The Abwehr, the German Intelligence Services, and the 1940 Western Campaign against Belgium

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The German invasion of Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Low Countries in May and June 1940 has seen a myriad of scholarship related to the planning and the course of this campaign. Surprisingly, the intelligence factor within German operational planning has received little attention so far (Frieser, 1995; Germany, 1991; a noteworthy exception is May, 2000).

This article discusses the role of the intelligence component of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces High Command), the *Abwehr*. It should be emphasised that the *Abwehr*, often misunderstood as *the* German intelligence service, was but one organization within a much bigger German military intelligence system.

While a number of recent publications have examined sub-areas of the Abwehr, an overall history of the Abwehr is still lacking. An essay by Thomas Menzel provides basic organisational information (Menzel, 2008). The various publications by Etienne Verhoeyen examine the *Abwehr's* activities in and against Belgium (Verhoeyen, 2011). While the study by Magnus Pahl provides information on the Army's intelligence organization, *Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost* (Department Foreign Army East), there is no corresponding study on its Western equivalent, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* (Pahl, 2012). This gap cannot be filled by the memoirs of Ulrich Liss (1897-1968), head of the department from 1938 to 1943 (Liss, 1959).

Generally speaking, the situation with regard to archival sources is scarce. Consequently, it is hardly possible to reconstruct the acquistion, the processing, and the implementation of intelligence during the Western Campaign; exceptions remain anecdotal (Halder). The *Abwehr* records groups in the German Federal Archives suffer from large, war-related gaps. With regard to 1940, the two intelligence record groups RW 5 (*Amt*

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Ausland/Abwehr) and RW 49 (subordinate offices and units of *Amt Ausland/Abwehr*), contain virtually no relevant documents on Belgium.

The Political Archive of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, the German Federal Foreign Office, contains individual files with direct reference to intelligence activities. Over the last years, a Russian-German digitisation project has drawn up *Wehrmacht* records related to the Western Campaign which are held in the Russian Federation as trophy documents.[3] The British National Archives hold personal files created by the British intelligence service MI5 on *Abwehr* officers and Belgian *Abwehr* agents deployed in Belgium. However, the focus of the records is on the later years of the war.[4]

Fortunately, additional resources can be found in Belgium itself. Still, the archives of the Belgian counter-espionage service were almost completely destroyed in June 1940. Reorganized as a joint intelligence organization in the spring of 1940, the *Administration de la Sûreté de l'Etat* (Administration of the State Security) retreated to France together with the Belgian government in May (Choquet, 2022). During this operation, the service decided to destroy its files in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy. Judicial files concerning pre-war-espionage cases have been preserved, as have been most of the files of the *Police des Etrangers*. They contain documents collected by the *Sûreté publique*, the pre-war Belgian civilian security service, concerning the actions of German nationals or others. Finally, investigations carried out after the war against persons suspected of having acted on behalf of Nazi Germany before or during the conflict shed further light on certain clandestine operations and the way they were possibly repressed. These files can be found at the Belgian National Archives and the Study- and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society (CEGESOMA).[5]

This article places the *Abwehr* in the context of the German military intelligence apparatus. Due to its complexity and contradictions, however, its is possible to shed only some highlights (for an overview, see Geyer, 1984). The aim of the essay is therefore to outline the structure of the *Abwehr* against the background of the Western campaign. In a first part, the most important analysis department, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere* (Foreign Armies Department) and the most important departments of the *Abwehr* are presented. The second part features some *Abwehr activities* carried out in Belgium before the war. In a third part, the activities of the *Abwehr* during the Western campaign and its involvement in the operations are examined. The final chapter attempts to assess the *Abwehr*'s contribution to the success of the Western campaign.

3 www.germandocsinrussia.org [last consultation 28.10.2022].

4 Most of the relevant files are digitised in The National Archives, London (hereafter: TNA), *The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files*): http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/search.asp [last consultation 28.10.2022]

5 See for example Study- and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society [hereadter: CEGESOMA], AA 1312, *Dossiers généraux et sur des personnes de la Sûreté d'Etat sur l'Abwehr et la Sipo-SD pendant l'occupation*. Like most of the CEGESOMA fonds mentioned in this article, it has since been transferred to the National Archives.

1. The *Abwehr* and the Intelligence Apparatus in the Run-up to the Western Campaign

An overall picture of the German military intelligence services during the Second World War is characterised by five features:

1. Organisationally, intelligence tasks were sharply separated between gathering and analysis departments in the Prussian-German military since the 19th century;
2. During the First World War, the interwar period and the Second World War, the analysis organisations were subordinate to the branches, i.e. during 1939-45: the *Heer* with its high command (*Oberkommando des Heeres;* OKH), with the *Abteilungen Fremde Heere Ost* and *West*; the *Luftwaffe* and its 5. *Abteilung des Luftwaffenführungsstabes*; and the *Kriegsmarine* and its 3. *Abteilung der Seekriegsleitung*;
3. The *Wehrmacht* branches each had their own intelligence apparatus. An intelligence apparatus is understood to be the network of gathering and analysis organisations of each of the *Wehrmacht* branches. Army, Airforce, and Navy had its own gathering organisations such as a signals intelligence unit or an attaché service. There were two exceptions: the *Luftwaffe* was responsible for the air reconnaissance of all *Wehrmacht* branches.[6] The other exception was the *Abwehrabteilung I*, the *Geheime Meldedienst*, which carried out human intelligence operations for all *Wehrmacht* branches;
4. With the exception of a small *Ic-Abteilung* of the *Wehrmachtführungsstab* established at the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) in the autumn of 1942, there was no central analysis organisation at the top of the *Wehrmacht* until the end of the war.[7] Nevertheless the OKW had its own SIGINT component: OKW/Chi;[8]
5. Intelligence activities were integrated into the army command structure and doctrine. The activities of the *Abteilungen Fremde Heere* and their cooperation with the *Abwehr* were determined by the service regulations *Truppenführung* and the *Handbuch des Generalstabsdienstes*.[9] Until 1941, there was no military terminology that summarised these activities.[10]

The example of signals intelligence reveals the complexity of intelligence activities: General Erich Fellgiebel (1886-1944) had been in charge of signals intelligence for the *Wehrmacht* and for the Army's *Nachrichtentruppe* in personal union since October 1937. Corresponding organisations also existed for the air force and the navy. In addition,

6 There is a lack of modern studies on individual procurement organisations, with the exception of Vogler, 2020. No recent scholarship is available for the Army's signal intelligence. According to Ulrich Liss, the enemy radio stations were the "best source of intelligence" of *Fremde Heere West*. He described them as the "gossipy darlings of all intelligence chiefs" (Liss, 1958, 218).

7 For reasons of space, it is not possible here to place it in the context of German military command structures (especially the dualism of OKW and OKH) and Hitler's increasing dominance in the military command structure.

8 On the organisation of German SIGINT branches see Pahl, 2012, 195.

9 Heeresdienstvorschrift (H.Dv.) 300. *Truppenführung* (TF), 2. Teil. Berlin 1934; and *Handbuch für den Generalstabsdienst im Kriege*, 1. Teil, 1.8.1939.

10 H.Dv.g. 89 *Feindnachrichtendienst* (1.3.1941). Ulrich Liss, who had played a decisive role in this, stated after the war that he had not found a suitable translation of the English term 'intelligence' and had therefore chosen '*Feindnachrichtendienst*' ('enemy intelligence service'). Within the *Wehrmacht*, the term did not catch on. For the most part, the field of activity continued to be referred to as *Ic-Dienst* – even if it went beyond intelligence and counterintelligence and also included press and propaganda issues. (Pahl, 2012, 26-27).

civilian agencies such as the *Forschungsamt* (Research Office) of the Air Ministery, the *Forschungsstelle* of the *Reichspost* and the *Abteilung Department Z* of the *Auswärtiges Amt* also worked in the field of signals intelligence.

1.1. The *Abteilung Fremde Heere West*

With regard to the German war preparations against Belgium, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* of the Army High Command was by far the most important analysis organisation. In autumn 1938, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere* (until 1931: *Heeresstatistische Abteilung* or *Abteilung* T 3 des *Truppenamtes*) was divided into *Fremde Heere Ost* and *Fremde Heere West*, respectively 12th and 3rd departments of the general staff). With this step, a new post was created at the same time with the *Oberquartiermeister IV* (OQu IV), to which the two departments were subordinated, as well as the *Attaché-Abteilung* in charge of the military attachés (Pahl, 2012, 61-63). The *Oberquartiermeister IV*, colonel Kurt von Tippelskirch (1891-1957), was not directly involved in operations, but had mainly coordinating tasks. However, his role in communicating the results of the departments under his command is not to be underestimated.

Fremde Heere obtained its information from various sources – not only from the *Abwehr*. The sources included the analysis of daily newspapers and military journals, attaché reports, signals intelligence and from captured documents (Liss, 1958, 19). Another source were reconnaissance trips by officers. Liss himself spent his summer holidays in France and Belgium in 1939 (Liss, 1958, 82). Since Belgium was not at war with Germany until May 1940, German officers could continue to travel to the country. A few months before the German attack, also *Luftwaffe* officers still toured the country (Verhoeyen, 2011, 198). In March 1940, officers of the 6th Army reconnoitred the Meuse crossings, and in the same month, the intelligence officer of *Heeresgruppe B* toured Belgium and the Netherlands.[11]

By means of this information from various sources, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere* drew up a picture of the situation. Its main task was to identify and locate enemy units. In this mosaic, the *Abwehr* was only one of several suppliers of raw information. Neither did it contribute directly to the situation picture, this was the sole task of the analysis organisations (such as the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West*) nor had it direct access to the decision-makers in the general staff. Among the most important products of *Abteilung Fremde Heere* on Belgium, apart from the regular situation reports, were its memoranda on the Belgian army and fortifications (Liss, 1958, 74-77).[12] The information-gathering on foreign fortifications is an example for the fragmentation of the analysis organisations as well. It was not until the summer of 1939 that the land fortifications department officers of the General Staff, who worked on the foreign fortifications, were distributed among the *Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost* and *West*. There they were significantly involved in the investigations on the Belgian fortresses (Liss, 1958, 17, 35 and 93).

11 *Kriegstagebuch* (KTB) *Heeresgruppe* B (9.3.1940), Tsentral'nyy Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Podolsk [hereafter: CAMO]: 500/12454/73, p. 138 and pp. 138-139.

12 See *Gliederung des belgischen Friedensheeres,* (Stand: 1. Sept. 1939), *Verteilung des belgischen Friedensheeres* (Stand: 1. Nov. 1939), *Kriegsgliederung der belgischen Wehrmacht am 1. Juni 1939,* Bundesarchiv (hereafter: BArch), RH 2/1542; *Technische Angaben über die niederländischen und belgischen Befestigungen* (Stand: 1.11.1939), BArch, RH 2/3803; *Taschenbuch Belgisches Heer 2. Auflage* (Stand: 1.2.1940), BArch, RH 2/3820.

1.2. The *Abwehr*

The *Abwehrgruppe*, established in the Reichswehr Ministry in autumn 1919, was subordinated to *Abteilung T 3*, later *Abteilung Fremde Heere* of the camouflaged Army general staff. On the 1th of April 1928, the intelligence services of the Army and the Navy were (partially) merged. The *Abwehrabteilung* was established as a joint organization, directly responsible to the Minister of Defence (Altenhöner, 2015).[13] Naval signals intelligence remained under the Navy's responsibility until 1945. Until 1937, the Army's signals intelligence organization remained with the *Abwehr*.

The territorial subdivisions of the *Abwehr* (*Abwehrstellen*) were organised on different levels. The superior level consisted of *Abwehrstellen* (*Abwehr* offices, or *ASts*), which had been established with each military district command since the early 1920s. As we will see, some of those *Abwehrstellen* played an important role in pre-war covert operations in Belgium. Smaller adjoining posts (*Nebenstellen*, or *Nests*) and outposts (*Außenstellen*) were subordinate to the *Abwehrstellen*. After the *Wehrmacht's* takeover of Austria and the Sudetenland, *Abwehrstellen* were set up in theses areas as well as in the occupied Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939. These *Abwehrstellen* were also integrated into the Army's regional command structure.

In July 1928, the duties of the Ic officer and the *Abwehr* officer (AO) were merged by the establishment of the Ic/AO officer's office. The 'Ic' was the general staff officer responsible for intelligence. Until 1945, he was also responsible for matters related to press, censorship, propaganda, and the troop morale. As heads of the *Abwehrstellen*, the Ic/AO officers were part of the Army command structure. An exception were the *Abwehrstellen* Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, which were subordinated to the naval station commands. The only Abwehr offices that were exclusively subordinate to the *Amt Ausland/Abwehr* were the *Kriegsorganisationen* (*KO*). These were rezidenturas set up from 1938 onwards and staffed with *Abwehr* officers disguised as diplomatic staff. At the beginning of the war, *Kriegsorganisationen* existed, among others, in Switzerland, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium.

The task of *Abwehrabteilung I* was the "procurement of secret intelligence for the *Heer*, *Marine* and *Luftwaffe*". In doing so, it was to cooperate with the *Auswärtiges Amt*, the *Gestapo*, the *Forschungsamt* and "all relevant authorities and other suitable organisations".[14] At the beginning of the war in 1939, the groups *Heer* (Abw. I H, with the sub-groups *Ost* and *West*), *Marine* (Abw. I M), *Luftwaffe* (Abw. I L), Technical *Abwehr* Equipment (Abw. I G) and Air Force/Technology (Abw. I T/Lw) worked as autonomous groups inside the *Abwehrabteilung I*. In addition, there was an Economy Unit (Abw. I Wi) and a Radio Network Unit (Abw. I i). The Technical *Abwehr* Equipment group was responsible for equipping agents with forged papers, secret inks, etc., and the Radio Network Unit handled radio communications with agents. Group I *Heer* 'supplied' the *Abteilungen Fremde Heere Ost* and *West* in the OKH, Abw. I *Marine* the 3rd department of the *Seekriegsleitung* (*Marinenachrichtendienst*), Abw. I *Luftwaffe* the Foreign Air Forces

13 The precise position of the *Abwehr* in the military command system and its organisation were subject to permanent change. It is impossible here to describe these developments in detail.

14 *Dienstanweisung für die Abteilung Abwehr I*, in: *Kriegsspitzengliederung und Kriegsstärkenachweisung des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (1.3.1939), CAMO 500/12450/18, p. 45.

Department in the Luftwaffe staff and Abw. I Economy the *Wehrwirtschaftsamt* in the OKW. Furthermore, there was the *Abwehrabteilung Z*, which was concerned with administrative tasks, and the *Abteilung Ausland*. The task of the latter included liaising between *Wehrmacht* and *Auswärtiges Amt*. Furthermore, it evaluated open sources such as foreign newspapers.

The relationship between the *Abwehr* and the *Abteilungen Fremde Heere* was never without friction. In the autumn of 1939, a crisis developed regarding the cooperation with *Fremde Heere* West. This crisis has been above all revealed through the diaries of Helmuth Groscurth (1898-1943). He was head of *Abwehrabteilung II* until 1938 and liaison officer for the *Abwehr* at OKH from August 1939. This liaison post in April 1940 became the *Heerwesenabteilung,*. It dealt primarily with military-political and political matters (Krausnick, 1970, 212-213, 216, 222, 286, 294, 319, and on the tasks of the *Heerwesenabteilung*, 42-48). The crisis was triggered by the alleged failure of the *Abwehr* since the beginning of the war, as human intelligence had largely come to a standstill. As late as 1956, Ulrich Liss lamented the "complete collapse of our *Abwehr* at the beginning of the war" and that therefore the deployment of the French and British forces was "still a sea of fog" as late as November 1939. In addition, the slow transmission of the *Abwehr* reports was deplored. Liss criticised the *Abwehr* harshly and was perceived by Groscurth as a "troublemaker". As late as February 1940, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), the head of the *Amt Ausland/Abwehr*, defended himself to Liss and Tippelskirch against the accusations.

There is no evidence that the *Abwehr* succeeded in recruiting informers in the top echelons of the Belgian Army or the civilian authorities. Thus, there are no documents proving that the *Abwehr* had agents who could provide reliable information about the German documents that fell into Belgian hands at Maas-Mechelen in January 1940 (Frieser, 1995, 75-76). Nevertheless, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere* was satisfied with the information provided. At the end of January 1940, during a joint meeting of the *Abwehr* and *Fremde Heere West*, Major General von Tippelskirch stated that the secret intelligence service against Belgium and the Netherlands was working "smoothly" and met "the requirements". Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich-Carl Rabe von Pappenheim (1894-1977), the military attaché in Brussels and The Hague, also confirmed that "reconnaissance in Belgium worked one hundred percent".[15]

The German plan of operations had focused above all on surprise and speed. Therefore, the rapid and unhindered crossing of the Albert Canal in Eastern Belgium and the securing of the bridges and roads were essential prerequisites for a German success. The canal was covered, among others, by the Eben Emael fortress, which was considered one of the strongest fortresses in the world. In the early morning of the 10th of May 1940, it was attacked in one of the most spectacular commando raids of the Second World War and was forced to surrender a day later (Frieser, 1995, 104). A closer look at the operation shows that this success was by no means solely due to the daring of the attacking task force, but that it was a special operation that had also been thoroughly

15 Abwehr I H/West, *Aktennotiz über Besprechung Amtschef Ausl/Abw mit OQIV am 26.1.1940* (27.1.1940), CAMO 500/12450/48, pp. 6-11. The following day, Tippelskirch presented the results of the meeting to the Chief of Staff. Halder, Kriegstagebuch, 1962, 174 (27.1.1940). On the problematic nature of this key document, see Frölich, 2020.

prepared by the *Abwehr* and other intelligence. It was the result of systematic assessment of the fortification with all available reconnaissance means. Ulrich Liss described the best source available as "completely new stereoscopic aerial photographs" (Liss, 1958, 129). Agent reports and the interrogation of Belgian defectors also contributed to the intelligence picture (Vogler, 2020, 350-361). The latter also helped in the construction of models on which the attack could be trained (Verhoeyen, 2011, 283-284). *Abwehrabteilung I* obtained documentation from German construction companies involved in the construction of the Albert Canal from 1930 to 1939 (Hubatsch, 1952, 277; Mader, 1979, 65). The German military attaché in Brussels also claimed the reconnaissance of the forts around Liège, which had been a focus of his work, for his organisation (Rabe von Pappenheim, 1987, 116). Rabe's open sources included photographs, newspaper reports, and postcards (Vogler, 2020, 359). The contribution of signals intelligence cannot be determined. However, as early as autumn 1939, the intelligence on the "Liège and Namur fortress networks" was one of its focal points.[16]

Abwehrabteilung II was the latest department of the *Abwehr*. Its origins can be traced back to the 1920s, when Major (ret.) Friedrich Georg Voss worked on minority issues in the then *Abwehr I* group. From this activity, a sub-group developed, which was enlarged in 1938 to become *Abwehrabteilung II*. Its tasks were, on the one hand, the "reconnaissance and use of minorities and anti-state organisations of foreign powers". The goal was to 'weaken' the enemy's armed forces by subversion and propaganda and to conduct sabotage operations on enemy territory.[17] During the Western campaign *Abwehrabteilung II* was primarily tasked with protecting critical infrastructure like bridges and tunnels *en route* of the German advance from being destroyed by the retreating Allied troops. In addition, it sought liaison with Flemish nationalists and the German minority in Belgium. Since the mid-1930s, the *Abwehr* had already been in contact with Flemish nationalists, especially the Fascist party *Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond* (VNV) led by Staf De Clercq (1884-1942). During the mobilization of the Belgian army the VNV had established a so-called *Militaire Organisatie* (MO), a clandestine organization aiming at coordinating actions of the VNV-members under Belgian uniform. The immediate impact of these connections, and most specifically of possible MO subversive and even sabotage activities during the May 40 campaign, remains difficult to determine, but was probably extremely limited (Verhoeyen, 2011, 237-260).[18] There is also a lack of evidence on the immediate consequences of the *Abwehr*'s desertion campaign among Belgian soldiers.

Abwehrabteilung III was tasked with countering espionage and sabotage. Its field of activity also included countering subversion and corruption within the *Wehrmacht* and monitoring military and civilian correspondence. Group III F (counter-intelligence) was one of the *Abwehr*'s most highly staffed units. Its task was to penetrate enemy intelligence services. Among the rather unknown sections of the Abwehr is Group D (deception) of *Abwehrabteilung III*, which was to provide the enemy with false information via the connections of Group III F (counter-intelligence).

16 *Heeres-Nachrichten-Führer, Aufgabenverteilungsplan* Nr. 1 (16.11.1939), CAMO 500/12454/31, pp. 91-93.

17 *Dienstanweisung für die Abteilung Abwehr* II (1.3.1939), in: *Kriegsspitzengliederung und Kriegsstärkenachweisung des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (1.3.1939), CAMO 500/12450/18, p. 50). The activities of *Abwehrabteilung* II are comparatively well documented by its war diary. Transcripts can be found in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München (FD 47), and in BArch, RW 5/497-498.

18 *KTB der Abwehrabteilung* II, BArch, RW 5/497, pp. 61-62 (3.5.1940) and pp. 71-72 (31.5.1940).

The German military leadership was well aware of the danger posed by the enemy's intelligence service. For example, in January 1940, during a meeting at the headquarters of *Heeresgruppe B*, Colonel General Walther von Brauchitsch (1881-1948), the Army's Commander-in-Chief, pointed out that "secrecy on all measures is of the utmost importance". The experiences of the last few months had shown that the enemy had always received information in good time of our planned measures; this should be avoided at all cost. One of the many means to this end is absolute compliance to the order given by the Führer that each *Abwehrdienstelle* should only know what was absolutely necessary for it to know. The schedule for the crossing of the border is subject to particular secrecy.[19]

Case Study: Deception of the Enemy

The German plan of operation relied heavily on deceiving the enemy about the centre of gravity of the attack, the forces of *Heeresgruppe A* pushing through through the supposedly impenetrable Ardennes (Frieser, 1995, 168-172). The British military historian Basil Henry Liddell Hart (1895-1970) compared this plan to a bullfight. In this metaphor, *Heeresgruppe B* attacking in the North corresponded to the red cloth of the torero, while *Heeresgruppe A* was given the role of the sword that would kill the bull (Frieser, 1995, 119). Thus camouflage, secrecy and deceptive measures were essential prerequisites for the success of the operation.

In the scholarship on 1940, the *Abwehr*'s deception operations are repeatedly given credit for the success of the Western campaign (Frieser, 1995, 100-101 and 103-105). According to Bernhard von Loßberg, staff officer in the *Wehrmachtführungsamt* from 1939 to 1941, Canaris "played a major role [...] in the successful deception of the enemy in the West" (von Loßberg, 1949, 77). However, little is known about the precise contribution of the *Abwehr* in the run-up to the Western campaign. The diaries of Chief of General Staff Franz Halder (1884-1972) and Helmuth Groscurth mention discussions between the General Staff and Colonel Dr. Gotthold Schäfer (1883-1945), head of Abwehr III D (Krausnick, 1970, 280 [26.9.1939], 300 [23.10.1939] and 304 [3.11.1939]). In Halder's work, there are several references to deception, especially in the autumn of 1939 – without the *Abwehr* being mentioned in every case.[20] Regarding deception, the *Abwehr* is to be understood primarily as an instrument of the Wehrmacht's Operations Department and less as an independent actor. The guidelines for deception in the West were laid down by the OKW in February 1940.[21] The processing and 'unified management' of enemy deception was the task of the *Abteilung Landesverteidigung* of the *Wehrmachtführungsamt* (from 1940 Wehrmachtführungsstab). The circle of those involved was to be kept as small as possible. The officers were instructed to use "the spreading of news through personalities travelling abroad (e.g. business man), carefully considered leaks to neutral military attachés, planified use of 'salon espionage', exchange of information material

19 *Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe* B (25.1.1940), CAMO 500/12454/73, pp. 35-42. Brauchitsch was referring to Hitler's order on secrecy in the Wehrmacht of 11.1.1940, which was motivated by the Maas-Mechelen incident.

20 A study on deception measures on the Southern wing of the German front does not mention the *Abwehr* (Vetsch, 1973).

21 OKW/WFA/Abt. L, *Richtlinien für Feindtäuschung* (2.2.1940), Staatsarchiv Nürnberg (hereafter StA Nürnberg), KV Anklage C-70. The present copy of the *Richtlinien* is the copy intended for the Commander-in-Chief of the *Kriegsmarine*. Annex 1 („*Western Front*") was not issued to him.

with Neutral states".[22] However, concrete examples for the *Abwehr's* operations are missing. Deception is here not to be understood as a measure to instigate a public fear regarding a German 'Fifth Column', as the target of deception measures was rather the enemy's military leadership.[23] The example of enemy deception underlines the range of tasks performed by the *Abwehr*, but also shows that it usually worked in conjunction with other military offices.

2. The Covert Operations of the *Abwehrstelle* Münster in Belgium, 1936-1940

Among the 18 *Abwehrstellen*, four were engaged in espionage in Belgium before the Second World War. In order of importance, these were *Ast* Münster (with *Nebenstellen* in Cologne and Düsseldorf), *Ast* Wiesbaden, *Ast* Stuttgart and *Ast* Hamburg with a *Nest* in Bremen. Each *Ast* consisted of different departments which concentrated on different fields of interests, like I *Heer* (or I H) for foreign armies. The department I H of *Ast* Münster, more specifically of *Nest* Cologne, will be more specifically examined in this article. *Ast* Münster indeed concentrated on intelligence from Belgium and to a lesser extent from Northern France. Since there is quite a lot of information available on *Nest* Cologne, an analysis of its performance offers the opportunity to show the concrete workings of the *Abwehr* in the field.

Abteilung I H of Nest Cologne was headed by Major Wilhelm Friedrich Rudolph (1892-1966).[24] He was a veteran of the *Abwehr*, for which he worked since 1924. In 1929, he was transferred to *Ast* VI (Münster), where he was put in charge of Section I H of *Nest* Cologne. In Cologne, he surrounded himself with a number of employees who were called *Haupt-Vertrauensmänner* (or *Haupt-V-Mann*) or *Agentenführer*. They concentrated on recruiting agents from countries on which the Abwehr was seeking information. One of these *Haupt-V-Mann*, Jean-Gaspar (Hans) Rumpe. Born in 1891, he had joined the *Abwehr* in March 1937 through Major Rudolph. He concentrated on recruiting agents and frequently met agents who had been recruited by Rudolph. Another *Haupt-V-Mann* who often stayed in Belgium was Hermann Brandel ('Otto'). To describe the concrete functioning of the *Abwehr* covert operations, we have chosen the work of one of Rudolph's most active agents, the Belgian Jean Vandecasteele. He was one of the initiators of an operation that was widely reported in the press in 1939: the 'Dombret case' (Dormal, 2009).

Recruitment by the *Abwehr* could take place in various ways. It could be done through a German consulate, a customs post at the Belgian-German border or even through the *Staatspolizei*, who also had outposts at the border. After someone had been earmarked as a potential agent, meetings were usually organised in a Neutral country, mainly the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. These first meetings, called '*Treffs*', served to evaluate the candidate agent to determine whether he was suitable for the requirements of the German service. If the candidate seemed suitable, he was officially

22 OKW/WFA/Abt. L, Richtlinien für Feindtäuschung (2.2.1940), StA Nürnberg, KV Anklage C-70. See also Loßberg, 75-76.

23 On the propaganda of the *Reichsministeriums für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, see Buchbender/Hauschild, 1984. The propaganda apparatus of the Wehrmacht was also involved in deception measures: Von Wedel 1962, 28, 35; Murawski, 1962, 86; Matin, 1973, 74-82. On the effects of the idea of a Fifth Column using the example of the British Army, see Prysor, 2005.

24 On Major Rudolph see the MI5-files in TNA, KV 2/265 and 266.

inducted into the service as an agent (*Vertrauensmann* or *V-Mann*). At that moment, he received a code number and a cover name that was used for secret communication. For the agents of *Ast* Münster, the code number composed of a letter followed by a number in the series 3000. An agent with a code number U 3025 served as an *Umleitestelle*.[25] This means that he was prepared to act as a 'mailbox' for passing messages from a neutral or hostile country to the addressee in Germany. This could be, for example, newspaper kiosk owners in railway stations or catering staff. But dead letterboxes were also used where secret messages could be hidden, such as a tomb or a hollow tree.

In which circles did the *Abwehr* recruit its agents? Needless to say that value was attached to Belgians who were able to access military secrets. Among the 116 agents of I H for the *Asts* Münster, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, there are six Belgian soldiers, one of them being an officer, Lieutenant Dombret (Verhoeyen, 2011). The *Abwehr* also played cleverly on people lacking money or crippled with debts. In order to identify such people, the *Abwehr* had newspaper advertisements published via intermediaries, offering favourable loans.

In the early days of *Nest* Cologne, it was noticeable that people who had already worked for a German secret service during the First World War were recruited. The Germans also looked for employees among *Grenzgänger*, people who had to travel to Germany regularly for work or personal reasons. For example, they could take documents with them to Germany, where the customs post exempted them from completing border formalities.

2.1. Jean Vandecasteele, Major Rudolph's Flagship Agent

One of the first Belgian agents recruited by Major Rudolph was Jean Vandecasteele, born in 1903. French counterintelligence documents show that he was working for the *Abwehr* as early as 1934. Vandecasteele operated a gaming hall on the Belgian coast at an unknown time. He was possibly recruited by Hermann Brandel, who had been working in Belgium since 1933 as a recruiter for *Ast* Münster and also had contacts with the Swiss agent Max Stocklin, himself a relation of Vandecasteele. After Rumpe joined *Nest* Cologne and became *Haupt-V* in 1937, he met Vandecasteele regularly in Cologne and Amsterdam. Before that, Rumpe's superior, Major Rudolph, met him in the Netherlands.

Vandecasteele was soon in the spotlight of the French and Belgian security services. It is established that, in early 1935, he delivered documents intended for the *Abwehr* to a woman living in Brussels, Elisabeth Den Hartog, then 69 years old. The French counterintelligence assumed that the woman was a regular visitor to France, and asked the French *Sûreté Nationale* to order the *commissaires spéciaux* at the Franco-Belgian border to detain her the next time she crossed the border. The same request applied to

[25] There is no contemporary document giving a conclusive explanation to the letters used by the Abwehr to mark the function of an agent. In an interrogation by Soviet authorities Franz Eccard von Bentivegni (1896-1958), 1939-1943 head of Abwehrabteilung III explained that 'R' marked a '*Resident*', 'S' a '*Spannungsagent*', 'A' a '*Kriegsagent*', 'U' an '*Umschlagstelle*' and 'E' an '*Erkunder*'. 'G' and 'GVM' were agents who were in contact with an enemy intelligence service ('*Gegenspionage*'). Franz Eccard von Bentivegni, *Die deutsche Gegenspionagedienst (III-F Dienst) vor dem Kriege und in den Kriegsjahren 1939-1943* (16.7.1951), BArch, Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv, Berlin (hereafter: BStU), MfS HA IX-11 22942, pp. 6-258, 38-39.

her daughter, the dancer Fernande Achterberg, and her boyfriend Jean Vandecasteele, who lived at the same address as mother and daughter Achterberg. This information was passed on to the Belgian *Sûreté publique*, which established that Vandecasteele collected the mail by proxy from a PO box registered on the name of Den Hartog. In all likelihood, it served as a mailbox for messages from *Abwehr* agents operating in France. Vandecasteele was followed inconspicuously by the investigation service of the *Sûreté publique*. It is established that he tried to get the names of officers and non-commissioned officers who were in debt from private money lenders.

On the 26th of October 1936, an advertisement appeared in the newspaper *Le Soir*: "Even to civil servant, all loans, 5% per year. No drafts or delegations. Write Rossel Agency under n°388.27 A."[26] Jean Keusters, one of Vandecasteele's collaborators, had placed this advertisement and came with him to collect the answers. The Brussels public prosecutor's office found this suspicious and started an investigation, which ended after some time with dismissal due to lack of evidence. But the advertisement did bear some fruit.

On the 27th of April 1937, Antoine Putteman, who had already lent money to Vandecasteele several times, received a letter posted in Verviers, from an unknown Jules Bricot, Liebigstraße 44 in Aachen.[27] Bricot wrote that he had heard that Putteman's company, *L'Aide Commerciale*, needed money. Putteman found this suspicious and talked about the letter with his friend Godefroi Devos, inspector of the *Sûreté publique*. Putteman occasionally acted as an informant for Devos, to whom he reported what he considered to be Vandecasteele's suspicious behaviour in 1937. Devos requested advice from his superior Romain Bekaert, who asked Putteman to respond to the letter and accept the appointment proposed by Bricot. Accompanied by Devos and one of his colleagues, commissioner Blero, Putteman travelled to Rotterdam on the 20th of May 1937, where he met Bricot in the *Hôtel du Commerce*. Devos and Blero kept an eye on the two from a distance. Bricot proposed to Putteman that he would sell him the addresses of Belgian soldiers who had debts with *L'Aide Commerciale*. However, the amount that Putteman asked for was so high that Bricot could not possibly accept it. Nevertheless, a second meeting was arranged at the same place shortly afterwards. Inspector Devos again travelled with them. Still, Bricot and Putteman could not come to an agreement. Bricot must have been very keen on the addresses that Putteman could sell him, because he proposed a third meeting, this time in Breskens, a Dutch harbour town close tot he Belgian border. Now Putteman was travelling alone, and unlike on the previous two occasions, he had not informed either the *Sûreté publique* or his own associate Hersz Atlas of his travel. For an amount of BEF 10 000, Putteman was ready to sell Bricot four addresses. Years later, after his arrest by order of the Belgian military court on the 10th of June 1947, Putteman denied having sold Rumpe four client addresses.[28] He also claimed

26 «*Même à fonctionnaire, tous prêts, 5% l'an. Ni traites ni délégations. Ecrire Agence Rossel sous le n° 388.27 A* ». *Le Soir*, Brussels, 26.10.1936.

27 Centre de Liaison français, note of the 5.6.1940, CEGESOMA, AA 1423, *Archives partielles du service de renseignement français (Deuxième bureau) concernant la Belgique*, 7/1/2011, pp. 71-77. This document provides an overview of the 'Vandecasteele case' up to May 1940 and is largely based on information that was provided by the *Sûreté publique* in May-June 1940. Unless otherwise indicated, the data about Vandecasteele and his staff have been derived from this document.

28 Report of the hearing of Godefroi Devos, 11.6.1947, CEGESOMA, AA 1312, *Dossiers généraux et sur des personnes de la Sûreté d'Etat sur l'Abwehr et la Sipo/SD pendant l'occupation*, 4, file Putteman. The *Sûreté publique* created a file on all these events, which was destroyed in Poitiers in June 1940 to prevent it from falling into German hands.

that lieutenant Dombret was not in his address file. Rumpe, however, was formal: Dombret was one of them, and in his opinion, he had no interest in telling lies in this matter. And Inspector Devos also stated after the war that Putteman's associate, Hersz Atlas, had let him copy Putteman's client list in 1937: "This is how I can say that there was a card in the name of Lieutenant Dombret and several other non-commissioned officers, officers and civil servants. I can even tell you that the name card of Lieutenant Dombret had the following inscription on it: 'Attention, do not lend, bad payer'."[29]

Inspector Devos also played a role in the unmasking of Rumpe. On the 1st of June 1937, the inspector accidentally saw 'Bricot' in Brussels, whom he recognised from the meeting in the Netherlands. Devos followed him and found out that he was registered at *Hôtel Siru* – a frequent stopping place for *Abwehr* agents – as Hans Rumpe, manufacturer, born in Altena on the 13th of February 1891, living at Kaiserallee 6 in Aachen. That is how the *Sûreté publique* immediately knew who 'Bricot' really was. Devos continued to follow him and established that Rumpe met several more people in Belgium, of whom only one, a salesman living in the same street as Vandecasteele, seemed somewhat suspicious. So it is certain that Rumpe knew Putteman's address via Vandecasteele. Putteman himself had told Vandecasteele that he provided loans to civil servants and military personnel.

Rumpe then wrote to the four addresses he had bought from Putteman. He received two replies. The first came from non-commissioned officer Collin, who served in the Fort of Pepinster (also called *Fort de Tancremont*) near Verviers. Collin had received a letter in September 1937 from an unknown Henri Rohl, Boxgraben 100 in Aachen, who wished to meet him. Collin found the letter suspicious and showed it to his superior on the 13th of September. Collin admitted that he had appealed to a moneylender for a loan of BEF 1,500 in 1935. In consultation with the *Sûreté publique*, it was decided that Collin would accept the invitation from 'Rohl'. Very shortly afterwards both men met in *Hotel Krasnapolsky* in Amsterdam. The meeting was observed by an inspector from the *Sûreté publique* – probably Devos again. It was not difficult to recognise Rumpe in 'Rohl'. Rumpe asked Collin directly if he would provide him with information about the Fort of Pepinster in return for payment. Collin pretended to accept, but then didn't let hear from him again. The *Sûreté publique* also found out that Vandecasteele had played a role as an intermediary in this case, which was correct since he was at the origin of the trade in addresses of soldiers in debt.

The *Sûreté publique* obviously found the incident with Collin alarming enough to want to take immediate action against Rumpe. It was therefore decided to have him arrested on the occasion of a meeting planned in Liège on the 25th of September 1937 between Rumpe and the French penetration agent Joseph Doudot, in whom Rumpe still had confidence. The French counter-espionage colleagues, who had been informed of this intention by the Belgians, strongly resisted. At the last minute, on the 24th of September, André Bonnefous, the commander of French counterintelligence in Brussels, came to his Belgian counterpart of the *Sûreté publique*, Justin Verhulst, and asked him not to act. He emphasised that if Rumpe was to be arrested, "the fruit of long years of work is

29 *"C'est ainsi que je puis affirmer qu'il existait une fiche au nom du lieutenant Dombret et de plusieurs autres sous-officiers, officiers et fonctionnaires. Je puis même préciser que la fiche du lieutenant Dombret portait l'inscription: 'Attention, ne pas prêter, mauvais payeur.'"*

likely to fester".[30] Obviously Bonnefous was referring to the penetration work of Doudot and his deputy Joseph Klein, who had been working on the penetration of *Nest* Cologne since 1932. Doudot had succeeded in knowing Rudolph's real name as early as 1932, and in 1937 he was able to find out various stud names and stud addresses of *Nest* Cologne.

During its investigation the *Sûreté publique* had established that Vandecasteele did not have a regular occupation and hardly had any known means of existence. Early 1938 he started working as a clerk at the *SA des Tuileries et Briqueteries d'Hennuyères et de Wanlin*. According to the company's accountant, Marcel Roezer, Vandecasteele gave a new impetus to the company, as well as to the until then languishing *Centre de Documentation du Bâtiment*, of which Vandecasteele became secretary on the 1st of April 1938. This centre was located at 82 Rue de la Loi, in Brussels, where Vandecasteele soon took up residence with Fernande Achterberg and her mother.[31] According to the accountant, Vandecasteele had first been a journalist and then ran a health centre on the coast, but by 1938 he had run aground. According to Roezer, this was due to the fact that Vandecasteele had to pay alimony to the woman he had divorced in 1936, and that he had a second mistress besides his girlfriend Achterberg (whom he married in 1942). It is possible that Vandecasteele owed his job in Brussels to the *Abwehr*. Indeed, some evidence suggests that he also worked for the *Abteilung* I Wi (Wirtschaft) of *Nest* Cologne before the war. It is possible that the I Wi companies in which Vadecasteele worked could later be used as a safe house or for channelling money to agents.

Meanwhile, in February 1938, Vandecasteele had recruited Alfred Cauvin, a Frenchman from Schaerbeek.[32] Vandecasteele sent him to the Netherlands, where he had to deliver a small package to a certain Staube. This 'Staube', alias 'Weber' (or vice versa), was known to the *Sûreté publique* in 1938 as an agent of the *Abwehr*, and was almost certainly Rudolph, who used the alias 'Weber'. Cauvin met him in May 1938 at the *Parkhotel* in Amsterdam. In August 1938, Cauvin was introduced by Vandecasteele in the famous Brussels' *Hôtel Métropole* to a German, who asked him to deliver military information about France. He had to send it to 'Weiss', *Eden Hotel* in Cologne. This was a mailbox Rumpe made use of, for he remembered after the war that at the time of the first mobilisation in September 1938 Cauvin had delivered valuable information about the cantonment of French troops. But Cauvin evidently felt remorse, for at the end of 1938 he gave himself in to the *Sûreté Nationale* in Paris, who had him arrested on the 1st of December 1938.

That same day, commander Paul Paillole of the French counterintelligence came to Verhulst to insist that Vandecasteele and other suspects be arrested.[33] The next day, the Brussels public prosecutor's office searched Cauvin's home in Brussels, where a false

30 *"Le fruit de longues années de travail risque de s'écrouler"*. Report on Bonnefous' meeting with his Belgian colleagues Justin Verhulst, Romain Bekaert and Nothomb, 24.9.1937, CEGESOMA, AA 1423, *Archives partielles du service de renseignement français (Deuxième bureau) concernant la Belgique*, 7/1/1613.

31 Report on Vandecasteele's activities drawn up by the accountant Roezer in 1943-1944, p. 31, CEGESOMA, AA 1312 *Dossiers généraux et sur des personnes de la Sûreté d'Etat sur l'Abwehr et la Sipo/SD pendant l'occupation*, 3, file Vandecasteele.

32 Alfred Jean André Cauvin, born in Cannes on 17.5.1906. According to Hans Rumpe, Cauvin used the pseudonym 'Vermorel', although he doubted whether 'Vermorel' or Cauvin was his real name.

33 *Compte-rendu*, 1.12.1938, CEGESOMA, AA 1423, *Archives partielles du service de renseignement français (Deuxième bureau) concernant la Belgique*, 7/1/736, pp. 199-200.

passport in the name of Joseph Berger was found, as well as correspondence with the *Abwehr* and information about the organisation of the French army. While the search was in progress, Keusters arrived at Cauvin's residence. He was promptly arrested. His house and Vandecasteele's – both were detained for several days – were also searched, but nothing suspicious was found. On the 9th of December 1938, another fruitless search took place at Vandecasteele's house.

In fact, the group around Vandecasteele had been infiltrated by an agent of the French counterintelligence since early 1939. This was the former communist Norbert Lefebvre, who had been excluded from the Party in February 1938 for embezzlement of money. He possibly came into contact with Vandecasteele and Keusters in connection with their activities as money lenders. Lefebvre worked for them for a while and also got a postal address from Rumpe: 'Jean Parmentier', Königstraße 13 in Cologne. But finally in February 1939, Lefebvre made revelations to the *Sûreté Nationale* in Paris. The *Abwehr* must have continued to trust him, because his name still appears on a list of recipients of letters from *Nest* Cologne to Belgian agents, posted by Rumpe's factotum Hugo Lüttger in Liège, on the 19th of April 1939.

2.2. The 'Case Dombret'

Joseph Dombret was born in Mons in 1904.[34] After his studies at the ***École royale** militaire* (Royal Military Academy), he served briefly in a cavalry unit. He then went to work for the *Institut cartographique militaire* (Military Cartographic Institute), which was responsible for the production of military maps. In 1929, he became acquainted with Simone Pirlot. From this short-lived relationship a daughter was born. In 1930, Dombret married another woman. In 1936 he met Pirlot again and she became his mistress. Dombret left his wife and had to pay her a rather substantial alimony. In May 1937 he went to live with Pirlot and their daughter in Schaerbeek. At that time Dombret was already deeply in debt with a liability of BEF 60 000. Pirlot noticed an advertisement in a newspaper offering loans and she encouraged Dombret to take it up.

In September 1937, Dombret received a letter from a banker in the Netherlands offering him a loan on favourable terms. He went to the appointment in '*Hotel Poll*'[35] in Amsterdam in the company of Pirlot, but the 'banker' did not turn up. He was there, however, but let it be known that he wanted to see Dombret alone. A new appointment was arranged, this time in the *Hôtel Suisse* in the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam. Dombret met there a 'M. Robert' or 'Legrand'. He suggested him to deliver, against payment, military information to which he had access because of his function. Dombret hesitated for a few weeks, and then went to a third rendezvous at the *Hotel Ritz* in Rotterdam. From then on he became Rumpe's agent under the name of 'Jules' with the code number 3065. After the war Dombret admitted to have met Rumpe a dozen times in Holland and also three times in Germany, twice for the 'service' and once during a pleasure trip on the Rhine with the Rumpe family. Dombret went to Germany via the Netherlands. Usually accompanied by Pirlot he crossed the border at Horbach, on the way from Aachen to Heerlen.

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34 Unless otherwise stated, the data on Dombret was taken from his criminal file. AGR2, *Auditorat général près la Cour militaire*, file 1134/47, J. Dombret – S. Pirlot – H. Lüttger.

35 Probably the *Hotel Polen*.

Dombret's post-war statements correspond largely to reality. What this looked like came to light when in June 1939, after the arrest of Dombret and Pirlot, the Belgian police discovered diaries and travel documents in their home, which give a detailed picture of the couple's movements in 1938-1939. Between the 20th of July 1938 and the 24th of June 1939, Dombret had travelled to the Netherlands a total of fourteen times (twice by train and twelve times by car), six times to France and possibly another six times together with Pirlot (for these six train journeys, only traces of her movement were found, but it is not likely that she travelled alone). According to Dombret, meetings with Rumpe in the Netherlands took place in Rotterdam, The Hague (*Hotel Central*), Maastricht, Eindhoven, 's Hertogenbosch and Tilburg. After the war, Rumpe mentioned the same meeting places.

Dombret and Pirlot usually ensured that to evade border controls on their return from the Netherlands they each passed through a different customs post than on their outward journey. On the 30th of July 1938, for example, they entered the Netherlands via the border post of Wernhout, on the road from Antwerp to Breda, so it may have been a trip to The Hague or Rotterdam. They returned the next day via the same border post. But two days later they crossed the border at Goirle and returned via Reusel, presumably for a *Treff* in one of the mentioned Brabant towns. On the 6th of August 1938, they left via Reusel and returned along the Bergeyckse Barrière, with Eindhoven as probable destination. During the following months, their trips to the Netherlands continued to follow different paths.[36] For the sake of caution, Dombret sometimes travelled alone by car, while Pirlot departed by train to the same destination on the same date. This was the case on the 28th of January and the 25th of February 1939. Pirlot always passed Goirle, while Dombret crossed the border at the Bergeyckse Barrière or in Baarle-Nassau, so that he could pick her up in Tilburg or Eindhoven, for example. Pirlot also travelled by train to the Netherlands six times, once past Valkenswaard and five times past Roozendaal, which suggests a destination such as Rotterdam or The Hague. Their last two trips to the Netherlands were also separate. On the 2nd of June 1939 Dombret entered the Netherlands via the Bergeyckse Barrière and Pirlot via Goirle; on the 24th of June 1939 – two days before their arrest – Dombret entered via Baarle-Nassau and Pirlot again via Goirle. Pirlot stated after the war that she also took documents with her when she moved to the Netherlands. During the occupation, she told a non-commissioned officer of the German secret military police, the *Geheime Feldpolizei* (GFP), for whom she worked at the time, that she herself had also taken documents with her to Germany and the Netherlands. It did indeed seem more prudent that Dombret, as an officer, did not carry any documents with him when he crossed the border.

It is striking that some of Dombret's trips were in very short succession, whereas Rumpe usually organised his *Treffs* on a three-weekly or monthly basis. A possible explanation is that Rumpe photocopied the documents Dombret gave him, in Cologne or elsewhere[37], and then returned them to Dombret at the next meeting. Since these were often documents which Dombret mistakenly possessed, it was advisable not to keep them in his possession for too long. In November 1937, according to a document drawn up on the

36 On 8.8.1938, they crossed the border at Roosteren (Limburg) and returned via Eisden, most likely from a meeting in Maastricht. On 13.8.1939 they went via Wernhout and returned via Goirle. Further trips to the Netherlands took place on 28. and 29.1.1939, on 25. and 26.2.1939, on 23. and 24.4.1939 and on 29.5.1939.

37 We already know that Hans Rumpe had secret documents photographed in Amsterdam by the German Georg Peschke, who may also have done the same with documents brought to Amsterdam by Dombret.

basis of questions put by the *Abwehr* to French penetration agents, the *Abwehr* asked for, among other things, oro-hydrographic maps of Belgium (which were not on sale), the exact location of defensive bridges on staff maps, and the brochure *L'organisation de l'Armée belge du temps de paix*. It was explicitly mentioned that this brochure had to be stolen from the unit and returned within ten hours after pictures had been taken.[38] This may explain why Dombret and Pirlot often stayed in Amsterdam for two days. In addition to Rumpe, Dombret and Pirlot also met Rudolph (whom they knew only as 'Moens') and a money courier whom they called 'M. Arthur'. 'M. Arthur' came from Frankfurt according to Pirlot; occasionally he came to Belgium, brought money and took documents with him to Germany. His identity is not known; according to Dombret he was a non-commissioned officer of the *Luftwaffe*. Rumpe's son Ulrich remembered after the war that he picked Dombret up several times at the customs post of Bildchen, from where he brought him to his father at the Hotel *Frankfurter Hof*, who in turn accompanied him to Rudolph in Köln-Braunsfeld, Malmedyerstraße 13.

The quantity of documents that Dombret handed over to Rumpe is impressive. The military experts established that he had passed on 93 documents of military importance, some of which were marked 'secret' or 'for the service only'. These were for example documents about the armament of the Belgian army, about special places of military importance near the Albert canal, staff maps on which Dombret had marked the location of the defence works of the bridgehead of Visé, information about fortifications near Bornem and Ghent, details of bridges on the Mons-Brussels railway line (whether they were mined or not), guidelines on the distribution of staff maps among the army units (from which, according to the military experts, one could deduce the organisation of the Belgian army in a state of war), sketches of the defences around Namur and Liège. Some of these documents had been stolen by Dombret from the strongbox of the Cartographic Institute, of which he sometimes had the keys for official reasons. Other documents or courses on armament he borrowed from colleagues, with the reason that he needed them to prepare for his entrance examination at the ***École de Guerre*** (War College). An officer could take that exam until he was 35. Dombret would turn 35 in October 1939, so the request in itself was not suspicious.

According to Rumpe, Dombret received a total of approximately BEF 300 000 from him. His travel expenses and those of Pirlot were also generously reimbursed. Rumpe explained Dombret's greediness not only as a result of his debts but also as a result of his lifestyle. According to Rumpe, he and Pirlot lived well above their means. Despite his debts, Dombret owned a car and bought a new one during the period he worked for Rumpe, although Rumpe had advised him to start paying off his debts to Putteman. According to Rumpe, the payments were made as follows: Each time Dombret delivered a document, he received an advance. The balance was paid to him if the *Abwehr* central office in Berlin considered it a valuable document. The money was handed over from hand to hand in Belgian Francs, Dutch Guldens and sometimes in British Pounds or US Dollars. Because of Dombret's repeated requests for money and the fact that Rumpe apparently preferred not to go to Belgium himself, a courier was hired who could easily cross the German-Belgian border and post or deliver envelopes in Belgium. That courier

38 *Questions posées par le S.R. allemand sur la Belgique de septembre 1937 à septembre 1938*, CEGESOMA, AA 1423, *Archives partielles du service de renseignement français (Deuxième bureau) concernant la Belgique*, 7/1/736, pp. 203-207.

was Hugo Lüttger[39], first a manufacturer of needles for cartographic maps and then a salesman for the Zimmermann needle factory in Aachen, for which he had to travel regularly to Belgium. Rumpe gave him the covers in the *Stapo* office in Aachen. Pirlot and Dombret knew Lüttger as 'Ernest'. They said to have met him once in Cologne or Aachen and once in Belgium. A stupid mistake by Lüttger would be the cause of their arrest.

In February 1939, at the Herbesthal border post, the *Sûreté publique* asked its investigator Léon Toussaint to identify a suspicious person who was on the Brussels-Aachen train. It turned out to be Lüttger. On the 19th of April 1939, Toussaint followed him from Herbesthal to Liège, where Lüttger posted seven envelopes on Place Saint-Paul. Some time later, Lüttger was back in Liège, closely followed by Toussaint, who was able to establish that he mistakenly deposited envelopes in the letterbox of the newspaper *La Meuse*, on the Boulevard de la Sauvenière, and not in the letterbox of the *Administration de la Poste* nearby. Then Lüttger went to a restaurant where he met a man and a woman. The man later brought Lüttger to the station by car. Toussaint made a note of the licence plate number; this enabled him to identify Dombret. Toussaint then hurried to *La Meuse* to ask for the envelopes. The next time Lüttger turned up in Liège, he was arrested on Sunday the 25th of June 1939. The next day it was the turn of Dombret, Pirlot and five other 'correspondents' of Lüttger, who were already known to the *Sûreté publique* from the letters posted in April 1939.

Toussaint turned out to have a photograph of Rumpe. When Pirlot was shown the photograph, she confessed almost everything. Dombret held out longer but confessed a few days later that he had been in Rumpe's service.[40] In April 1940 the court sentenced him to twenty years; Pirlot got five years. Lüttger was released on the 7th of December 1939 and put on a train to Germany the next day. During the campaign of May 1940, Dombret was deported to the Isle of Man and placed in the custody of MI5. After the war, he was tried again in court because he had appealed against his first conviction. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on the 20th of April 1948; and Pirlot to seven years, also for her collaboration with the *Geheime Feldpolizei* during the occupation.

The example of the operations mounted by the *Abwehrstelle* ***Münster in Belgium shows us that human intelligence did indeed contribute to the preparation of the 1940 campaign. The*** *Abwehr* had practised an active policy of acquiring military intelligence on Belgian territory very early on, and this had made it possible to collect precious documents, as the Dombret affair shows. However, this case also shows that not only were agent reports alone never decisive, but that German agents were not able to operate with impunity. At the time of the German attack, the valuable agent Dombret had already been unable to provide information to the *Abwehr* for several months. Little emphasis should be placed on searching for sensational espionage successes, but rather on the systematic reconnaissance by the Abwehr's agents and by other means. This for example is shown by the request of the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* to the *Abwehr* to

39 More on Hugo Lüttger in National Archives of Belgium, *Ministère de la Justice. Administration de la Sûreté publique. Service de la Police des Etrangers*, individual file K.-H. Lüttger.

40 Declaration of Léon Toussaint, 4.6.1945. Toussaint had to reconstruct the story of the arrests from his memory, as the pre-war file had been destroyed during the campaign of May 1940 to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Germans. (letter from the military prosecutor A. Henry de Faveau to the President of the Bar in Liege, 8.2.1947).

procure seemingly mundane field post numbers (Liss, 1958, 91). See also the note on the evaluation of regimental numbers on the collar patches of French and Belgian uniforms (Liss, 1958, 22).

3. The 1940 Western Campaign

Human intelligence against Belgium did not end with the arrest of Dombret. On the contrary, it intensified during the so-called 'Phoney War'. However, the start of operations in May 1940 did not only change the intelligence practice, but also the place of the *Abwehr* in the German intelligence apparatus.

3.1. The *Abwehr* on the Eve of the '18 Days' Campaign'

At the beginning of 1940, the *Abwehr* intensified its intelligence operations. In the months before the start of German aggression, the *Abwehrstellen* in the West had pushed outposts like *Meldeköpfe* (points of contact) further and further to the border.[41] In the autumn of 1939, a *Kriegsorganisation* had been set up in Belgium. With the start of operations in the West, the activities of *Abwehr* and *Ic-Dienst* were intertwined by the appointment of intelligence-gathering officers and liaison officers and of *Abwehrabteilung III* counterintelligence detachments to the *Heeresgruppen* and armies. At the centre of the operations in Belgium and the Netherlands was *Heeresgruppe* B under *Generaloberst* Fedor von Bock (1880-1945). In May 1940, the 6th and 18th Army with a total of 29 divisions were subordinate to this *Heeresgruppe*.

Within the General Staffs of the *Heeresgruppen* and *Armee-Oberkommandos* (AOK, Army High Commands), the Ic/AO Divisions handled intelligence, counter-intelligence and related tasks. The heads of the Ic/AO divisions of *Heeresgruppe* B and the subordinate AOKs were former heads of *Abwehrstellen*: *Major* i.G. Willi Manthey (1903-1990), Ic/AO of Army Group B, had been head of *Abwehrstelle* Stettin from 1935-1938; *Hauptmann* i.G. Rudolf Paltzo (1904-1985), Ic/AO of AOK 6, had headed *Abwehrstelle* Dresden from 1936 to 1939; and Hauptmann i.G. Theodor Heinrich (1904), Ic/AO of AOK 18, had led the *Abwehrstelle* Wiesbaden from 1936 to 1939.[42]

The heads of the Ic/AO-*Abteilungen* were primarily responsible for the reconnaissance of the enemy, and they combined acquisition and evaluation of information. They were the only structures within in the German army handling the gathering and the evaluation of intelligence within a common department. In addition to the counterintelligence service, they also controlled the deployment of the signals intelligence and air reconnaissance units subordinate to them in their front areas. *Abwehr* personnel and *Abwehr* units were subordinated to the *Abwehr* officer of the Ic/AO divisions of the *Heeresgruppen* and the armies. For specific tasks, additional officers and units were subordinated to the Ic/AO-*Abteilungen* of the *Heeresgruppen* and the armies. For example to the Ic/AO of the 6th Army were subordinate:

41 Note on Admiral Canaris' inspection trip to the I-*Referaten* of the *Abwehrstellen* in the West (10.2.1940), CAMO 500/12450/48, pp. 14-26.

42 Theodor Heinrich was the only of these officers to continue an intelligence career. In 1943 he was put in charge of *Abwehrabteilung* III until a car accident, followed by a short tenure again in 1944.

— A field post examination office (*Feldpostprüfstelle*). Like the surveillance and censorship of civilian foreign mail traffic by foreign mail examination offices, the surveillance of the military postal service was also a task of *Abwehrabteilung* III.[43]
— The *Propagandakompanie* 637, the head of which was also Staff Officer I *Propaganda*, of the 6th Army.[44]
— A *Kommando z.b.V.* (*zur besonderen Verwendung*, for special service). Little is known about the tasks and subordination of the *Kommandos z.b.V.* during the campaign in the West. They were subordinate to the *Heerwesenabteilung* in the OKH and, like the latter, dealt mainly with questions of military policy. Dr. Walter Hellenthal (1896-1969), a representative of the *Auswärtiges Amt* to the 6th Army, was also assigned to this unit. His task was, among other things, to inform the AOK about foreign policy issues and foreign propaganda. In this he worked together with the propaganda company.[45]

3.2. The Integration of the *Abwehr* into the Command Authorities

Each of the three *Abwehrabteilungen* chose its own procedure to integrate its officers into the command authorities. *Abwehrabteilung* I assigned so-called *Nachrichtenbeschaffungsoffiziere* (NBO, intelligence procurement officers) to the Ic/AO-Abteilungen of the *Heeresgruppen* and AOKs at the beginning of the operations. The NBO of *Heeresgruppe* B was the mentioned Major Rudolph, the former head of the *Nebenstelle* Cologne. The rapid advance made the NBO's activities considerably more difficult and made therefore agent intelligence almost impossible. Rudolph himself did not consider his activity with Army Group B to be very successful.[46]

While the Western campaign was still in progress, a front-line trip by the Abwehr top brass had revealed that "excellent work had been done in the Netherlands and Belgium [by the *Abwehrstellen*, *Nebenstellen*, NBOs and *Kriegsorganisationen*], and that the reconnaissance results from Holland and Belgium [had been] an excellent working basis for the approach of the troops in the two countries".[47] In August 1940, Major Manthey, Ic/AO of *Heeresgruppe* B answered a questionnaire from the *Heerwesenabteilung* on the deployment of the *Abwehr*.[48] While the results of intelligence gathering by agents were "relatively small" even in the opinion of *Heeresgruppe* B, the procurement and evaluation of "partly valuable written material [...] had yielded valuable conclusions

43 AOK 6/Ic/AO Abw. III, *Kriegstagebuch für die Zeit vom 9.5.1940 bis 24.6.1940*, CAMO 500/12472/279, pp. 8-14.
44 An assignment of censor officers, who according to the *Handbuch des Generalstabsdienstes* should be subordinate to the *Abwehr* officers, is not confirmed for AOK 6.
45 *Dienstanweisung für die Vertreter des Auswärtigen Amtes bei der Wehrmacht bei den AOKs* (10.4.1940), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, RZ 501/60711.
46 CSDIC(WEA) BAOR, Preliminary Interrogation Report 51: Oberst Friedrich Rudolph (29.11.1945), TNA KV 2/266/103a.
47 *Abwehr I Heer/West, Aktennotiz über die Reise nach dem Westen v. 7.-16.5.1940* (18.5.1940), CAMO 500/12450/48, pp. 29-38.
48 HGr B/Ic/A.O., *Fragebogen der Heerwesenabteilung über die Tätigkeit der Abteilung* Ic/AO v. 22.7.1940 (6.8.1940), CAMO 500/12454/3, pp. 144-153. Answers to this questionnaire from other *Heeresgruppen* and AOKs are not known.

about the enemy situation".[49] Aside of this the Ic/AO-*Abteilungen* were also involved in the interrogation of prisoners of war. Interrogation offices had been set up at the army's prisoner collection points, which were staffed by officers subordinate to the *Abwehr* I of the AOK.[50] Follow-up interrogations were to be carried out by the *Abwehr* officers in the POW camps. Prisoner of war officers were taken to an officers' camp in the Mainz citadel. There they were to be interrogated with the cooperation of the *Ast* Wiesbaden. Defectors were to be taken to a defector collection point, in the Mainz citadel as well. There was also a 'special regulation' for members of the German-speaking minority in Belgium.[51] At the beginning of 1940, the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* had requested that "the defectors should be placed together in a camp in order to distribute them to the individual POW camps after appropriate training as informers".[52]

The evaluation of the numerous captured documents was also initially carried out during the operations by the *Abwehr* I officers of the Ic/AO-*Abteilungen*. The documents of the French High Command found in a train near the small town of La Charité-sur-Loire had no immediate impact on the situation picture and operations – according to Liss, they had "almost only historical interest" for the OKH (Liss, 1953, 56, 128-129, 252-253). In contrast to this well-known affair, British files captured in Norway in April 1940 had allowed important conclusions to be drawn about the British army in Belgium and France.[53]

In the run-up to the offensive in the West, *Abwehrabteilung* III had set up several *Abwehrkommandos* from autumn 1939. These mobile units were to seize relevant documents from enemy intelligence services and arrest suspects on the basis of wanted lists.[54] These units, together with the *Abwehrtrupps* subordinate to them, were given a considerable number of staff.[55] At the beginning of the Western campaign, an *Auswertungsstelle West* (Evaluation Office West) was set up at the *Abwehrstelle* Münster for the evaluation of the files and the interrogation of those arrested. No precise information is available on the number of those arrested, but we know that at the end of June 1940, 120 persons were still in custody in Münster.[56] These were primarily Dutches, Germans and Belgians.[57]

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49 HGr B/Ic/A.O., *Fragebogen der Heerwesenabteilung* über *die Tätigkeit der Abteilung* Ic/AO v. 22.7.1940 (6.8.1940), Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii, Moscow [hereafter: RGASPI]: 500/12454/3, pp. 144-153. In the 6th Army, the intelligence gathering service was "just getting started" at the beginning of June. AOK 6/Ic/AO, *Besprechungspunkte* für *Ic-Besprechung* 4.6.1940, CAMO 500/12472/279, pp. 316-319.

50 According to the *Handbuch* für den *Generalstabsdienst (p. 24)*, the interrogation of prisoners of war was the task of the Ic officer and interpreters under his command.

51 *Abteilung Fremde Heere West, Merkblatt über Vernehmung von Gefangenen und Überläufern* (13.5.1940), CAMO 500/12451/390. There is no information on the special regulation mentioned. AOK 6/Ic/AO/Abw I, *Gefangenenvernehmung und Behandlung von Beutepapieren* (3.6.1940), CAMO 500/12472/279, pp. 332-333.

52 Abw I H/West, *Aktennotiz über Besprechung Amtschef Ausl/Abw mit OQIV am 26.1.1940* (27.1.1940), CAMO 500/12450/48, pp. 6-11.

53 For general information on the confiscation of files in 1940 by German services, see Grimsted, 2013.

54 A task force of *Abwehr I Marine* under Frigate Captain Erich Pheiffer was also assigned to *Heeresgruppe* B. Camp 020: Interim Report on the Case of Erich Pheiffer (1.9.1945), TNA KV 2/267/100a.

55 Only for the *Abwehrkommando* IV, under Major Oscar Reile (1896-1983) and assigned to the 16th Army (1896-1983), there were 20 officers, 28 men of the Geheime Feldpolizei and 117 NCO and enlisted men (Reile, 1973, 117). There is no precise information on the composition of the Abwehrkommando II under Major Hans von Engelmann, which was attached to the 6th Army.

56 *Reisebericht über Dienstreise* 29.6.1940 zur Ast Münster (5.7.1940), BArch, RW 5/199b, pp. 24-29.

57 *Reisebericht über Dienstreise* 29.6.1940 zur Ast Münster (5.7.1940), BArch, RW 5/199b, pp. 24-29.

At the beginning of August 1940, the *Auswertungstelle West* was moved from Münster to Berlin and attached to the *Abwehrstelle* Berlin.[58]

Unlike during the attack on Poland, no *Einsatzgruppen* of the *Sicherheitspolizei* and SD were deployed during the Western campaign. Their formation was prepared by the RSHA but not implemented. The *Wehrmacht* had managed to prevail over the SS, which had pushed for the deployment of *Einsatzgruppen* in the West (Wildt, 2002, 507; Karusnick/Heinrich, 1981, 107-111).

Between autumn 1939 and June 1940, *Abwehrabteilung* III had compiled '*Fahndungslisten*' ('wanted lists') for the countries of Western Europe (Verhoeyen, 2011, 309-31). In May 1940, the *Abwehrkommando* deployed in the Netherlands had at its disposal a *Fahndungsliste Holland* from *Abwehrabteilung* III. It can be assumed that the *Abwehr* had also issued a *Fahndungsliste–Belgien* – but this is not documented in the sources. Initially, the Abwehr's *Fahndungsliste* named mainly suspected spies and German deserters. Their numbers had increased significantly by the summer of 1940. There is little information about the cooperation between the *Wehrmacht*, the *Abwehr* and the Reich Security Main Office, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA,) in the run-up to and during the operations. Research has so far tended to examine the contrasts between the two organisations rather than their cooperation (Mühleisen, 1999). For example, it is unknown whether and to what extent the *Abwehr* and the RSHA, which had begun compiling an extensive special wanted list West in the autumn of 1939, exchanged information on wanted persons. In a few individual cases, the Abwehr's *Fahndungslisten* also contained persons wanted by the *Gestapo*.[59]

Units of the *Geheime Feldpolizei* (GFP) were also subordinate to the counterintelligence officers of the *Heeresgruppen* and armies. GFP Groups 8 and 560 were assigned to the 6th Army.[60] The GFP had been (re)established in August 1939 as '*Abwehrpolizei*' of the *Heer* (since 1.5.1940 of the *Wehrmacht*) and was subordinated to *Abwehrabteilung* III. Until the beginning of the operations in the West, the GFP dealt with the espionage and treason cases within the *Wehrmacht*. Afterwards, its area of responsibility was expanded to include the protection of the troops – "in particular, acts of sabotage and espionage [were] to be prosecuted relentlessly". The GFP's activities were now explicitly directed against the civilian population in the area of operations.[61] Persons arrested by the GFP and the *Abwehr* were handed over to the *Sicherheitspolizei*.[62] The RSHA had

58 *Abw III F, betr. Auswertestelle West* (2.8.1940), BArch, RW 5/199b, pp. 123-125.

59 BArch, RW 5/230-231. This is the only indication of the exchange of information, at least between individual offices. On the one hand, the *Sonderfahndungsliste West* compiled by the RSHA contains a clear indication of cooperation between the RSHA and the *Abwehr*: the introduction refers to the *Abwehr*'s search request. On the other hand, none of the approximately 12,400 wanted persons listed refers to the *Abwehr*. This contradiction cannot be resolved.

60 In addition, the GFP Group z.b.V. of the *Auswärtiges Amt* under Eberhard Freiherr von Künsberg (1909-1945) and the GFP Group 627 under Josef Gerum (1888-1963) also operated for a time in the area of the 6th Army in Belgium, among other places – in each case with special assignments such as the confiscation of files and pieces of art.

61 AOK 6/Ic/AO, *Befehl vom 11.5.1940*, CAMO 500/12472/279, p. 18. S.a. H.Dv.g. 150 (*Dienstvorschrift für die Geheime Feldpolizei vom 24.7.1939*) Berlin 1939. See also Fortemps' and Gabriel's articles in the present issue.

62 Franz Eccard von Bentivegni, *Die deutsche Gegenspionagedienst (III-F Dienst) vor dem Kriege und in den Kriegsjahren 1939-1943* (16.7.1951), BstU, MfS HA IX-11 ZR 920 A. 138, p. 136-153, p. 144.

established its own *Sonderauswertungskommission West* to which the prisoners were to be transferred.[63]

With the end of the fighting, the tasks and personnel of the *Abwehrkommandos* were transferred to the newly established *Abwehrstellen* in the occupied countries, which were attached to the occupation administrations. Major von Engelmann, the head of the *Abwehrkommando* of the 6th Army, joined the *Abwehrstelle* Brussels and became head of *Abteilung* III there. The head of the *Abwehrstelle*, Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig Dischler, was at the same time Abwehr Officer (AO) on the staff of the *Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und Nordfrankreich* (Military Commander in Belgium and Northern France) and thus also responsible for the deployment of the GFP in occupied Belgium. After the surrender of the Belgian army and the conclusion of hostilities in the West, the *Abwehr*'s task profile changed. An organisation directly supporting military operations became part of the German occupation apparatus.

4. An Intermediate Assessment

In 1940, Belgium was the victim of a German aggression directed against four countries, which ended after a few weeks with an unexpected victory: Luxembourg was overrun, the Netherlands surrendered after 5 days, the Belgian army after 18 days; France requested an armistice on the 17th of June. The surprising military success of the Western campaign obscured the questions of whether and to what extent the operation plan had also been based on a correct assessment of the enemy and knowledge of his intentions and capabilities.[64]

The attack through the Ardennes – seen in retrospect as a stroke of operational genius – was undoubtedly a game of chance. The decisive breakthrough at Sedan in May 1940, for example, was described by both General Heinz Guderian (1888-1954) and Hitler as a 'miracle' (Frieser, 1995, 2-3). In his memoirs, Guderian, commander of the XIX Army Corps in May 1940, one of the spearheading leaders of *Heeresgruppe* A, stressed the importance of knowledge about the enemy (Guderian, 1951, 85-86). The situation assessments and reports of the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* had contributed to the fact that it had been a calculated (and calculable) risk. Among the contributions of the intelligence apparatus to the military operation was the success of the surprise attack through the Ardennes and that the behaviour of the British and French armies was in line with German expectations: the Allies complied with the deceptive component of the German operational movement (sickle's cut). None of this can be attributed to the *Abwehr* alone. It is therefore natural to understand the *Abwehr* primarily as an element of the army's intelligence apparatus and less as an actor in its own right. What proved decisive – according to Ernest May – was the translation of existing intelligence knowledge into military decisions. The quality of the *Abwehr*'s *V-Männer* and the information they provided did not play the central role that was to be expected (May, 2000, 348). Even Lieutenant Dombret, who was probably one of the agents who handed over the most interesting documents, did not play a decisive role, and was eventually arrested months

63 Telegram RSHA to Gestapo posts (13.6.1940), BArch, R 58/241, pp. 247-248.

64 Just as the military success of the offensive in the West can also be explained by wrong decisions and misjudgements on the part of the Allied leadership, the success of the German intelligence services was also based on mistakes and misjudgements on the part of the other side. These cannot be discussed here.

before the offensive. The *Abwehr* did not produce any spectacular agent reports and no intelligence 'coups' have been handed down from it. But it did contribute to a mosaic of information from various sources, which was put together by the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West*. Its concrete contribution, however, is difficult to determine.

Even the seemingly simple question of what the *Abwehr* was in 1940 is not easy to answer. For the *Abwehr* was neither just an intelligence service, nor was it the intelligence service of the *Wehrmacht*. In view of the diversity of its tasks, it is fundamentally difficult to speak of the *Abwehr*.

The *Abwehr*'s activities within the overall structure of the German intelligence services are characterised by three structural features:

1. The diversity and multitude of its tasks. In 1944, a British report on the German intelligence services noted that on the British side the tasks of the *Abwehr* had been distributed among three different organisations (Security Service, Secret Service, and Special Operations Executive). Nor should the position of the head of the *Abwehr* be equated with that of the British Directors of Intelligence.[65] As described above, there was no organisational equivalent in the *Wehrmacht* to the *Directors of Military Intelligence*. At this point, no systematic comparison of the *Abwehr* and its functional equivalents in the British services can be made. But the several tasks of the *Abwehr* – from intelligence with agents to letter censorship – were distributed among more than the three British services mentioned above.[66]
2. The integration of the *Abwehr* into the army command structure. Within Germany and in the occupied territories, the *Abwehr* was part of the command structure through the *Abwehrstellen* and, in the case of the command authorities, through the Ic/AO officers. A categorisation of the *Abwehr* therefore depends on the chosen frame of reference: Was it more of a highly specialised staff department or a genuine intelligence service? Intelligence activities were always at the core of military staff work: The study of the *Abwehr*'s activities during the Western campaign has shown how strongly the *Abwehr* and its tasks were integrated into the command culture. Karl-Heinz Frieser has identified an important factor of victory in the German command and control system. Among other things, he refers to "leading from the front" (Frieser, 1995, 423-424). Admiral Canaris and the heads of the *Abwehrabteilungen* undertook several 'front journeys' to Belgium, among other places, in May 1940: In May and June 1940, he spent at least four weeks in the operations area. Even if 'the front' here meant primarily the headquarters of the *Heeresgruppen* and AOKs, these 'front journeys' considerably shortened the decision-making process.
3. The lack of central coordination and jointness. Until the end of the war, there was no equivalent to the British *Joint Intelligence Committee*, for example. It would be wrong to see the *Abwehr* as a pure solitaire. But there is no evidence in the sources of a German intelligence community that systematically and permanently included the intelligence apparatuses of the *Wehrmacht* branches and state intelligence services. In 1940, for example, there is no evidence of meetings or coordination between the three intelligence organizations of the *Wehrmacht* branches. Nor is there any evidence of coordination between the various procurement organisations within the army's

65 *Manual on the German Secret Services and British Counter-Measures* (1.7.1944), TNA, WO 279/499.

66 The letter censorship was for exampled transferred in April 1940 from the War Office to the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department of the Ministry of Information.

intelligence apparatus. So far, only examples of bilateral discussions between the *Abteilung Fremde Heere West* and the *Abwehr* have been found.[67] Questions about jointness also touch on the issue of intelligence cooperation between the *Wehrmacht* and allied and friendly states in the context of the Western campaign. At present, however, there is no study on the intelligence cooperation with the most important ally, Italy.[68]

The position of the intelligence services in the overall structure of state and military suffered not least from the fact that Hitler, since February 1938 Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*, attributed only minor importance to the intelligence factor. He was certainly interested in some intelligence problems in 1939/1940, such as special operations like the attack on Eben Emael and matters of secrecy. However, he paid no particular attention to the activities of the *Fremde Heere West* and their procurement organisations, which were central to the preparations for the Western campaign.

Like the military success of the Western campaign, the success of the German intelligence services could not be repeated. They had not grown equally to the new challenges. For example, the *Luftwaffe* failed in the summer of 1940 during the Battle of Britain, not least because it lacked a realistic assessment of the RAF and the British air armament potential. The Western campaign already points to the basic problem of all intelligence services in National Socialist Germany. For when researching the Western campaign, it must not be disregarded that the army had no plan of operations against France and Great Britain in September 1939. The need to plan an offensive in the West stemmed from the misjudgment that Britain and France would not respond to the German aggression against Poland with a declaration of war. The background to this was not so much a failure of the intelligence services, but the inability of the German top brass to make a realistic assessment of the situation and draw the appropriate conclusions. However, in the summer of 1939 not starting a war was no longer an option.

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67 It should also be emphasised, however, that studies are lacking that examine the cooperation of the military intelligence services with civilian services such as the *Forschungsamt*, the *Gestapo*, the *Amt* VI of the RSHA and the *Auswärtiges Amt*. There are two entries in Halder's diary suggesting that he had received information from the Forschungsamt (27.8.1939 and 8.1.1940). It is unknown by which channel this was transmitted to him.

68 References to this can be found in Liss, 1958, 66 and 93. One can find a few remarks on the cooperation of the German military attaché in Brussels and his Italian counterpart in Brussels, Lieutenant-Colonel Aldo Bonelli, in Rabe von Pappenheim, 1987, 91 and 104.

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