

Time Table – Operation Bernhard

Introduction

- “While the Nazi plan to counterfeit British currency was a minor event in WWII, it nevertheless is an exciting story. Tracing the history of counterfeit notes include stories of intrigue, jealousy, murder and the ultimate desire to keep the successful operation a secret at the end of the war” (bb p xiii-xiv). The operation was dramatized in the 2007 Oscar winning foreign movie of the year, The Counterfeiters. Although the movie grossly twists the facts of what actually took place to create a “Hollywood style” storyline, it does a great job introducing the most successful counterfeiting operation in history.
- The notes were printed in 5, 10, 20 and 50 pound notes of which 40% were the 5 pound notes (bb p. 30).
- Operation Andrew produced only about 500,000 notes (bb p.11).
- Research on production figures from Operation Bernhard conclude 8,965,080 notes made. Ref: Bryan Burke (bb p. 31), secret diary kept Oskar Stein Skala the official record clerk of Operation Bernhard, Lawrence Malkin (Krueger’s Men 2006) and Adolf Burger (2009 Devil’s Workshop). The corrected face value of the notes were £134,610,945 (Joe B. 19 Dec 2008 IBNS editor). This translates into at least US \$6 billion in today’s money (LM p. 116).
- Notes were sorted into several different classes with only the best notes being given to German spies in foreign countries. Many notes were never used or destroyed because of poor quality. Many notes were found in crates at the bottom of Lake Toplitz (Toplitzsee), Austria after the war. Regardless of the actual usage figures, many were used over and over again bringing some harm to the European economies. The notes were used widely in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In September 1943, when Italy’s Dictator Mussolini was captured and released, Bernhard notes were used to pay the ransom demands.

Time Table—Some Historical Points of Interest:

- 1939 Sep 18** At a Reichsbank meeting, Arthur Nebe (Chief SS Criminal Police) promoted the idea to drop counterfeit notes over the British Isles (LM). Later in the war, Nebe helped perfect the gas vans for murdering Jews before the death camps were constructed in 1942.
- 1940** Unternehmen Andreas (Operation Andrew) was said to have been originated by Alfred Helmut Naujocks. He presented the idea to Reinhard Tristan Heydrich (who in turn reported to Heinrich Himmler). The Operation fell under the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), the Central Security Department (SD) of the Reich (bb p 5).
- 1941 Mar** Naujocks had counterfeits sent to a Basel, Switz bank to determine if the notes could pass for genuine (bb p 11). Although the notes appeared to pass inspection, the British press reported the Swiss police were hunting for a “gang of forgers” (LM). By mid-1941, Operation Andrew came to a halt for various problems (and stories of Intrigue – bb p xiv).
- 1942 Spring** Friederich Walter Bernhard Krueger was placed in charge of the second plan to counterfeit British currency. The operation was coded Operation Bernhard (bb p 13). An initial team of 30 men from several concentration camps were assembled at Sachsenhausen Konsentrationlager (concentration camp), a short distance north of Berlin (bb p 15).
- 1942 Summer** A growing group of experienced men (and/or those who pretended to have experience) were transferred to Sachsenhausen. Jack (Isaak) Plapler arrived around this period. By the end of the operation, Kreuger assembled a total of 142* men.
- 1942 Dec 2** Printing presses arrived at Sachsenhausen Block 19 (bb p 18).
- 1943 Summer** Friedrich “Fritz” Schwend was put in charge of converting the Bernhard notes into genuine currency, gold, silver and jewelry. He was a civilian with many international connections and even lived in California for a short time. Schwend got 8 1/3% profit on all deals and became wealthy (bb p36-37).
It was Schwend that convinced the RSHA not to drop notes over England, but instead use them for gathering intelligence and purchasing genuine “hard” world currencies (bb xiii).
- 1944 Jan** Hans Walter and Peter Edel (registered as Hans Peter Hirschweh) arrived.
- 1944 Sept 2** As a result of Operation Bernhard, the Bank of England stopped printing all notes larger than the five (5) pound note.
- 1944 Sept** Soloman “Solly” Smolianoff was transferred from Mauthausen Concentration Camp to Sachsenhausen Barracks 19. Solly, was the only career counterfeiter in the group. Although earlier research (bb p 25-26) and the movie gave Solly credit for perfecting the Bernhard notes, in fact he never worked on the notes. Solly was brought in to only work on the US \$100 project (LM).
Adolf Burger arrived and was one of 8 selected for the US \$100 project. Burger worked as a printer. 200 successful bills were made early February 1945. A plan to immediately produce 10,000/day was made but then the final bombings over Berlin began and the presses were dismantled at the end of the month (ab p 160-168). Only the front/obverse side of the \$100 bill was printed (LM).
- 1945 Mar** Counterfeiting team transferred to Redl-Zipf, Austria, a sub-camp of Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp.
- 1945 May 1-6** The counterfeiting team was transferred to the Ebensee sub-camp. On May 4th, the last of the team members arrived. US forces liberated the camp on May 6th (Wikipedia 2008).
- 1946 Nov 25** After vanishing April 23, 1945 Bernhard surrendered to the British and was detained for 2 years, the last year by the French, until formally released in Nov. 1948 without any charges being pressed. He later worked for the company that produced the special paper for the Bernhard Operation (LM p 194-196).
- 1959 July 27** Prompted by German reporter Wolfgang Loehde of Der Stern magazine, drivers pulled cases of notes from the bottom of Toplitzsee (Lake Toplitz) in Austria (bb p87).