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Translation

Erika Canaris

Riederau, 15 November 1945

Dear General Donovan,

First permit me to thank you for the human sympathy you have shown me. You were kind enough to send me Captain Nordon to help in some personal difficulties. This proof of your kind willingness to help has done me a lot of good, and I shall never forget it;

Dr. Mueller and Captain Nordon told me that it might be a use if I made some notes concerning the life and character of my husband. Much as I like to comply with this request, I would ask you to consider as written only for you, for the purpose of giving a clear picture of my husband, but not for the purpose of having any of this published.

My husband was born in Westphalia on January 1 1887. His father was a mining director. In 1905 he entered the navy, went first to the Baltic, then the Mediterranean and Mexico. When war broke out in 1914, he was on the cruiser "Dresden". The Dresden took part in the battle of Coronel, later in the battle of Falkland. She was the only vessel that got out of the battle of Falkland and was later sunk by English ships near the coast of Chile. My husband was interned, fled however and returned to Germany after an adventurous flight. He was then used in the German Secret Service. From the fall of 1917 to the end of the war he was a submarine commander in the Mediterranean.

After his return he became active in an anti-bolshevist sense. Later he was the adjutant of the Reich Defense Minister Noske. In the summer of 1920 he was transferred to Kiel as an Admiralty Staff officer, and from 1922 to 1924 he

was First Officer on the cruiser "Berlin". From May to October 1924 he went on a professional teaching trip to Japan; then he had a command post in the Navy headoffice in Berlin for four years. Following this he spent 6 years in Wilhelmshafen as First Officer of the "Schlesien", as Chief of the Staff of the North Sea station, and as Commanding Officer of the "Schlesien". On October 1 1934 he was appointed Commander of the "Fortress of Swinemunde, but in December 1934 he was transferred to Berlin as Chief of the Abwehr. He held this post until February 1944 when he was deposed by Hitler and the whole Abwehr was put under the jurisdiction of Himmler and the SS. Officially my husband was sent "on leave", but on July 1 1944 he received a command as Admiral and Chief of the Special Staff for Trade and War Industry. On July 23 1944 he was arrested because of participation in the attempted assassination of Hitler. After having been imprisoned for 8 and a half months, he died on April 9 1945 in the concentration camp at Flossenbuerg for a just course.

Concerning his activity as Chief of the Abwehr, a specially concerning details of its structure, I can say little or nothing, since as a woman I was never much interested in these things. For two years I was away from Berlin because of the air attacks and spent most of this time on the Ammersee. Before that I lived at home as his wife and the mother of our two children and never interfered in official business. My husband did not want women to know of official affairs. He sometimes did tell me things and sometimes gave me things to read, such as the Allied War Communiques and the speeches made in Parliament as well as those made by President Roosevelt which he all received in the original. Roughly I was also informed about the preparations of July 20 and similar plans. My knowledge of these is much too general to be of any interest to you.

It might be of interest to you to know of the human side of my husband since that will explain to you the true motives of his actions. Such a description is not easy. I think that a good term to describe him would be "Christ of Action", as a friend of humanity in the truest and most beautiful sense of the words for whom there was no difference ~~under~~ among human beings as far as profession, rank, race or confession was concerned. Many of those whom he helped, will bear witness to this. He was very religious, and believed in the supernatural. He had a high feeling of responsibility for the unexpressed duties of life. He was extremely active, did not spare himself, and yet was extremely tender in his emotions. In the office he asked everything of himself, of his collaborators and the people under him. He had sympathy and human understanding for them and was always ready to help.

It is impossible to say how much he suffered from developments. He used his powers to oppose as much as possible the growing lawlessness. This was known. Many people who were persecuted by the Gestapo came to him, such as Jews, pastors, members of Christian organisations etc. Often meetings took place in our house with people or their representatives. Often he handled these cases directly in his office in spite of the dangers involved. He was supported in this respect by Dr. von Dohnany, who was arrested in 1933 and later died; also by General Oster who died with him. I am attaching a list of such acts of assistance but know, that these are only a small percentage of all that he did for others. Miss Hanna Reichmuth who worked with the pastor in Berlin-Schlachtensee, will be able to give you cases in which he saved Protestant pastors from arrest and concentration camps.

He helped everyone - be it a tubercular beggar, or be it the last Greek Minister Rangabe whose daughter was very sick in a Berlin Sanatorium and who

asked him to take her to Switzerland. He helped where help was needed. He had innumerable friends. He loved animals, particularly his small Dachshunds which always accompanied him.

He did everything in his power for his family, and words cannot describe it. He never thought of himself. He never took a vacation from January 1939 until his dismissal, because he realized that his absence would be used by his opponents and would take away from him the possibility to help. He was very modest and frugal, and always declined to move into an official apartment with beautiful representative rooms. Up to the end we lived in our small six room house in Schlachtensee in spite of the social obligations which we had.

My husband immediately recognized the dangers of National Socialism. He hoped that the danger could be mastered. To his sorrow the first and best chance to get rid of the system was not utilized - June 30, 1934 when the Army should have struck. That same year he took over the leadership of the Abwehr. During the following years, many plans of overthrowing the regime were doomed to failure because of the mass psychosis of the people, nourished by the treatment foreign nations accorded ~~him~~ Hitler. My husband's chief aim was to get good intelligence from abroad in order to try to convince the powers that be. He became extremely unpopular because of his continual warnings, and made many enemies in the Armed Forces Leadership Staff, in the General Staff, the Foreign Office, Gestapo and other places. Himmler, Jodl, Schmundt, Sperrly, Richthofen, Keitelring, Rader, Doenitz and Ribbentrop and Ritter were among his enemies.

I shall always remember the days before the outbreak of war. My husband always prophesied the disastrous end of the mad adventure and never changed his mind even in the face of the victories of the first years. He hates nothing more than the "special reports" - he saw, through them, the death march of his people. After the

first bombardment of Warsaw by the German Luftwaffe he returned home, deeply shaken, and said: "If there is justice, and I believe there is, we will go through the same thing. And then God save us." He also said: " We are all guilty, all, and we will all have to pay for it." He and his friend suffered so terribly because they had to fight on the German side and loved their fatherland, and yet their sympathies were not on that side and could not be - because their philosophical attitude was so different.

He kept on because of the hope for an overthrow of the regime, the hope to be able to help reconstruct a new, better, decent Germany. "I wanted so much to help them", he said once, and meant the "other side". Only because of his desire and keep to help, in a political and human sense, did he defend/his position, in spite of all opponents. He stuck to his post until he was deposed by Hitler in the most undignified manner. A short time after his dismissal he showed me a bunch of letters from people who had asked him to help them, and he said sadly: "There is nothing I can do for these people any more."

I shall never be able to understand why fate decreed as it did - why he had to suffer so much, he who had helped others so much. It is our task to go on living the way he would have wanted us to.

If I have told you all this, I have done it only for the sake of my husband, in order to show him to you in the proper light, and also, perhaps, in order to convince you, General Donovan, that my husband, together with those who thought and lived as he did, represented the decent Germany, which always existed and which will always exist.

With kindest regards, and renewed thanks, I am

(sign.) Erika Canaris