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Leon O. Prior



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GERMAN ESPIONAGE IN FLORIDA
DURING WORLD WAR II

by LEON O. PRIOR

ONLY ONE FLORIDA RESIDENT was arrested and convicted by the United States government for performing German inspired espionage in Florida during World War II. This one misguided individual was forty-nine year old Carl Herman Schroetter, with aliases John Charles Post and Captain Jack Post. He was arrested at his residence, 220 Northwest 33rd. Avenue, Miami, Florida, on September 2, 1941, by special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Upon arraignment before the United States Commissioner at Miami, Schroetter was charged with gathering and mailing information concerning the national defense to another German agent, Kurt Frederick Ludwig, in New York City. Ludwig then transmitted the information by secret ink and code communication to German agents in Spain and Portugal, and from there it was relayed to Germany. ¹

Subsequent to his arrest and on September 26, 1941, Schroetter and others operating under Ludwig's direction were indicted by a federal grand jury in New York City, and charged with violation of the federal espionage statutes, and not merely with using the mails to transmit improperly obtained material. ²

Schroetter was described by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a "stationary agent"; one who established himself in a defense area to gather all available information for transmittal to his foreign principals. A "stationary agent" must have a cover identity and Schroetter was well covered in Miami. He was born in Switzerland, educated in Germany, and first entered the United States about 1913. He became a naturalized citizen under the name of Schroetter in 1930, and never legally changed his name to Post. In the early 1930's he established himself in Miami, where for several years he operated a charter boat known as the "Echo of the Past." ³

He registered to vote in Dade County, Florida, on March 20,

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1. *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1941, page 1.
 2. *New York Times*, September 27, 1941, page 19.
 3. *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1941, page 1.

1933, using the name John Charles Post, and giving a false birthplace of Marshall, Texas. In the 1940 elections he served as a register clerk in voting precinct number 34, for Dade County.⁴ Just prior to his arrest, he had been employed as the night cook at the Greyhound Club, 9501 Northwest Seventh Avenue, Miami, Florida, a place frequented by the personnel of the Miami Naval Air Station, not far away.⁵

During the period 1920 to 1939, Schroetter made five trips back to Germany. His last trip was in 1939. He returned to the United States after the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Poland. It was during the 1939 trip that Schroetter was apparently contacted by a representative of the German government whom he referred to as a mutual friend in Germany, known to him and Ludwig. The mutual friend had given Schroetter's address to Ludwig and told Ludwig that Schroetter had a boat.⁶ Schroetter later admitted he had agreed to work with this mutual German friend, but implied that he had done so to safeguard the lives of his two sisters in Germany.⁷

During 1940 and 1941, Schroetter and Ludwig were in frequent contact by mail. Schroetter was one of several "stationary agents" under Ludwig's direction in various parts of the United States.⁸ He and the others enabled Ludwig to transmit to Germany amazingly accurate information about movements and cargoes of ships carrying war supplies to Great Britain. They also supplied information about airplane deliveries, production, harbors, military training, and sketches of strategic areas.⁹

Schroetter's principal, Kurt Frederick Ludwig, was a United States citizen, born in Ohio of German parents and taken to Germany by his parents at the age of two. Subsequently he visited the United States several times, and in March, 1940, he was sent to the United States by the German government for the specific purpose of securing and transmitting to Germany detailed information on the size, equipment, location, training, and morale of United States military units. Ludwig established residence in the German community in Queens, New York City,

4. *Miami Herald*, September 6, 1941, page 1.

5. *Miami News*, June 21, 1942, Section C.

6. *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1941, page 1.

7. *New York Times*, March 21, 1942, page 19.

8. *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1941, page 1.

9. *Miami Herald*, September 4, 1941, page 1.

and recruited three of his assistants from this area. One of his chief assistants was an attractive eighteen year old girl of German extraction named Lucy Boehmler.¹⁰ She traveled by automobile around the United States with Ludwig and on occasion was used as a lure to have servicemen disclose specific information that Ludwig desired.¹¹

A trip made by Ludwig and Lucy Boehmler in May, 1941, was not only to gather information along the eastern seaboard, but also for the purpose of a personal meeting with Schroetter in Florida. Lucy Boehmler testified at Ludwig's trial in February, 1942, that she accompanied Ludwig on the 1941 trip to Florida. During the trip Ludwig made numerous photos of military installations, observed the numbers of men in training, and noted the equipment and location of various military divisions.¹² Miss Boehmler recalled that after Ludwig and Schroetter conferred in Miami, she and Ludwig drove to Key West.¹³ They returned from Key West the evening of May 7, 1941, and stopped for the night at the Don Carlos Apartment Hotel in Coral Gables, Florida, located in the woods several hundred yards off the main highway, U. S. #1. Ludwig rented two rooms and gave the impression that Miss Boehmler was his sister. He signed the register as Fred Ludwig, Ridgewood, Queens, New York City. This hotel was just a short distance in front of the boom days skeleton structure of the present University of Miami Merrick Building. Recently the Don Carlos Apartment building was purchased by the University of Miami and converted into the University Infirmary. The building now stands in the center of the present University of Miami campus.

After his apprehension in Miami, Schroetter admitted that Ludwig had contacted him in Miami a short time prior to his arrest. Schroetter said that Ludwig asked him for aid in obtaining a small boat that would enable Ludwig to escape secretly to Cuba, without securing the necessary travel papers. Schroetter

10. *New York Times*, September 3, 1941page 12.

11. *Miami Herald*, September 4, 1941, page 1.

12. *Miami Herald*, February 5, 1942, page 1.

13. United States Department of Justice, *The Story of the Federal Bureau of Investigation*, undated, page 9. Published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C. for the Youth of America.

claimed he had never known or met Ludwig prior to this meeting.¹⁴

Schroetter pleaded guilty to the espionage charges for which he was indicted in New York City,¹⁵ and on March 20, 1942, was sentenced to serve ten years, in the federal prison.¹⁶

On March 29, 1942, after his removal to the United States penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia, he committed suicide by slashing his wrist with the diaphragm of a radio head set and hanging himself with a bed sheet attached to a water pipe.¹⁷

14. *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1941, page 1.

15. *New York Times*, October 21, 1941, page 13.

16. *New York Times*, March 21, 1942, page 19.

17. *New York Times*, March 31, 1942, page 11.