Revelations of the Kaiser's Personal Spy

By Dr. Armgaard Karl Graves

Who, for a Number of Years Prior to His Arrest and Betrayal in England in 1912, was Emperor William's Most Trusted Personal Spy.

My Mission and Betrayal in England.

November 18, 1911, I received the usual summons to report at the Wilhelmstrasse. Instead of being brought before Count von Wedel, I was taken over to Koeniggratzerstrasse 70, to the German admiralty intelligence department. Here I met my old chief, Captain Tappken, head of the naval branch of the intelligence department. The captain briefly informed me that it had been deemed advisable to send me to England—unwelcome news, this, as you will see.

In the usual curt yet polite manner of German officers, the captain introduced me to three naval experts. One was a construction officer, another in the signaling department, the third an expert on explosives and mines. One at a time they took me in hand, grooming me in the intricacies of their respective fields. It was like a rehearsal in the grooming I had received years ago when taken into the service and trained for months. I sat for hours over diagrams with a naval officer on each side. They brought me before charts that were as big as the wall of the room. These charts gave the exact dimensions and type of every vessel in the British navy. Not only that, I was made to study the silhouette of all the new and different types of English warships—why, you will see.

Obviously this special training was significant. Part of my mission to England was to watch the preparation and maneuvers of British warships at the naval bases on the Scottish coast.

A Strained Situation.

The situation between England and Germany was ticklish. Politicians had worked up a war scare to such a pitch that the people of the two nations were ready to rush into conflict. Only a spark was needed to fire the situation. Hence my mission.

It was included in my instructions to watch the movements of British warships off the Scottish coast and promptly cable the German admiralty intelligence department concerning them.

Moreover, I had to brush myself up in topography and trigonometry. In England—so I learned from my instructions—it would be necessary to calculate distances, to take observations on the exact nature of the newly reconstructed Rossyth base near Edinburgh on the Firth of Forth; besides keeping in touch with things in Cromarty.

I was to watch especially the new Rossyth base and to report progress on armaments, new equipment, anything of use to the German admiralty. I was to keep tab on all the British fleet maneuvers then in progress on the Scottish coast.

When I left Berlin I was thoroughly equipped to carry out instructions. Every war vessel of the British navy, every fortification, naval base and depot of supplies was coded in secret service ciphers.

I arrived in Edinburgh and put up at the old Bedford hotel on Princess street, a quiet select Scottish hostelry. I registered under my quasi-correct name of A. K. Graves, M. D., Tsre, Australia. My "stunt" was to convey the impression of being an Australian physician taking additional post-graduate courses at the famous Scottish seat of medical learning. After a few days' residence at the Bedford, I installed myself in private quarters at a Mrs. Macleod's, 23 Craiglea drive, Edinburgh.

For the first fortnight I quietly took my bearings, creating a suggestion that I was a semi-invalid. Having by this time familiarized myself with Edinburgh and surroundings, I made frequent trips to the Firth of Forth upon which was located the Rossyth base. Now, across the Firth there is a long bridge. It is between the Rossyth base and the North sea. Warships going to and from the naval station pass under it.

Gradually I worked myself into the confidence of one of the bridge keepers. I shall not give the man's name, for to do so would injure him, and quite unwittingly he gave me facilities for studying the naval base and furnished me with scraps of information that I wanted to know

The schooling I had received in the silhouettes presently came in handy. One night my friend, the bridge tender, learned that the fleet was getting up steam. Accordingly, I stood on the bridge that night and waited. At five o'clock in the morning a gray, rainy, foggy morning, through which the ships moved almost ghost-like, I made out 16 war vessels. From their silhouettes, I knew them to be dreadnaughts, cruisers, and torpedo boat destroyers. At once I filed a cable by way of Brussels, informing the intelligence department of the German navy that an English fleet 16 strong had put to sea. Subsequently, I learned that in describing the 16 ships I had made only one mistake.

After about three weeks I began to be suspicious of being followed. Arriving home one night I noticed that my dress suit was arranged in a different way to what I had left it. I called my landlady and casually inquired if my tailor had been there. She said, "No, Doctor."

"Well," I replied, "what reason have you then to rearrange my clothes?"

Her face reddened and she seemed flustered.

"I wasn't in your room," she faltered. "I remember now. I believe the tailor was here. One of the servants let him in."

I made it my business to go around to my tailor's within an hour's time and he contradicted her story. He had not been at the house.

I recognized it as an occasion where I had to make a right royal bluff. I went at once to police headquarters in Edinburgh. I asked for Chief Constable Ross, and sent in my card bearing Dr. A. K. Graves, Tsre, S. Australia. Presently I was shown into the chief's room and was received by a typical Scottish gentleman. I opened fire in this way:

"Have you any reason to believe that I am a German spy?"

I saw that it had knocked him off his pins.

"Why, no," he said, startled. "I don't know anything at all about it."

"It's not by your orders, then, that I am followed?"

"Certainly not," he replied.

He bowed me out. Of course, I knew I still would be shadowed, which I did not mind in the least

A Wrongly Addressed Letter.

About a week after my experience with Constable Ross, I received information that William Beardmore & Co., of Glasgow, were constructing some new 14-inch guns for the British government. That meant a change of base.

I at once made it my business to go to Glasgow and get particulars. I installed myself in the Central station hotel, and in a few weeks gained all the information I wanted. While in Glasgow I received letters addressed to me as James Stafford. I received two such letters, and upon calling at the General Post Office for a third, I was informed that there was a letter for A. Stafford.

"Oh, yes, that is my letter," I said.

The clerk demurred and replied:

"You asked for James Stafford. Under those circumstances I cannot hand you this letter. It is against the postal law."

Not being in a position to raise a question, I let it go at that, never for a moment thinking that my employers would be so culpably careless as to put any incriminating evidence in the mail. Events proved that that is just what they did. Moreover, I later came to know why that particular letter was addressed not to James but to A. Stafford. All my previous letters were addressed to me as Dr. A. K. Graves and were enclosed in the business envelope of a well-known chemical firm of Snow Hill, London, E. C.—which paper had been fabricated for the purpose. Of course, the letters were sent from the continent to London and there reposted.

When I left Edinburgh to find out about the 14-inch guns, I gave our people in London instructions to use plain envelopes and to address them to James Stafford, G. P. O., Glasgow. The first two letters were addressed correctly and plain envelopes were used. The third was not only misaddressed, but was enclosed in one of the Chemical company's envelopes—this, as I later learned, for a reason.

No one having called for it, the letter was returned to the chemical company. At their office it was opened and found to contain a typewritten letter in German language and five ten-pound notes on the Bank of England. The contents of the letter was such as to lead the firm to call in the police.

"There's a Gentleman Down Stairs to See You."

On the evening of April 14, I had just put on my evening clothes and gone to the upstairs writing-room. I was awaiting a party of gentlemen who were coming to dine with me in the hotel. There came a "buttons" who announced:

"There's a gentleman downstairs to se you, Doctor."

A premonition stole over me. I knew that my guests would not have sent for me to come down but would have been announced. I realised that if I was going to be caught there was no avoiding it. Secret service makes a man a fatalist.

I had hardly reached the last step of the grand stairway when four big plain-clothes men pounced upon me. More for the fun of it than anything else, I guess, I got on my horse and demanded to know what was the matter.

"You'll soon know," Inspector French declared.

The Search—and Prison.

He then ordered his men to search me and seemed amazed when they couldn't find any six shooters, daggers or bombs. I was taken back to my room and there he began going through my effects and, bundling them up.

I spent the night in the Glasgow city prison, and was taken the next day before a magistrate and formally committed to a sheriff's court. On July 12 my case came up before the sheriff's court. Waiving preliminary examination, I was committed for trial to the Edinburgh high court. It is significant that the extreme length of a committal without trial under British law is 105 calendar days, which 105 days up to the last minute I certainly waited. They were trying to find out my antecedents, but they did not succeed.

A letter from the Lord Provost informed me that all material for my defense should be in his hands a day before the trial. I had no defense. I neither denied nor admitted anything. I replied to his Lordship that as I was unaware of any offense there was no need of any defense. My attitude was a profound puzzle—which was as I wanted.

Scotland's "Most Sensational Court Procedure."

If you care to look over the back files of the English and Scottish newspapers of the time, you will read that my trial was "the most sensational court procedure ever held in a Scottish court of justice."

Now I shall reveal every circumstance of it. For the first time I shall explain how, why and by whom I was secretly released. Until I revealed myself in the United States, even the German foreign office thought me in jail.

Against me the crown had summoned 45 witnesses. They included admirals, colonels, captains, military and naval experts, post office officials—I cannot recall all. The press from all parts of Europe—for all Europe was vitally concerned in this trial—was represented.

Presiding was the Lord Justice of Scotland, himself no mean expert in military matters. The Solicitor General of Scotland, A. M. Anderson, who prosecuted for the crown, was supported by G. Morton, Advocate Depute. The government had indeed an imposing array of bewigged, black gowned, legal notables marshaled against me.

A Word to an Admiral.

On the first day I waived examination on all witnesses except the naval and military experts. I directed my fire against Rear Admiral T. B. Stratton Adair, who superintended the ordnance factories of the Beardmore Gun works in Glasgow.

The admiral was called in on testimony concerning the new 14-inch gun. The point they were trying to establish was that it was impossible for a man to have my knowledge of these guns unless he had obtained it first hand from the works in Glasgow. Of course, that brought the testimony into technicalities. I managed to involve the admiral in a heated altercation on the trajectory and penetrating power of the so-much disputed 14-inch gun.

I maintained that my knowledge of guns was such that I did not need to spy at Beardmore to obtain the things I knew.

The second day of the trial brought the Chemical company letter into the testimony—the letter that had been refused me and had in turn gone back to the Chemical company. Very gravely Sir A. M. Anderson, Crown Prosecutor, read the contents of this letter aloud. As I recall the exact wording it was:

"We are pleased to learn your successful negotiations of the business at hand. Be pleased to send us an early sample. As regards the other matter in hand I do not know how useful it will be to us. In any case my firm is not willing to pay you more than 100 in this case."

It was unsigned.

What the Letter Really Meant.

While reading, the prosecutor held the five ten-pound notes in his hand. Upon finishing he began a vigorous indictment which in substance he declaimed in this way:

"On the face of it, the letter does not seem suspicious. But if you gentlemen will recall the times of Prince Charles' insurrections, periods whenever intrigues were going on, you will remember that in communications of this sort a government was always referred to as a 'firm.' If this was an honest-business letter why was it enclosed in the envelope stationery of a company that knew nothing about it? Why was cash inclosed with it? What was his firm willing to pay 100 pounds for? Gentlemen, the reasons for all these things are obvious."

But the letter puzzled not only the court, the jury, the newspapers, but all England. For the first time I shall now explain it:

It was from the German government. By the "business at hand" they meant a new explosive and slow-burning powder that was to be used in the new type of 14-inch turret guns being made in Glasgow. Some of that explosive was in my possession. The fact that it was not discovered in my effects, nor was anything else incriminating found on me, is because the secret agent who knows his business leaves nothing about; but he "plants" things, that is to say, leaves them in a safe deposit vault with the key in the hands of a person with power of attorney.

By the "sample" in the letter was meant a sample of the explosive. The "other business at hand" spoken of was of tremendous importance, more vital to the safeguards of Britain than the other points mentioned in the letter.

There were sub-agents working at Cromarty. I did not know who they were; they simply made their reports to me, signing their German secret service number. I took up their points with Berlin. Well, the "other business in hand" was to put certain British army officers under a monthly retaining fee of £100 for which in the event of war he was to commit an act of unspeakable treason and treachery on a certain harbor defense.

Caught!

I had judged my jurymen right, for they were very little impressed by this letter. It was all too vague and even the fluent language of a Crown Prosecutor does not impress a hard-headed Scotchman. I was feeling in high spirits indeed, when I saw one of the attendants approach Sir A. M. Anderson and deliver a document that had been handed into court. I at once recognized it and my heart dropped into my shoes. The Solicitor General read the document and smiled. I knew they had me.

In addressing the court the Solicitor General produced two pieces of thin paper—the same that had been brought in on the previous afternoon.

"I have got to show the court," he said impressively, "the most deadly code ever prepared against the safeguards of Great Britain."

And it certainly was. It contained the name of every vessel in the British navy, every naval base, fortification and strategic point, in Great Britain. There were over ten thousand names and opposite each was written a number. For example, the dreadnaught Queen Mary was number 813.

Using a magnifying glass I had written in tiny characters my code. There were so many names it was impossible to memorize them all. Two opposite sheets of the little memorandum book were used, then the edges of the pages were pasted together. Whenever I learned the British warships were going to put to sea, I slipped the book in my pocket, went to a position of vantage where I could make out the silhouettes of the warships, classified them in my mind, and then writing out a cable put down the code numbers, say in this way:

214, 69, 700, 910, 21—(Necessary words were filled in by the A. B. C. code.)

This message was sent by way of Brussels or Paris to the intelligence department of the German Admiralty in Berlin and told them what warships were putting to sea or arriving at Rossyth.

The Puzzle of the Sentence.

The accidental finding of the code of course settled all further argument. I called no witness for the defense except two or three personal acquaintances, to each of whom I put this question:

"What is your knowledge of my attitude as regards England?"

They all declared that even if I was a spy in the pay of any foreign government, I certainly had never shown any personal feeling or animosity toward Great Britain.

All of which I figured might aid the cause of clemency. The jury was not out more than half an hour. I was found guilty of endangering the safeguards of the British empire and under the new law that had been aimed against German spies I was liable to seven years' penal servitude. Even then my spirits were not down. I had what Americans call "a hunch."

Just before his Lordship, the Chief Justice, summed up, an aristocratic, gray-clad Englishman, who never had been in the court room before, appeared and was courteously, almost impressively, conducted to the bench. I noticed that the Chief Justice bowed to him with unction and they had about two minutes' whispered conversation. His Lordship was nodding repeatedly. This worried me. I felt I was going to get it good.

But, in substance, his Lordship's verdict was:

"Taking all the circumstances into consideration, the court pronounces a sentence of 18 months' imprisonment."

I smiled and said:

"Exit Armgaard Karl Graves."

A Caller.

I was taken first to Carlton Hill jail, Edinburgh, and transferred after two weeks to Barlinney prison near Glasgow. Considering the circumstances, I was treated with surprising consideration. The conditions that had characterized my trial prevailed in the prison. I soon perceived that the Barlinney prison officials were trying to sound me in a canny Scotch way—with no result.

"You're foolish to stay in here—You must have something worth while—Why don't you get out?"

That was the gist of their talks with me from the warders up. I kept my mouth shut.

Now I shall present information that was denied the house of commons upon the occasion of an inquiry into my case.

On the fifth week of my imprisonment I was taken to the office of the governor of the prison. As I entered I saw a slight, soldierly looking English gentleman of the cavalry type—(a cavalry officer has certain mannerisms that invariably give him away to one who knows). The governor spoke first.

"Graves, here is a gentleman who wishes to see you."

The stranger nodded to the governor and said:

"I may be quite a while. You have your instructions."

"That's all right, sir," replied the governor.

The governor left and we were alone. The stranger rose.

Of course, being a prisoner, I had remained standing.

Robinson began some casual conversation.

"How are they treating you?"

"I have no complaints to make."

"Is the confinement irksome to you?"

"Naturally."

Then suddenly he changed front. Point blank he asked me:

"Why Not Work for Us?"

"Now, old chap, we know that you worked for Germany against us. We also know that you are not a German. Is there any reason why you should not work for us? Any private reason?"

"Captain," I said, "you of all men ought to know that the betrayal of your employers for a monetary or a liberty reason alone is never entertained by a man who has been in my work. We go into it with our eyes open, well knowing the consequences if we are caught. We do not squeal if we are hurt."

For a time he looked at me very earnestly.

"H-m," he said. "That just bears out what we have been able to ascertain about you. It puzzled us how a man of your ability acted the way you did. From the moment you landed in England, all the time you were doing your work, even after your arrest, in prison and in court you showed a sort of listless, almost an indifferent attitude. If I may put it this way, you seemed in no ways keen to go to extremes in any possible missions you might have had." He paused. "We think you could have done more than you did . . . The mildness of your sentence, has it surprised you?"

I grinned.

"Nothing surprises me, Captain."

His manner became very earnest.

"Supposing," he said, "we show you that it was a quasi-deliberate intention on the part of your employers to have you caught—what then?"

This did not startle me either. I had had an idea of that all along.

"Under these circumstances," I said, "I am open to negotiations. But I am rather deaf and my vision is very much obscured as long as I see bars in front of my window."

The captain smiled.

"Well, Doctor, I may see you again soon."

The Proof I Asked for.

I was taken back to my cell. I am frank to admit that I didn't sleep much for the next two or three nights.

But as I expected, another week brought Captain Robinson again. This time it was late in the evening after all the prisoners were shut up tight. The lieutenant-governor himself took me into the governor's office. No other warder or prison official observed us.

"Well, Doctor," was the way Robinson greeted me, "I have something definite to propose to you. You can be of use to us. You have still sixteen months of your sentence to serve. Are you willing to give these sixteen months of your time to us—terms to be agreed upon later? I am prepared to supply you with proofs that you were deliberately put away, betrayed by your employers, the German government."

He did so to my complete satisfaction. As I guessed, I had come to learn so much of Germany's affairs that I was dangerous. To betray me in such a way that I would not suspect and squeal was a clever way to close my mouth for seven years in jail or until vital plans had matured.

"How would you suggest that we go about it?" he asked.

"To be of the slightest degree of use to you, nobody must know of my release," I added. "Here is my suggestion. I must leave the execution of it to you. The impression I conveyed around Edinburgh was that my health is rather indifferent. So it is also believed here in prison. On these grounds it should be an easy matter for you to have me ostensibly transferred to another prison; instead of which, have me taken wherever you wish to. I see no necessity that, outside the lieutenant-governor, the governor and yourself, any one need know of it."

"Yes, yes," said Robinson. "That coincides with my own ideas and plans." Presently he departed and I went back again to my cell.

Alone and Free.

At half-past five the next morning, I was aroused by the lieutenant-governor. He was alone. There were no warders in sight. In the governor's office I found all my clothes and effects ready and laid out for me. These I addressed a parcel with the lieutenant-governor. We took a taxicab for the Caledonian station in Glasgow.

The trip to London was uneventful. At Euston station we were met by Captain Robinson. We went into a private waiting-room where Captain Robinson signed a paper or the lieutenant-governor. It was what amounted to a receipt for the prison's delivery of me into his hands. Then the lieutenant-governor left us; then Robinson left, after handing over an envelope containing cash and instructions.

My first move was to register at the Russel square hotel. Opening the envelope in my rooms, I found it contained ten pounds and the following instructions:

"Telephone at 10:30 tomorrow morning, this number Mayfair—"

I telephoned the Mayfair number and was told to hold the wire. Then Captain Robinson got on the 'phone and told me to meet him at luncheon at one o'clock at the Imperial hotel on Trafalgar Square. There another gentleman joined us—a Mr. Morgan, whom I easily judged and afterwards knew to be of the English secret service. Presently Morgan told me that I was to drive with Captain Robinson to Downing street that afternoon.

"One of our ministers wishes to see you," he explained.

We drove to Downing street, Captain Robinson and I, and stopped before the historic governmental building. After we had signed the book that all visitors to "Downing street" must sign, I was shown into an anteroom and Robinson took his leave. My name appears on this book as Trenton Snell, and if the English government challenges a statement that I shall subsequently make, let them produce the "Downing street" book for the date I shall mention, let them have a handwriting expert compare the name "Trenton Snell" with my handwriting.

I make this statement, for what followed is of tremendous importance.

Sir Edward Grey.

After a twenty-minute wait, which impressed me as being different from the slam-in-and-slam-out methods of the Wilhelmstrasse, I was shown up a flight of stairs. The attendant knocked on the door, opened it and announced, "the gentleman."

I was facing Sir Edward Grey.

"I presume you are familiar with Germany's naval activity."

"Up to a certain point, sir."

"What point?" he asked quickly.

"I am familiar only with the intelligence department of the admiralty," I replied.

"Their system?" he asked. "Is it so extensive and efficient as we have been led to believe?"

"That canont be exaggerated."

A Startled Foreign Minister.

At this Sir Edward began to throw out innuendoes to which I replied in like vein. The interview was not progressing. Finally he came out with what was in his mind.

"Do you know if any officials or naval officers are selling or negotiating to sell information to foreign intelligence departments?"

Although he had not said English officers or officials, I knew what he meant, but I made up my mind not to tell everything I knew.

"There are such," I replied.

It had the effect of making him look at me in a most startled manner.

"How do you know that? On what grounds do you make that assertion?" His agitation was ill-concealed.

"I have no specific proof," I replied—(which I had)—"but from information that has been gained from plans that have been secured—plans like those of your dreadnaughts Queen Mary and Ajax—it is obvious that these things have been done with the co-operation of high officials of your country."

He pressed me for further details, but I withheld them.

"Were you ever present at conferences attended by high officials? Were you, for instance, at the Schlangenbad meeting? Have you any data? Any documentary evidence of having been there?"

I was not a bit startled. I had guessed it would be that. His very question showed that it was useless for me to deny that I had been at the Black Forest conference where Germany had tried her best to isolate France by winning over England. Possibly Churchill, recalling my meeting him during the Boer war, had dropped a word about this coincidence to his Lordship.

Naturally I told him I possessed no such data. Still, I did not like the trend of his talk. I began to suspect that this British minister was doing one of two things. Either he did not know everything about the Black Forest meeting—(not at all improbable with the conditions existing in England's cabinet at that time)—or else he wanted to learn if I knew the tenor of that conference. In either case, it was one of those occasions where I deemed it wise to keep my own counsel.

After many searching questions upon the French system and her army and navy, he began to try to lead me to make comparisons between their strength and England's, these being based upon my personal observations. This, and the whole trend of his thought, led me to suspect that Sir Edward Grey was in noways sure in his own mind of, or favorable to, the proposed German-English alliance. With men like his lordship personal antipathy plays a powerful part in such matters.

Unsatisfactory Fishing.

He then began to try to make me divulge the contents of any personal dispatches I had carried for the German emperor.

"Do you know," he asked abruptly, "if the German emperor ever communicated with Viscount Haldane?"

"Yes, sir."

He leaned forward eagerly.

"How, and under what circumstances?"

"Why, I thought it common knowledge that they often corresponded. They are good friends."

"Not that. I mean direct secret communications between them, concerning affairs of the state."

I denied any knowledge of this, although I knew it to be so.

He began fishing around again, and his hints found me very stupid.

My unsatisfactory answers seemed to displease Sir Edward Grey, for with true British discourtesy he abruptly began working at something on his desk and without even saying good day, let a commissaire bow me out.

A few days later I received definite instructions from Captain Robinson. I was to go on my first mission in the interests of the British secret service and subsequently another mission brought me to New York, where I resigned from service permanently.