollis to combat Soviet subversion.

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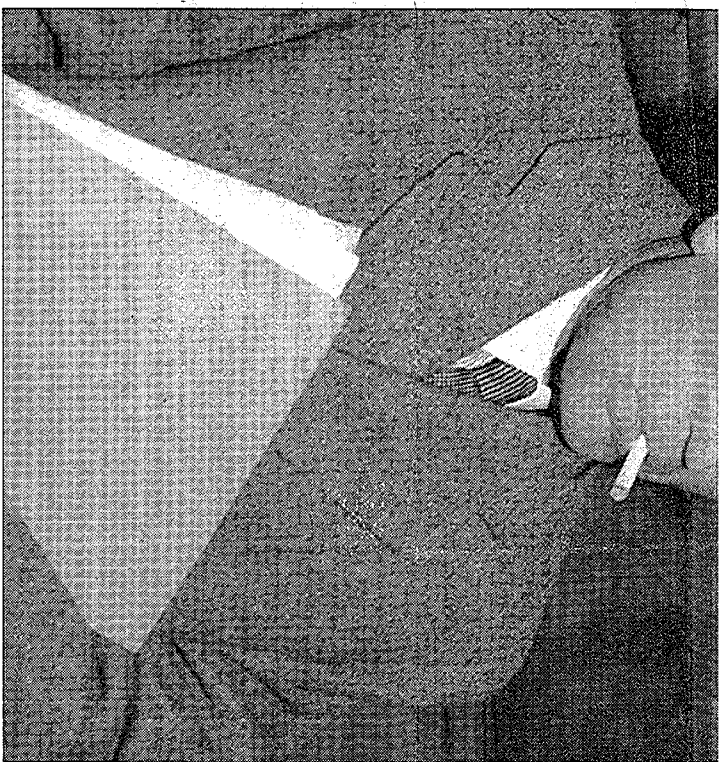
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