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State Secrets (Volume 1)

Tyler Kent & MI5

The Full Story

Bryan Clough

Introduction & Chapter 1 only

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Introduction

Many words have been written over the years about the 'Tyler Kent Affair'. Described as 'one of the most serious breaches of security in World War II'¹ and 'the most sensational story of the century'², it concerned Tyler Gatewood Kent (1911-1988), a code and cipher clerk at the American Embassy in London and Anna Wolkoff³ (1902-1973), a Russian-born dress designer who had become a confidante of Captain Archibald Henry Maule Ramsay (1895-1955), the Conservative MP for Peebles.

Previous works have mainly concentrated on whether or not Kent was a spy and, if so, for whom? Initially, he was categorised as a German agent because his partner-in-crime Anna Wolkoff, a Russian-born dress designer, was said to be 'in communication' with persons in Germany. Later, he was re-categorised as a Soviet agent. It is not clear why but it may have been based on his previous service at the American Embassy in Moscow, where his mistress was probably an NKVD agent.

It is only following the release of MI5 files into the National Archives that it has become possible to reconstruct 'The Full Story'. The task was not straightforward because most documents have been 'weeded'. This included the destruction of some documents and the blanking out of words, sentences or whole sections in others. However, by comparing official records in different locations and with other contemporary material, missing gaps can often be filled in.

On 21 August 1939, representatives of the Governments of the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics agreed a Treaty of Non-Aggression. It was ratified two days later and its declared aim was 'because both nations were desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926'.

Its real aim expressed in a 'strictly secret' protocol, was to carve up the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and to determine whether it was in the interests of both parties to maintain an independent Polish state. In the event of some territorial or political rearrangement of the Polish state becoming necessary, it was agreed that the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San would become the boundary of their respective spheres of influence. In other words, Nazi Germany would invade Poland from the West and the Soviets from the East. They would then divide the country between them, in accordance with the agreed borders.

Next, the S.S. took twelve prisoners out of the Buchenwald concentration camp and made them dress up in Polish uniforms. They were taken to the frontier, where a Polish-speaking S.S. Officer announced on the radio that they had come to invade Germany. The prisoners were shot and the S.S. men fled.

On 1 September 1939, Hitler told the Nazi Reichstag that Poland had tried to invade Germany and that the Wehrmacht was returning their fire. It was, of course,

¹ Ladislav Farago, *The Game of Foxes* (1971).

² Gerald L. K. Smith, *The Story of Tyler Kent* (1944).

³ Wolkoff is sometimes written 'Volkoff', the way it is pronounced.

total nonsense because Generalfeldmarschall Walther von Brauchitsch had carefully planned the attack, codenamed Fall Weiss (Case White).

In anticipation of Germany's intentions, Britain and France had guaranteed Poland's independence on 30 March 1939, in the mistaken belief that this would cause Hitler to abandon his military ambitions. They were wrong and, after their ultimatum had been ignored, the British and French Governments declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939.

World War II had begun but, in the beginning, it was a very tame affair with neither side wanting to cause too much offence to the other. Chamberlain had been correctly advised that Hitler was not universally popular in Germany, and that should Britain stand up to him over the Polish issue then arrangements would be made for his removal. Britain took the bold initiative of sending wave after wave of bombers over Germany, showering the populace with leaflets. But when a popular uprising failed to materialise, the British experts debated the literary merits of their offerings. Noel Coward put it into perspective by asking 'Are we trying to bore them to death?' The question was raised in Parliament 'Why not drop bombs?' A minister replied that this was not possible because they might damage private property.

The truth of the matter was, that neither Chamberlain nor Hitler had ever wanted their countries to be at war with each other. Both had been misled: Hitler had been assured that Britain would fail to honour its commitment to Poland, and Chamberlain believed that he would soon be able to sort out a peace deal that would allow Britain to step gracefully aside while things in Europe sorted themselves out. Chamberlain had confided to his sister that he had 'a hunch' that the war would be over before the Spring.

However, there were others in Britain who believed that if Hitler were allowed to get his own way yet again, then he would soon become unstoppable, as each military success fuelled further ambition.

Chamberlain's military advisers had also assured him that Britain had nothing to fear from Germany. In their experience, it was always easier to defend than to attack and the French Maginot line, a string of forts along most but not all of France's borders, would ensure that there would be no prolonged trench warfare, as in WWI. There wasn't any prolonged trench warfare, so Chamberlain's military advisers were right, but for the wrong reasons.

What happened was that Soviet troops entered Western Poland on 17 September 1939; and German troops occupied Warsaw on 1 October. Organised Polish resistance ended on 6 October 1939.

In a clever political move, Chamberlain had invited Winston Churchill to join the War Cabinet, coincident with his declaration of war. Several newspapers had been clamouring for Churchill's return to Government office and, according to Maurice Hankey⁴, Chamberlain had consulted him on whether or not Churchill should be in the War Cabinet. Hankey had advised that 'public opinion would expect it'. Chamberlain may have also perceived that this would muzzle the man who had been the greatest critic of appeasement. Churchill accepted the invitation and on 4 September 1939, he became the First Lord of the Admiralty, the same position that he had held at the outbreak of WWI. In the event, both men supported each other.

⁴ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets* (23 August 1939).

The following day, President Roosevelt declared American neutrality, as he was required to do under the provisions of the Neutrality Act, a piece of legislation originally introduced in 1935 after Italy had invaded Ethiopia. It was designed to prevent America from becoming embroiled in any 'foreign' wars, by placing an embargo on arms shipments to any belligerents, without making any distinction between 'aggressor' and 'victim'. It was amended in 1937 as a result of the Spanish Civil War to embrace civil wars also to include an embargo on strategic materials. However, Roosevelt had chosen to ignore it when China needed aid, after being invaded by Japan later that same year.

The Neutrality Act was only one of the hurdles that Roosevelt would have to overcome, should he want to provide aid officially to any of the belligerents in the European conflict. There was also the Johnson Act of 1934, which prohibited loans except renewals or re-financings, to any Government that was in default on the payment of its obligations to the American Government. Britain was among the countries in default, a legacy of WWI. The Neutrality Act also reinforced the provisions of the Johnson Act, by making belligerency a reason for the denial of loans. In fact, the Neutrality Act was soon relaxed but in his statement to the press on 4 November 1939, Roosevelt forgot to mention that the arms embargo had been lifted.

Nevertheless, Britain was in double trouble under the Johnson Act because it was both a defaulter and a belligerent. Therefore, any business had to be 'Cash and Carry' so formidable obstacles remained because Britain had a heavy adverse trade balance with the United States and it had only a very limited war chest in terms of dollar securities and gold.

The problems were compounded by a widely held belief that America should avoid all European commitments. Charles Lindbergh, the aviator who had thrilled the world with the first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, was among the prominent spokesmen who aired these views. Joseph P. Kennedy, the American Ambassador in London and the patriarch of the famous clan, was also a prominent isolationist. He was very chummy with Chamberlain and heartily approved of his appeasement policies.

Two further problems faced the future war leaders. Churchill had been out-of-step with the Conservative Party since 1931 and until being recalled by Chamberlain, he had been in a 'political wilderness'. Roosevelt was approaching the end of his second term as President and although not yet a 'lame duck President', no previous incumbent had ever been re-elected for a third term. With elections coming up in November 1940, there was a big question mark over his future.

Hitler had become an icon during the Thirties and many in Germany and elsewhere came to believe in his magic. He had clearly valued the support of his British sympathisers, which he consolidated through a charm offensive. He had even tried to charm British Intelligence and shortly after becoming Chancellor, he had invited an exchange of information on Communist activities. The invitation dated 31 January 1933 came from the Polizei President and was routed through the German Embassy in London.

The Polizei President's invitation was passed to Lord Trenchard, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. The Metropolitan Police is now better known as 'Scotland Yard' but its activities are not confined to the metropolis. It also runs 'Special Branch', an important part of the British Intelligence community.

Trenchard formally accepted the invitation on 24 March 1933 and the exchange of information took place in Berlin from 30 March to 9 April 1933. The event was described as 'The Liquidation of Communism, Left Wing Socialism and Pacifism in Germany'.

Captain Guy Maynard Liddell (1892-1958) and Captain Frank Edward Foley (1884-1958) who both spoke German were the representatives of British Intelligence. After serving in WWI, Liddell joined Scotland Yard in 1919 and moved to MI5 in 1931, when it assumed responsibility for monitoring Communist activities. He became the Director of MI5's 'B' Division, with responsibility for the entire spectrum of Counter Espionage activities. Officially, Frank Foley was the British Passport Control Officer in Berlin, but it was an open secret that the job really provided cover for an MI6 man. Presumably, if their German hosts hadn't already figured this out for themselves, Foley's presence at the meeting might have given them a clue.

Their host was Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengel (1887-1975), a personal friend of Hitler, who had become the Führer's Personal Liaison Officer with the Foreign Press. Although he was said to be a man with considerable influence, the visitors found him to be 'quite unbalanced'. Seemingly, he believed the conspiracy theories of Mrs. Nesta H. Webster, including 'the International Jewish conspiracy'. He had evidently made a careful study of Mrs. Webster's books, and was under the impression that Communism was a movement controlled by the Jews.

Nevertheless, the visitors found Hanfstaengel 'extremely likeable' and he was undoubtedly well disposed towards Britain. He even proposed that Britain should establish a bureau in Berlin, where its representatives could work on documents found in recent raids.

Later, they met another Nazi leader named Bürger-Neuss who seemed to have a fanatical hatred of the Jews. He produced a map that purported to show that International Jewry was being controlled from London. He also showed them a photograph of a Jew addressing a meeting of 40 or 50 people in London's Hyde Park. Liddell and Foley tried to explain that such meetings had little or no significance but Bürger-Neuss 'seemed unconvinced'.

They were then shown around Karl Liebnecht Haus, the former Communist Headquarters, now renamed the Horst Wessell Haus, in tribute to a Nazi who was held up as a martyr after being murdered by Communists.

The delegation was also provided with documents that the Nazis had obtained after taking over the occupation of the former Communist Headquarters. Their host for this part of their visit was Staatsanwalt Diehls, a young man aged about 30-35, who explained that it was his intention to eliminate Communism in its widest sense by the inclusion of left-wing pacifist organisations. Diehls told them that they had already arrested 'some thousands' and that the question of what to do with them was becoming 'a serious problem'. Diehls asked, 'Perhaps the British Government could set aside an island somewhere which could be jointly used as a penal settlement?'

The general question of relations with Russia was discussed and it soon became evident to the visitors that the Nazis were on the horns of a dilemma. They had become increasingly dependent upon Russo-German trade, which they valued, whilst simultaneously trying to make political capital out of the insidious effects of Soviet influence on German interests.

The visitors formed the impression that the Nazis earnestly wanted to cooperate with British Intelligence, but having had responsibility for countering Soviet influence

in Britain since 1919, Liddell was not convinced that the Soviet threat was as serious as their hosts had been trying to make out so the offer of establishing a bureau in Berlin was not taken up.

In fact, the privileged visit by the two British Intelligence men into the inner sanctum of the Nazi political police had the opposite effect to what their hosts had intended. Hitherto, MI5 had only run a section for countering Communist political subversion, but from 1934 it also embraced the British Fascist parties and other organisations of the extreme right. It was a critically important change.

Frank Foley stayed on as the British Passport Control Officer in Berlin, but he continually went well beyond his official duties, by advising visa applicants how they could circumvent the regulations. After Foley's flexible attitude became known, large queues of people seeking an escape route regularly formed outside his offices and he is now credited with having saved some 10,000 souls from the Nazi concentration camps, or worse.

Putzi Hanfstaengel, who hosted the visit, would eventually fall foul of Josef Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief. After being tipped off that his life was in danger, he fled to Zurich in March 1937 and then to London. His former colleagues tried to lure him back to Germany by telling him that it had been 'a joke', but he couldn't see the funny side.

Putzi told his English friends that he was waiting for Hitler to fall and he would then be asked to return to Germany, as Head of the Fourth Reich. The call never came and he was interned on the outbreak of war. Later, he was transferred to Washington and whilst still in captivity, he produced political assessments of events in Germany.

Guy Liddell was given a rude awakening on 4 September 1939, the second day of the war. He learned from Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador in Washington, that there was a Soviet spy in the Foreign Office who had been passing secrets to his Soviet spymasters for 'a long time'. There was also another Soviet spy in the Committee of Imperial Defence, Britain's top security body.

The information would prove to be correct and although it would be easy enough to find the first spy, the second spy would be much more elusive. Who would have believed that the son of a prominent politician could have possibly stooped to spy on his own country?

The two wartime leaders, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, would certainly have some work to do, if they were to get their acts together. But would they have ever corresponded on such politically sensitive matters as:

- How to circumvent the Neutrality and Johnson Acts, so that the United States could help Britain, by becoming its major supplier of war matériel?
- How the United States could gift 50 of its surplus destroyers to Britain?
- How the United States could arrange the financing of the War, through a massive War Loan that would be euphemistically called 'Lend-Lease' in America and 'Lease-Lend' in Britain?
- How Britain could help to ensure Roosevelt's re-election in November 1940?

But if they did, then there would have been a lot of interest on both sides of the Atlantic in getting sight of their correspondence. Particularly when in the run-up to

the Presidential Elections, Roosevelt had repeatedly assured the electorate that, 'I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again; your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars'⁵.

On 29 December 1940 a few months after his re-election for a third term, Roosevelt delivered one of his famous Fireside Chats. He said, 'If Great Britain goes down, the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the high seas - and they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us, in all the Americas, would be living at the point of a gun - a gun loaded with explosive bullets, economic as well as military'.

Roosevelt continued in this same vein with the German monitors picking up his every word, 'The American appeasers ignore the warning to be found in the fate of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and France. They tell you that the Axis powers are going to win anyway; that all of this bloodshed in the world could be saved, that the United States might just as well throw its influence into the scale of a dictated peace, and get the best out of it that we can. They call it a 'negotiated peace'. Nonsense! Is it a negotiated peace if a gang of outlaws surrounds your community and on threat of extermination makes you pay tribute to save your own skins? Such a dictated peace would be no peace at all. It would be only another armistice, leading to the most gigantic armament race and the most devastating trade wars in all history. And in these contests the Americas would offer the only real resistance to the Axis powers ...'

Shortly after Roosevelt's Fireside Chat, British Intelligence noticed the impact that it had made on the Nazi Government. It was panic stations, and Peace Fellers started pouring into London from all directions, often at the rate of one a week.

Obviously, whatever Churchill and Roosevelt had been getting up to must have worked.

⁵ FDR, Speech in Boston, 30 October 1940.

1: A Miller's Tale

Tyler Kent joined the American Foreign Service in March 1934. In those days, jobs were scarce and he was probably fortunate to get taken on as a junior clerk. He had a flair for languages and he must have hoped that his lowly job would lead to bigger things. He was a bachelor, a condition of his employment, and he was posted to the American Embassy in Moscow, which had been newly opened following a breakdown in diplomatic relations as a consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Kent was transferred to the American Embassy in London in October 1939, by which time he spoke 'wonderful Russian'. Having had a Russian mistress, thoughtfully provided by the NKVD would have helped. His transfer to London was not a promotion. In fact, his salary was reduced from \$2,500 to \$2,250 p.a. due to a differential between the two locations.

As a junior clerk, his job included the coding and decoding of cables and 'radios'. However, because London acted as a hub for Embassy traffic within Europe, he was able to read many messages exchanged between the White House and its various European outposts.

Kent then started collecting copies of the correspondence that he considered 'interesting'. Often, he simply helped himself to a spare copy that would otherwise have been scrapped but at other times he made an extra copy for himself. He kept his collection of Embassy documents in an unlocked suitcase in his London flat. Being a 'serviced' flat to which the housemaid and cook always had access, there was no lock on the door, just a bolt on the inside when he wanted privacy.

Evidently, Joseph Kennedy, the Ambassador, had also been collecting copies of Embassy correspondence. These were interesting times and it is not unusual for an Ambassador to collect material from which he can later write up his memoirs. Indeed, Joe Kennedy evidently did write his Diplomatic Memoirs, but these have never been published in their entirety possibly because his two sons, Jack and Bobby, did not consider that they would have been helpful to their own political careers. Fragments have subsequently appeared in *Hostage to Fortune* (2001), edited by Amanda Smith, his granddaughter.

Whether or not Kent was influenced by Kennedy's actions is not relevant because those who are in the wrong often look for excuses and by helping himself to copies of Embassy correspondence, Kent was clearly in the wrong. He then exacerbated the wrong, by allowing Captain Ramsay and Anna Wolkoff to examine his collection.

After his arrest, Kent signed a statement in which he admitted that he had obtained a collection of Embassy documents and that he had shown them to Ramsay and Wolkoff, so this was never a matter of dispute.

However, Kent's excuse was that his collection of documents contained evidence that Churchill and Roosevelt had been conspiring to bring America into the war. This was not necessarily true, but true or false, Kent's claims could have been politically explosive, had he been allowed to make them in public, because in May 1940 Churchill had only just stepped up as Prime Minister and Roosevelt had less than six months remaining on his Presidential franchise.

Moreover, with the German juggernaut already smashing its way through the Netherlands, Belgium and France, the prospect of a German invasion had become a very real threat for which Britain was entirely unprepared.

The Tyler Kent Affair would become a cause célèbre in the United States and it could have had important political consequences in Britain had it not been kept closely under wraps by official censorship and other measures. By 1981, the story had pretty much run out of steam when one of the MI5 operatives who had worked on the case decided that she had a story to tell.

Her name was Joan Miller.

Joan Miller joined MI5 on 4 September 1939, the day after Britain had declared war on Germany, to undertake clerical duties. She was a very attractive 21-year-old⁶ and, having previously worked for Elizabeth Arden the cosmetics company, she knew how to make the most of her natural assets. Her father Anthony⁷ had been a Lieutenant in the 5th Gloucester Regiment in WWI, so she came from the 'right background'. A product of a broken marriage, she had been to boarding school and an old school friend had suggested that she should apply for a job.

Much to her surprise, Miller found herself working in 'The Scrubs' - Wormwood Scrubs Prison in Hammersmith - where MI5 had been re-housed as a wartime emergency measure in the mistaken belief that it was bombproof. She was assigned to the Transport Section headed up by the 6th Earl of Cottenham who was otherwise known as Mark Pepys, a racing driver of some repute who had driven for Alvis at Brooklands. One of Miller's duties was handing out the petrol vouchers that had been introduced as part of the wartime rationing restrictions.

Before long, Miller was talent spotted by William Younger⁸, another new recruit who had recently come down from Oxford. He introduced her to his boss MI5's 'legendary' agent runner Maxwell Knight who had a requirement for a young secretary who was prepared to take on an unusual assignment.

Knight was a former Naval Midshipman and preparatory school teacher who had joined MI5 in 1931⁹. Within MI5 he was known as 'M'¹⁰ (for Maxwell) but in the outside world he usually appeared as Captain King of the War Office. He ran Section B5b whose mission was Countering Political Subversion and his job was to place 'moles' in extreme political organisations. The Communist Party and its sympathisers were initially his prime concern but from 1934 the British Fascist parties assumed increasing importance, after Hitler had come to power and had declared his intentions.

Knight who was a keen amateur naturalist enjoyed a second career after the war as a radio and television broadcaster becoming well known as 'Uncle Max', a children's favourite. He also wrote several books that reflected his interest in all kinds of

⁶ Joan Priscilla Miller was born in Bristol on 19 March 1918.

⁷ Anthony Guy Miller was granted a Regular Army Emergency Commission on 9 December 1939 as a Lieutenant. He served in the Army Catering Corps and remained in the army after the war, finishing up as Mess Manager at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He retired in 1954 with the rank of Major.

⁸ William Younger (1917-1961) was the stepson of Dennis Wheatley, the writer, who was a friend of Maxwell Knight's. After the war, Younger wrote detective novels under the name of 'William Mole'. He also had some poetry published.

⁹ It has often been wrongly reported that Knight joined MI5 in 1924 or 1925.

¹⁰ Vernon Kell, the Director General of MI5, had already claimed 'K'. Knight's activities bore no resemblance to Ian Fleming's fictional 'M'.

animals and insects, having previously failed to make any impact with two tame 'thrillers' published in the Thirties¹¹.

Over the years, the British Secret Service has been a fertile ground for nourishing writers of spy fiction with John Buchan, Somerset Maugham, A.E.W. Mason, Graham Greene, Compton Mackenzie, Ian Fleming and John Le Carré (David Cornwell) as stellar examples. Two of Maxwell Knight assistants: John Bingham, who was the model for John Le Carré's 'Smiley', and William Younger also tried their hands at other types of fiction.

Forty years on in October 1980, the former Joan Miller now known as Joanna Phipps decided to continue the tradition, by writing about her 'Personal Exploits in MI5's Most Secret Station'. It was based on the facts as she knew them, suitably modified to give herself the starring role. She had neatly sidestepped the restrictions imposed by the Official Secrets Acts by moving to Malta, where she was outside British jurisdiction.

Her motivation was money. Having turned sixty and having lived life to the full she was being hounded by creditors. She also had health problems, her figure had ballooned and she had taken to wearing tent-like garments. In public, she wore dark glasses that helped to hide the puffiness of her face.

Miller desperately wanted to write a bestseller and she was fully prepared to lie as much as necessary to achieve her ends.

A magazine article appeared on 18 October 1981 in which she was colourfully described as 'MI5's Mistress of Espionage'¹². It was a trailer for the book that she was said to be writing on 'an unnamed Mediterranean island'.

The Tyler Kent Affair was the only case of any consequence with which Miller had claimed an involvement. Both Kent and Wolkoff were members of Captain Ramsay's Right Club, which had never got off the ground and, after the declaration of war, its only discernible representatives were a small group of women who fancifully called themselves 'The Inner Circle'. Wolkoff was the most prominent among these and she claimed to be Ramsay's aide-de-camp.

The Inner Circle met mainly at the Russian Tea Rooms, a small café on Harrington Road near South Kensington Underground Station. Somewhat surprisingly, while the *hoi polloi* were limited to the subsistence amounts prescribed by their ration books, the better off could still patronise the cafés and indulge to their heart's content. Even delicacies including caviar were available and reputedly the Russian Tea Rooms served the best caviar in London.

Wolkoff's parents ran the café and even with caviar on the menu this was a very big come down. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, her father Admiral Nicolas Wolkoff had been the Naval Attaché at the Russian Embassy in London and some time previously her mother had been a Lady-in-Waiting for the Empress. After the Revolution, the Wolkoffs had opted to stay in London but they held bitter memories having been deprived of their former privileges. Anna, the eldest of their four children shared their bitterness.

¹¹ *Crime Cargo* (1934) and *Gunmen's Holiday* (1935). *Crime Cargo* is interesting because it contains cryptic references to some of Knight's friends and associates.

¹² Barrie Penrose, *MI5's Mistress of Espionage: The Sunday Times Colour Magazine* (18 October 1981).

The magazine article on Miller had evidently touched a raw nerve, because Whitehall reacted by asking its American counterparts to withdraw the material on Tyler Kent that had been released into the National Archives in Washington.

It was withdrawn on 6 November 1981.

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, a London publisher, had offered Miller a contract and introduced her to Patricia Craig, an established writer who agreed to 'ghost' the book. It was slated for publication in May 1984 but shortly before the due date the Treasury Solicitor stepped in and persuaded Weidenfeld's not to go ahead.

Miller died in June 1984 and Jonquil Hepper her daughter and Patricia Craig offered the manuscript to an Irish publisher, Brandon. A deal was done but once again the Government intervened shortly before publication and, as a consequence, the book was officially banned for sale in Britain for several years¹³.

Brandon published Miller's book *One Girl's War* in 1986 two years after her death. It was a jolly good read but like most books in this genre the author had relied heavily on previously published work, some of which was decidedly dubious.

Yet, according to the cover, it was the book 'Whitehall Wants to Ban'. Most readers would have been at a loss to understand why but eventually everything would unfold when MI5 files for that era were released into Britain's National Archives.

Some of the documents had obviously never been intended to see the light of day whilst others had been heavily 'weeded' but collectively there was enough new and relevant information to piece together one of the most controversial stories in Anglo-American relationships.

On arriving in London, Tyler Kent began to socialise amongst the American and White Russian émigré communities, which was hardly surprising given his American roots, his experience of Soviet Russia and his 'wonderful Russian'. One old émigré acknowledged that Kent knew many new Russian words that had not previously been heard in London. Another spoke of the photographs that he had brought with him. He became much sought after for social gatherings.

Aged 28, he was a bachelor, a condition of his employment, and was considered a snappy dresser. He acquired a mistress, Irene Danischewsky, an attractive Russian-born woman whose husband was serving in the Armed Forces in India.

Barbara Allen¹⁴, an American woman married to an Englishman, took Kent to the Russian Tea Rooms on or about the 21 February 1940 and introduced him to Anna Wolkoff¹⁵. Kent and Wolkoff shared the same outlook that the war was nothing more than a Jewish conspiracy and they soon hit it off. Before long he invited her to his flat and allowed her to read his collection of Embassy documents, some of which appeared to support their beliefs.

¹³ Steve MacDonogh, *Open Book: One Publisher's War*, 1999.

¹⁴ Barbara Welford Allen née Dixon was the 37-year-old wife of Samuel Carson Fitzwilliam Allen, the youngest brother of Bill Allen (William Edward David Allen), a former Unionist MP who had supported Sir Oswald Mosley financially and by contributing mainly anonymous articles to *The Blackshirt*, including 'The Letters of Lucifer'. Bill Allen also wrote a book *BUF, Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (1934) under the pen name of James Drennan.

¹⁵ Previous reports that Mrs Betty Straker had made the introductions are wrong. Mrs Straker introduced Kent to Wolkoff's parents and possibly to his mistress, Irene Danischewsky.

At some time between the 10th and the 13th April 1940, Wolkoff introduced Kent to Captain Ramsay. Kent then invited Ramsay to peruse his secret cache of Embassy documents whereupon Ramsay asked Wolkoff to obtain copies of two telegrams that Churchill had sent to Roosevelt. It had been Ramsay's intention to show these to Prime Minister Chamberlain, as evidence of the conspiracy that was being conducted behind his back. In those days, when photocopiers were largely 'a thing of the future', this meant that Wolkoff had to visit a photographer, which she did.

However, Ramsay would run out of time because Churchill became Prime Minister on 10 May 1940. Both Kent and Wolkoff were arrested on 20 May 1940 and after secret trials, they were sent down for seven and ten years. Ramsay was arrested on 23 May 1940 and detained without trial until 24 September 1944.

According to Miller's version of events, she had been the undercover agent who had been instrumental in breaking up this dangerous spy ring, she had been the main prosecution witness at Wolkoff's trial and she had been at the receiving end of a death threat uttered by Wolkoff on seeing her in court.

Although Miller worked on the Kent-Wolkoff case, she greatly exaggerated her part for the purposes of her book, by claiming an earlier involvement and to have carried out tasks performed by the two undercover agents assigned to the case: Marjorie Norah Mackie née Amor (1898-1975) and Hélène Louise de Munck (1914-?).

Miller must have assumed that she could get away with her deception because the agents' names had never been previously published in Britain. Evidently, she was initially unaware that they had testified under their real names, that copies of Kent's trial transcript had become available in the United States and that the 'death threat' supposedly uttered by Wolkoff in court was actually just a piece of nonsense invented by a newspaper to spice up its report on the trials.

When Miller discovered that Kent's trial transcript was telling a different story, she changed hers to suit. In her 1981 version, she claimed to have performed de Munck's role in the sting operation that MI5 had mounted against Wolkoff but later¹⁶ she reinstated 'Helen' (de Munck).

In other respects, Miller continued to insist that she had played an important role in the Affair but the truth was that she had played no part whatsoever in the sting operation nor had she been a witness at Wolkoff's trial. Here she was on safer ground because no transcript had ever been released, although according to the Earl Jowitt 'When the Judge decided that the case against Kent should be tried separately from that against Anna Wolkoff, it became necessary to call the same evidence in both cases.'¹⁷

Maxwell Knight was at the heart of the Kent-Wolkoff Affair, having planted Marjorie Mackie in Captain Ramsay's Right Club in August 1939. She was the Assistant Secretary of the Christian Defence Movement and, having separated from her husband, she had reverted to using her maiden name of Amor. On 4 October 1939,

¹⁶ Anthony Masters' biography of Maxwell Knight *The Man Who Was M* published in 1984, shortly after Miller's death contains her original version.

¹⁷ As Sir William Jowitt, he had been the Solicitor General and he had led for the Prosecution at the trials. Later, as the Earl Jowitt, he summarised the cases in his book, *Some Were Spies* (1954).

she was given a job in Censorship to satisfy Captain Ramsay's wish to have a contact there.

Mackie was introduced to Anna Wolkoff on 6 December 1939 and quickly discovered her superstitious nature, her interest in spiritualism, clairvoyance, astrology and anything to do with the occult¹⁸. Wolkoff also boasted about her contacts at various Embassies and her ability to send correspondence abroad without troubling the Censor. She had apparently tried to send a letter through the Belgian Embassy but as she had never received any acknowledgment she fretted about the reliability of her Belgian contacts¹⁹.

Knight, who was also interested in the occult, inserted H el ene de Munck, a Belgian-born mystic, into the operation on 1 February 1940 so that he could play mind games with Wolkoff and investigate the connections that she had claimed to have in Belgium.

De Munck was encouraged to tell Wolkoff about her mystical abilities and of her plan to visit relatives in Belgium. Wolkoff fell for the yarn and asked de Munck to tell her own fortune and to produce character profiles of her friends and associates from specimens of their handwriting. Marjorie Mackie was among those who had provided a specimen but fortunately someone at MI5 recognised her hand and de Munck was instructed to provide a suitably favourable analysis.

Marjorie Mackie introduced Joan Miller to Anna Wolkoff on 9 April 1940, simply to satisfy Anna's wish to have a contact within MI5. She believed that one of the young secretaries could be educated into 'her way of thinking' and Miller, who was 22 at the time, played her part to perfection.

Although de Munck may have planted the idea in her head, this was not altogether crazy because MI5 and Censorship were then sharing the facilities of Wormwood Scrubs Prison and with Mackie ostensibly working in Censorship she could conceivably have known some of the secretaries, at least by sight.

After accepting Knight's assignment, Miller just happened to visit the Russian Tea Rooms one evening when Mackie and Wolkoff were present. Mackie just happened to spot Miller sitting by herself and so she went over and went through the motions of introducing herself. She then introduced Miller to Wolkoff. Wolkoff was suitably impressed and further meetings followed.

On one occasion when they were in the Russian Tea Rooms, Wolkoff pointed out Miller to de Munck and asked her 'what she thought about her?' She evidently placed great faith in de Munck's mystic powers even though she would later dismiss her as a 'drug fiend'²⁰.

In due course, Knight provided Miller with some titbits of information that she could pass on to Wolkoff to establish her credentials. Wolkoff was so pleased with Miller's contributions that she gave her some *haute couture* creation that she had admired, as a token of her appreciation. Miller responded with a letter of thanks and this was duly passed to de Munck 'for analysis'. Once again she provided a suitable response.

Wolkoff also introduced Miller to a 'Mrs. Freeman', an alias adopted by Captain Ramsay's wife whose husband sometimes called himself 'Mr. Freeman' but MI5 were aware of their subterfuges.

¹⁸ KV 4/227 page 49.

¹⁹ Germany had not invaded Belgium and it was neutral when she had attempted to send her letter.

²⁰ Miller also claimed that 'Helen' had an addiction.

When de Munck told Wolkoff that she was visiting her relatives in Belgium, she was asked to check out the reliability of her contacts there, and Wolkoff duly provided their names and addresses.

Wolkoff expressed herself pleased with the contributions made by de Munck and, as a reward, she was promised an introduction to Captain Ramsay although this never happened. Neither de Munck nor Miller was invited to join the Right Club, despite Miller's claim to have been enrolled.

The three women saturated Wolkoff with their attention and continually encouraged her to carry out subversive activities. Mackie may have even suggested that she should visit the War Office to check if her activities might be frowned on in official circles, because Wolkoff did make such a visit on or around 20 March 1940. Knight interviewed her in the guise of his alter ego, Captain King, and he evidently gave her the assurances she was seeking. It now seems rather contrived. Perhaps Knight had simply wanted to meet his protagonist.

Knight put a fourth agent on the case on 16 April 1940, just one week after Joan Miller. Anna evidently already knew Knight's fourth agent and they had dinner together at the Russian Tea Rooms. She told him that she had been obtaining 'a great deal of information through Tyler Kent' and claimed that he had given her confidential information regarding 'the North Sea battles', arising out of the Norwegian campaign.

Although Knight's fourth agent is only identified as 'Special Source' in the MI5 files, he can now be named with some certainty.

On 18 May 1940, Knight briefed Herschel Johnson, the Counsel at the American Embassy, about MI5's intention to arrest Wolkoff and he sought permission to search Kent's London flat. After this was obtained, he led the search party, discovered 'masses' of Embassy documents, arranged for Kent's arrest and then took a Statement from him.

Having previously made an 'illegal' search, Knight would have been disappointed had he not 'discovered' masses of Embassy documents among a variety of other incriminating material that Wolkoff and her associates had entrusted to Kent's care, in the mistaken belief that his diplomatic immunity had put them out-of-reach of the British authorities.

Among the trophies was a red leather-bound accounting ledger that was protected from casual inspection by a small brass lock. It was the Membership Book of the Right Club in which Ramsay had listed some 250 names, although most including Wolkoff had not paid any subscription.

Miller romanticised about her relationship with Knight and even claimed that she had beaten him to the Registry Office before he made his third entry in the marriage stakes. This supported her story that she had given him the brush off but, in fact, Knight married Susan Barnes on 18 November 1944, whereas Miller did not wed her first husband Lieutenant Commander Thomas Kinloch Jones of the Royal Navy until 29 December 1945. For the purposes of her book, Miller brought the date of her own marriage forward to 19 June 1943²¹ and then claimed that 'having deprived M of my own personal services', she had found Susan for him as 'a suitable replacement'.

²¹ Miller had changed her surname to 'Jones' by Deed Poll some time prior to her first marriage to Thomas Kinloch Jones. Towards the end of her life, she was known as Joanna Phipps.

Despite the supposed closeness of her relationship with Knight, she admitted that it had never been consummated. This is not surprising because Knight was 'completely impotent' and throughout his three marriages he had never fathered any children. After his second marriage was annulled, his former bride produced two children from a more productive relationship.

Miller dramatised the death of Knight's first wife Gwladys, by claiming that she had committed suicide after 'an occult experience with the notorious Aleister Crowley'²² but this is demonstrably false. Gwladys Knight died in 1936 at the age of 37 and a Coroner's Inquest concluded that her death was due to 'poisoning by a barbiturate and hypnotic probably Soneryl and there is insufficient evidence as to circumstances. Open Verdict.'

Gwladys had been suffering from sciatica, which can be very painful and she had been prescribed a barbiturate to relieve the pain. This was standard practice in those days, but drugs like Soneryl™ are now considered 'highly dangerous' because there is only a small difference between the normal dose and an overdose. But any drug, even aspirin, can produce a fatal reaction.

Miller also claimed that Knight was homosexual but her evidence was decidedly flimsy and her claim was contradictory because elsewhere she had reported that he had an aversion to homosexuals. Contemporaries of Knight's believe her claim to be false, but true or false it certainly spiced up her story and Miller's allegation is now firmly embedded whenever Knight's name appears.

Miller even lied about her last meeting with Knight 'towards the end of 1945' which provided her tale with a suitably dramatic ending. In fact, Knight was the godfather of her daughter Jonquil who was born on 22 May 1948, long after the fictitious incident.

Miller's 'revelations' have successfully fooled many commentators over the years and her fabrications have often been recounted as if they were true, even though she evidently did not know much about the Right Club case, except from her own rather modest involvement and from what she had gleaned from previously published sources. Consequently, she had to fill in many gaps in her knowledge with guesswork; and her guesswork was often very wide of the mark.

Nevertheless, she had clearly known Knight personally and was able to provide an accurate description. According to Miller, Knight was rather tall and lanky with a big nose, which he referred to as 'my limb'. He always dressed in stylishly shabby tweeds and smoked long, hand-made cigarettes. He had charm of a rare and formidable order with a voice that Miller described as 'hypnotic'. Another woman who met Knight in the Thirties and had often seen him on post-war television also recalled his 'marvellous voice'.

So why did Whitehall ban Miller's book which was largely a fictionalised reworking of previously published material?

In part, it was probably because Miller had named names and with so many former officers and agents still alive, this was strictly taboo. She had even revealed the name of the hitherto mysterious 'Miss X', one of Knight's agents, who had successfully infiltrated the 'Friends of the Soviet Union'. Based on information provided by Miss X, four Communist spies were tried for espionage in 1938 in what became known as

²² Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was Britain's leading exponent of black magic and considered himself 'the wickedest man in the world'. Maxwell Knight met him on at least one occasion.

the Woolwich Arsenal Secrets Case. Unlike the Kent and Wolkoff trials that were held entirely *in camera* under wartime Emergency Regulations, the four Communists were tried partly in open court where Knight's agent was allowed to testify as Miss X. This had evidently influenced Miller in her belief that this was standard practice.

Anthony Masters had not only revealed the identity of Miss X in his biography of Maxwell Knight *The Man Who Was M* (1984) but he had even managed to track her down to a suburb in Toronto and obtain both 'a long interview' and a photograph from her younger days. Masters named her as the former Olga Gray²³ who having been born in 1906, was then in her late seventies. As Joan Miller had been one of his sources²⁴, a link could be made and this was precisely the sort of disclosure that MI5 would have deplored.

Miller stopped short of naming another of Knight's agents, a German Jew whom she described as having 'been in England since the early thirties ... his father was a judge ... who had decided that his son would be better off abroad'. However, when taken together with other titbits, she had revealed enough to identify Ferdy Mayne²⁵ (1916-1998) who had become a well-known actor and was then still alive.

But, undoubtedly, the main reason for Miller's book being banned was because of the sting operation that MI5 had set up to get Anna Wolkoff categorised as a 'foreign agent'. This was the key to getting at Tyler Kent and with Kent still alive, it was possible that he might have been able to make something out of Miller's claims.

Having previously participated in a colossal cover-up on both sides of the Atlantic that included lots of spin and several colourful cover stories, the British Government could only have been embarrassed by Miller's book and they took the sensible course of action.

The material on Kent in the Washington National Archives was made publicly available again on 13 August 1989. Around the same time, Whitehall lifted its ban on Miller's book. So, whatever matters had concerned the authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, these had evidently been resolved by the deaths of Joan Miller in June 1984 and Tyler Kent on 11 November 1988.

End of Chapter 1

**The remaining chapters are scheduled for publication
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For details, please visit

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²³ Masters did not reveal Olga's married name.

²⁴ Masters reported that Miller had entertained him with 'gin and smoked salmon in great quantities'.

²⁵ Born Ferdinand Philip Mayer-Horckel, he would make over 70 films, having started with an uncredited part as a Prussian Student in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). He was a witness at Miller's wedding in 1945 and he signed under his stage name of Ferdy Mayne.