The name Sidney Reilly is associated with World War I, British intelligence, and the Bolshevik uprising in 1917. He has been called the “ace of spies,” though the facts of his life are difficult to find and shrouded in mystery largely by his own design.[i] Newspapers and biographical works have gushed superlatives concerning his efficiency as a British agent, “One of the bravest men of his time,” “The greatest spy in history,” “. . . surely not only the master spy of this century but of all time,” “One of the most amazing men of his generation,” and “acted on a gigantic heroic scale as a maker and indeed breaker of governments.”[iv] He has also been portrayed as the first agent to infiltrate Western intelligence for the Kremlin and as a self-centered criminal who would do anything for money. To masquerade his true identity, he employed disguises and a variety of noms de guerre: Signore Massino, an Italian businessman; Mr. M. Constantine, a Greek businessman; and Comrade Relinksy, an officer of the Russian secret police. Sidney Reilly has been the subject of numerous biographical studies[v] and a PBS miniseries.[vi] His disappearance in 1925 has remained a mystery though classified MI5 files released in May 2002 seemingly present the official description of his demise in Russia. A man with little formal education, he allegedly spoke seven languages fluently and used eleven passports. During certain periods of his life he accumulated impressive personal wealth, enjoyed the charms of many women and wives, and occasionally acted as one of the most prized British intelligence agents in the empire’s history. During his life, which seems to have spanned a little over half a century, he gained the reputation of savvy businessman, incomparable collector of military intelligence, and unscrupulous immoral scoundrel.

Reilly’s Rise

Sidney Reilly, the ace of spies, was born in Russia in 1874 under the name of Sigmund Georgievch Rosenblum. Gordon Brook-Shepherd writes that as a boy he had a comfortable life but developed into a youth who, “though blessed with a remarkable talent for languages, was cursed with a violent temper” and a conviction that he was right about absolutely everything. “Megalomania seems to have set in early.”

Later he would find that he was not the son of Grigory J. Rosenblum, who was a wealthy owner of a Polish estate once owned by the Wittgenstein family, but the product of an illegitimate union between his Russian mother of Polish descent and a Jewish doctor from Vienna named Rosenblum. He had lived in an anti-Semitic atmosphere as a boy, raised as a Catholic. The fact that he was of illegitimate birth and half Jewish was a double slam that seems to have greatly troubled him and may have driven him to the many peculiar and daring episodes in his life, not unlike the audacious British soldier and Reilly contemporary, T.E. Lawrence, who was also disturbed by his illegitimate birth.

Rosenblum changed his name to Sidney Reilly[vii] and, as one legend has it, fled Russia as a
stowaway in a British ship bound for South America where in Brazil he saved the lives of two or three British officers connected with British intelligence. To show their gratitude they gave the young Rosenblum a passport to England and sources with British intelligence. However, this story is one of several that Reilly seems to have told acquaintances throughout his life; he also claimed he was a railway engineer in India but there is nothing in the official files that Brook-Shepherd was able to see in the late 1990’s that confirmed any of this part of Reilly’s early life. [viii] Reilly biographer Richard Spence has dismissed the Brazil story as a classic bit of fiction Reilly spun to hide his real identity and intentions.

Ace Reilly spent more than thirty years spying under different disguises and personas. From 1900 to 1914 he traveled through Europe and the Far East as a businessman but with extra work commissioned by British naval intelligence. From 1914 to mid-1925 he spent most of his time in the United States, especially New York City. Reilly was a collector; like Mata Hari, but to a further extent, he showed an allegiance to numerous intelligence agencies in hopes of gaining advantages in business adventures. He collected a string of lovers and wives like he collected Napoleon-related paraphernalia. Napoleon fascinated Reilly and may have inspired his incredibly ambitious attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik government and replace it with his own ministers. He knew or was known by some of the biggest names in the world. One of the strangest links seems to be with the British occultist Aleister Crowley who dabbled in black arts and espionage, one of several “sorcerer-spies,” as author W. Adam Mandelbaum calls them, who engaged in the secret world of espionage through the occult.[ix] Biographer Spence seems to believe that they may have had some kind of relationship in London in 1898-9. In 1898 an Englishman, Dr. Westcott, created the mysterious cult group, the Golden Dawn. Crowley became part of this group. Like Reilly, Crowley created a variety of personas, one being the Russian nobleman Count Svarov, during his bizarre career as secret agent, magician, anti-Christ, and drug addict.[x] Though it may never be known for sure there is evidence that Reilly was an agent for Germany, Russia, Japan, as well as Britain. Files from the American Office of Naval Intelligence, and other American intelligence services provided information that American officials believed Reilly was an unscrupulous businessman working for German intelligence.[xi]

One of Reilly’s favorite passions was collecting wives. His first marriage was to a twenty-three-year old Irish girl, Margaret, one of the five daughters of the celebrated mathematician and logistician George Boole, who developed ways of expressing logical processes using algebraic symbols and created a branch of mathematics known as symbolic logic. Reilly eventually abandoned Margaret and took several other wives though the number is unknown. He was attracted to several actresses and singers, which included a Polish born opera singer, Ganna Walska. Walska, like Reilly, was ambitious, fascinated with Napoleon, and made an effort to disguise her Jewish ancestry. Their affair was brief before both went on their way of collecting material wealth and companions who would aid them in their hunt for that wealth.[xii]

**ST-1, ST-25, C, and the Birth of the British Master Spy**

Sir Mansfield Cumming headed the British Secret Service when Reilly was active. In 1909 at the age of fifty, Cumming, a naval commander who suffered from the unlikely malady of seasickness, began to direct a new secret service division of the navy, which would eventually become the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) of British intelligence. Cumming was an eccentric man who became known as “C,” a moniker that would continue to connote the head of the service no matter what name the director bore. It was C
who used green ink exclusively for all his notes and correspondence and was known to be an effective and inspiring leader. Gordon Shepherd-Brooke wrote that C wrote one of his diaries in a coded form concerning his role in the service that has remained undeciphered to this day. He worked with some of the greatest agents in British intelligence history: George Hill, Paul Dukes (ST-25), Augustus Agar (ST-34), and Sidney Reilly (ST-1). Dukes and Hill were skilled in the art of penetrating Bolshevik organizations. Dukes used various aliases and was able like Reilly to secretly join the Bolshevik secret police, Cheka. Both Dukes and Reilly were masters of disguise. Dukes was able to go beyond penetrating just the Cheka; he joined the Red Army and with this connection was able to provide some of the most important intelligence ever produced concerning the Bolshevik regime to C. Hill was able to get himself appointed Inspector of Aviation by the head of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky himself, one of the chief architects of Bolshevism. Hill had worked with the Russians in blowing German ammunition dumps and bridges but quickly made an about face when the Bolsheviks took power, which led him to destroy Red Army trains. Dukes's information concerning the Bolsheviks was so impressive that he was knighted and given accolades from his contemporaries as well as historians in deserving the title of “master spy” as much, if not more so, than Reilly. Agar received the Victoria Cross and Distinguished Service Order citations for his heroism in his work against the Russian navy in which he sank several Russian warships with information provided by Dukes. These agents, with the aid of C, created a special mythology concerning the British secret agent who was not only a seeker of classified information but a man of adventurous action; the kind of action hero that would become the inspiration for numerous spy novelists later in the century like Ian Fleming and his post World War II agent James Bond.

C recorded his first meeting with Reilly as March 15, 1918. Reilly supposedly established his reputation as a master spy and impressed C with his exploits in Germany during World War I. It was his amazing resourcefulness in the midst of the enemy that drew C to send Reilly to Russia. C had written in one of his diaries that he felt Reilly was very clever and had been everywhere and done everything, though why he felt this is not entirely clear. It was said that Reilly was dropped behind German lines disguised as a German peasant carrying papers that claimed he was wounded and on sick leave, which allowed him to roam through Germany gathering intelligence. Among the legends surrounding Reilly was that he enlisted as a German private and was quickly promoted to a commissioned rank, and that he used his flawless German and Russian language skills to pass through the lines and report information from both camps.

In March 1918, C wrote to his Russian agents that Reilly would arrive in the port city of Archangel to aid their work. C wrote a strange and unflattering description of the agent that would become his most famous agent during both the war and the British secret services' attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. C wrote to his Russian agents that Reilly was a “Jewish-Jap type, brown eyes very protruding . . . may be bearded,” and carrying a code book and sixteen diamonds, which would act as a source for his cover as a diamond merchant and also act as funds for the agents.

When Reilly reached Moscow in May 1918 he brazenly walked up to the sentries at the Kremlin and demanded an audience with the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Dressed in a British Army uniform he informed the sentries that he was sent by Prime Minister David Lloyd George
to inquire on the Bolsheviks’ intentions and views of the European situation because the prime minister was unsatisfied with the reports of Bruce Lockhart. Lenin would not speak with Reilly. Instead Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich, head of the chancery of the Soviet of People’s Commissars, spoke with Reilly. Bonch-Bruyevich was amazed by the audacity of the alleged British officer and later contacted Lockhart concerning Reilly’s bonafides. Lockhart was shocked by Reilly’s unexpected and unorthodox entry into the Russian scene. Reilly was interviewed with Lockhart who “blew up in a storm of indignation” concerning Reilly’s unapproved interview at the Kremlin, though later he would realize that Reilly was one of the most daring and effective intelligence officers he would ever know.[xvi]

The Bolsheviks and the Capitalists

While Leon Trotsky lived in New York City in 1917 and supported himself as a reporter for *The New World*, a communist newspaper, he discovered wealthy men who were willing to finance a revolution in Russia. Financial support from the United States was surprising because the German government encouraged and financed the Bolsheviks (the “majority” — Lenin’s radical socialists) as early as 1915 hoping the chaos they created would turn to Germany’s advantage. [xvii] Eventually Wall Street bankers Jacob Schiff and Elihu Root contributed around 40 million dollars to Bolshevik activities along with Briton Lord Milner who gave 21 million rubles. It has also been written that in 1915 the American International Corporation was formed to support the Bolsheviks, which coincidentally was housed at 120 Broadway in New York,[xviii] a building shared by The Bankers Club; the headquarters of the No. 2 District of the Federal Reserve System, and the first Bolshevik “ambassador” to the United States and head of the Soviet Bureau, Ludwig Martens, the vice president of Weinberg and Posner. The American International Corporation directors represented the interests of men such as Percy Rockefeller (son of John D. Rockefeller), Pierre S. Du Pont, J. Ogden Armour, and W. L. Saunders (Director of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York).[xix] There were 22 directors in 1917 and the corporation had ties with American financier J. P. Morgan, the Rothschilds of Europe, numerous Federal Reserve representatives as well as George Herbert Walker, grandfather of President George H. W. Bush, and great-grandfather President George W. Bush.[xx] Why would capitalists support the ideology of the Bolsheviks? One theory proposes that the capitalists created a huge communist state so it could be perceived as the enemy of the democratic, capitalist system, which in turn would “produce huge markets for finance and armaments and . . . cycles of financial booms and busts, crises and revolutions, wars and threats of war, all of which maintained a balance of power.”[xxi] Author Antony Sutton (*Wall Street and the Bolshevik Revolution*) proposes that the notion that capitalists are the bitter enemies of Marxists and socialists is “nonsense,” because there has been a constant but concealed alliance between the two camps. This odd alliance, Sutton writes, is not so strange when one considers that monopoly capitalists are “the bitter enemy of laissez-faire entrepreneurs,” and with the inherent financial weakness of socialism the “totalitarian socialist state is a perfect captive market for monopoly capitalists.” Would not capitalists, Sutton asks, like J.P. Morgan, DuPont, and Rockefeller welcome a chance to create a “captive technical colony” from a planned socialist Russia where the likes of an “extension of the Morgan railroad monopolies and the Rockefeller petroleum trust of the late nineteenth century” could flourish? The Bolshevik Revolution was fueled by what Sutton describes “a partnership between international monopoly capitalists and international revolutionary socialism for their mutual benefit.”[xxii]
Equally strange, British intelligence — though it is obvious that numerous American capitalists and at least one wealthy Briton funded the Bolsheviks — went to great lengths in trying to destroy the Bolshevik revolution and did it with their prize agent, the Russian-born enigma, Sidney Reilly, as well as the other previously mentioned master spies. However, the American super financier J.P. Morgan, whose business dealings seem as enigmatic as Reilly’s behavior as an espionage agent, made numerous European business deals in Europe during 1914 and 1915 with Britain, France, and czarist-Russia. Though Morgan had done business with Russia it appears he had a bad experience with a 1905 Russian loan and bore a dislike for Russian contractors in New York, as well as a variety of prejudices that included anti-Jewishness (believing that Russian Jews were anti-czar and thus anti-Allied) cause and anti-Catholic, especially Irish Catholic. He was aware of Reilly and believed that an Irish Jew should be avoided, though of course Reilly was Russian whose father was Jewish but if Morgan knew this he would surely have disapproved of that genetic and cultural makeup as well. In July 1915 Erich Muenter, a German agent, failed in an assassination attempt on the American millionaire Morgan, an attempt that has been loosely associated with Reilly.[xxiii]

The Rise of the Bolsheviks and Lenin’s Red Terror

While the war still raged, the strain of the Russian Czar Nicholas’s oppression on his own people, coupled with the Russian people finding it increasingly more difficult to find enough food, created a revolutionary mood. Czarist Russia had a reputation as the most repressive country in Europe; its rulers had almost unrestricted power, and many of its people lived in dire poverty with no political freedom or redress against injustice. Some of the first acts of terror against the czarist rule came as early as the 1870s. In March 1917, 150,000 soldiers joined with rebellious workers and took control of Petrograd.

In September of 1917 the threat of a German attack on Petrograd led to a coup where Lenin’s Red Guards seized key buildings in Petrograd. In October 1917, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who in 1903 was elected the head of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (the Bolsheviks), returned to Russia along with Leon Trotsky, who had been living in exile in the United States. Lenin entered Russia in a train that Churchill called a “bacillus in a tube,” a reference to the spread of the disease of communism. Lenin had experienced the persecution of the Czar firsthand in the form of an arrest in 1895 and a subsequent one-year prison sentence in Siberia. His hatred for Czarist Russia was instilled in him before his arrest when his brother was hanged in 1887 for participating in a plot to kill Czar Alexander III. The Bolsheviks rallied people under the slogan of “peace, land, and bread.” On October 26 Lenin declared a new government based on the “socialization” of land and an appeal to peace.

Russia was in danger of being overtaken by the Germans so Lenin proposed a three-month armistice to discuss a peace agreement. By the end of 1917 most of the Russian army had simply walked away from the battles, disgusted with the entire affair. In 1915 a million Russian soldiers had become POWs, 750,000 simply giving up to the Germans. By the time Lenin had proposed peace talks a staggering four million Russians were in the Central Powers’ hands.

[xxiv]

With the Germans holding the upper hand, peace talks began in the Polish town of Brest-Litovsk December 3, 1917. Though their position in the east was good, the German army assessed its power and believed it could crush Russia or France but not both. The Germans
wanted to separate Poland from Russia and remove their forces from the Eastern front and apply them on the Western front where they could finally win the war. Lenin wasn’t eager to negotiate a deal quickly; he feared a quick peace would bring Germany and its enemies against the new Soviet government. This led Trotsky to lecture the Central Powers on George Hegel’s philosophy and other abstract subjects designed to stall for time. On March 3 the Soviets signed an agreement at Brest-Litovsk that gave the Germans 750,000 square kilometers, which was three times the size of Germany and contained an incredible quarter of the Russian population, 54 percent of its industry, and 89 percent of its coal mines. The treaty in effect drove Russia out of Europe and gave Germany the previously Russian-controlled Finland, the Baltic provinces, Poland, the Ukraine, and Caucasia. The Brest-Litovsk treaty, wrote historian John Wheeler-Bennett, was the “greatest diplomatic and military humiliation Russia had sustained,” and with “the exception of the Treaty of Versailles the Brest-Litovsk treaty had greater consequences and repercussions than any other peace settlement since the Congress of Vienna.” Though it was a humiliating agreement for Russia, Lenin was able to establish his Bolshevik government that would establish the Soviets as a world power for decades to come. The city of Brest-Litovsk would later be the target of one of the first Jewish pogroms by the Nazis during Operation Barbarossa in 1942.

Lenin then sought to consolidate Bolshevik power by crushing his enemies through terror. With Germany moving its forces to the Western front, Lenin focused his red terror on domestic groups such as the anti-Communist White Russians (supported by the Allies), the Greens (anarchists strong in the Ukraine), and the moderate socialists, the Mensheviks, who believed Russia would have to pass through a capitalist phase before an appropriate socialist government could be installed. Lenin’s Red Bolsheviks, the radical socialists, wanted a quick transition to socialism.

With the December 1917 development of the Cheka, the Bolsheviks’ equivalent to the Czar’s secret police Ochrana, Lenin was able to control dissidents with terror. Russians had a model for their secret police—the sixteenth century Oprichnina (band of outsiders) of Ivan Groznyi, also known as Ivan the Terrible. The Oprichnina relished the application of terror. Ivan used his agents as terrorists who would seek out traitors, or more simply put, enemies of Ivan. The Oprichnina’s saddles were imbued with a symbol of a broom (to sweep Russia clean of traitors) and a dog’s head (Ivan’s favorite way of dealing with traitors was to have them attacked by murderous hounds). In 1570 Ivan and his black-clad, Apocalypse-like horsemen attacked citizens of Norgorod. Ivan feared that the citizenry of Norgorod were allying themselves with Poland. The Oprichnina left thousands of dead in the city and a legacy of terror that the Ochrana and subsequent policing agencies of Russia would remember. In 1571 enemies of Ivan burned Moscow and in 1572 the Oprichnina was disbanded.

Lenin appointed Felix Dzerzhinsky as Commissar for Internal Affairs. Dzerzhinsky was another victim of Czarist incarceration. He had been released from prison due to the February Revolution. Like Lenin, Dzerzhinsky believed in the power of terror. He wrote in the Moscow newspaper, Svoboda Rossii, June 9, 1918, “We stand for organized terror . . . terror being absolutely indispensable in current revolutionary conditions. We terrorize the enemies of the Soviet government in order to stifle at its inception. Terror serves as a ready deterrent.”

Czar Nicholas II and his entire family were shot July 16, 1918 by the Bolsheviks, which led Leon Trotsky to write in his book Diary in Exile that the execution of the Czar’s family “was needed
not only to frighten, horrify and dishearten the enemy, but also in order to shake up our ranks, to show them that there was no turning back, that ahead lay either complete victory or complete ruin.” [xxix] Grand Duke Michael, Nicholas’s brother, wisely refused the throne and ended 300 years of the Romanov dynasty, which started with Michael III in 1613.

Reilly, Lenin, and the Lockhart Plot

By early 1918 the British withdrew all diplomatic personnel from Russia in an effort to make sure the world knew they did not support the Bolsheviks, the regime that had left the Alliance by withdrawing their troops and engaging in truce talks with the Germans. However, the British realized they would need some kind of presence in Moscow. Prime Minister David Lloyd George selected Bruce Lockhart to secretly sabotage the talks. Lockhart was a young diplomat fluent in Russia and with five year’s experience at the British Consul in Moscow. He was dispatched to Moscow in January of 1918 but was unable to do anything about the Bolshevik-German treaty.

By late summer 1918 there were rumors that there would be an Allied invasion for the purpose of overthrowing the new Soviet government. The invasion would install a new provisional government that would re-engage in the fight against the Central Powers. For decades after what happened in August, September, and October of 1918 in Petrograd and Moscow, writers have wondered whether there really was a plan to overthrow the Soviets with an Allied invasion or if the rumors had been a Soviet fabrication designed to heighten awareness of Allied intervention into Russian affairs by British intelligence agents.

Lockhart worked with Cmdr. Ernest Boyce who coordinated British Secret Service operations in Russia. Lockhart had little faith in Boyce’s agents with the exception of Capt. F.N.A. Cromie and Lt. Sidney Reilly, whom Lockhart described as “extremely able and the far cleverest of our agents in Russia.” [xxx]

C gave Reilly the code ST1 but his exact duties as a British agent in Russia have never been clear. C likely directed him to assist Lockhart, Cromie, and other agents in anti-Bolshevik activities that would result in the destruction of the Soviet regime. Considering Reilly’s reputation as a maverick agent what his real intentions toward Lenin will never be known. One of the legends concerning Reilly states that his ambition was to capture Lenin and march him half-naked to prison and shoot him. With the tyrant dead, Reilly would then become the new head of the country himself. He had planned to choose members of parliament before seizing Lenin.

The ever-independent Reilly went underground and began creating his own plans for the destruction of the Bolsheviks. He established relations with Boris Savinkov of the Union for the Defense for the Fatherland and Freedom, an organization based on anti-Bolshevik officers. Savinkov was part of the original provisional government as the minister of war and was known as a ruthless assassin who plotted against Nicholas II and participated in two assassinations of Czar sympathizers. Reilly seemed to find Savinkov worthy of respect and admiration and considered Savinkov as a potential prime minister in a new Russian government. As Reilly shuttled between Petrograd and Moscow creating a network of support, he was able to obtain a position with the criminal branch of the Petrograd Cheka. Reilly was used his legendary charm with women to create several safe houses and headquarters for his work under the alias of Mr.
Constantine, a Greek businessman in Moscow. When he was in Petrograd he used the cover of Mr. Massino, an Italian merchant. During Reilly’s career he established numerous contacts with Soviet officials and workers that allowed him inside information to Lenin’s regime. At one time he posed as Konstantin Pavlovich Massino and apparently established numerous relationships with women, one being Olga Starzhevskaia, a twenty-five-year old member of the staff of the Soviet’s All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VtsIK). She worked inside Kremlin and later confessed that she and Reilly had a love nest, one of Reilly’s safe houses in Moscow, but that she never passed on any sensitive information. He also befriended Maria Leoknovskaia, a wireless operator in the Kremlin, who passed on a variety of secret information to Reilly. These were only two of numerous contacts, both men and women, Reilly used to collect intelligence on the Lenin regime.[xxx]

**Reilly, Savinkov, and the Master of the Spy Book**

A British agent had approached Savinkov in late 1917 a few months before Reilly had entered the scene. The British agent, who had experience spying in Switzerland, used the cover name of Somerville and an occupation cover of a journalist writing for the *Daily Telegraph* of London. Somerville was really the celebrated British writer W. Somerset Maugham, who would later write the acclaimed novels *Of Human Bondage*, *The Razor’s Edge*, and the stories of *Ashenden*, which were based on his experiences as a British intelligence agent in Petrograd. Maugham has been considered the first author of spy books to be written from the perspective of a former spy. Maugham wrote that Ashenden was “founded on my experiences in the Intelligence Department during the first world war but rearranged for the purpose of fiction.” For years it was required reading by British agents. *Ashenden*, writes author Alan Furst (editor of *The Book of Spies – An Anthology of Literary Espionage*), is “a serious contender for the best novel ever written in the genre [espionage].”[xxxii]

Maugham found Savinkov quiet, reserved, and modest as well as a fascinating talker. Maugham also met Kerensky and gathered intelligence concerning the Bolsheviks. He sent ciphered messages to London for weeks before returning to London to meet Prime Minister David Lloyd George and pass along Kerensky’s desperate plea for more arms and ammunition to keep his crumbling government afloat. George refused to help, and before Maugham could return the Bolsheviks had taken over power in the fall of 1917. Maugham had told colleagues that he thought he could have succeeded in helping the Mensheviks overthrow the Bolsheviks if he had started six months earlier. Maugham would later work with World War II espionage ace, William Stephenson.[xxxiii]

**Targeting Lenin**

Reilly had his own plan in destroying the Bolsheviks: he worked closely with Captain Cromie in creating a powerful anti-Bolshevik army that would aid him in overthrowing Lenin’s regime. This would be done with the aid of the Latvian Rifle Division, which acted as a powerful Bolshevik army responsible for protection of officials and executions of dissidents among other duties. By the summer of 1918 the Cheka sent two agents to Petrograd to penetrate the Lockhart organization. They were able to convince Cromie and Reilly to send them to Moscow with a letter of introduction for Lockhart. The two agents convinced Lockhart to speak with a Colonel Berzin, another disaffected Latvian soldier with more power than they had. Reilly got involved with providing Berzin, who was another Chekhist agent, detailed information concerning the
plan for two Latvian regiments to defect to a group of Anglo-French troops during the upcoming Allied intervention. The Latvian troops, who Reilly planned on subverting through bribes, would remain in Moscow and assassinate Lenin and other members of his government. For the Latvian aid the officers would be awarded high positions in the Reilly-created government.

The plot became more detailed by the end of August. Reilly planned on making the key move on August 28 when a session of the all-Russian Congress of Soviets was to take place at the Bolshoi Theatre. Russia would instruct the Latvians to close all exits while he and other unknown agents would shoot Lenin, Trotsky, and the other Bolshevik leaders. All of this was duly noted by a French journalist and Bolshevik sympathizer, Rene Marchand, who passed on the information to the Chekhists and Lenin.[xxxiv] At the same time Marchand had provided key information for the Chekhists and Lenin, Berzin passed along a list of names and addresses of Allied agents in Moscow, which he had found at a flat Reilly used under the cover name of Massino. When Lockhart and other agents heard of the Reilly's plan to assassinate the Bolshevik leadership they unanimously rejected it, Lockhart saying that he would have nothing to do with “so dangerous and doubtful a move.”[xxxv]

The assassination of Moisei Uritsky, chief of the Petrograd Secret Police, on August 30, 1918 marked the start of a remarkable day for the Bolsheviks. A man, completely unassociated with an allied secret service, avenged the execution of a friend by the Cheka and killed Uritsky. On the same day as Uritsky’s death, Lenin spoke at a meeting in Moscow. When he left the building a woman who started asking him questions about how he was running the country approached him. As Lenin reached his car he turned and the woman fired three bullets into Lenin. The woman was identified as Fanya “Dora” Kaplan. Kaplan had been born into a peasant family; her parents immigrated to the United States. Like Lenin she had been imprisoned by the Czarist regime but longer than Lenin, eleven years. In 1906, she had been convicted of a plot to kill a Czarist official and was sentenced to life at hard labor in Siberia. It was Lenin’s February 1918 revolution that aided in her release. Lenin survived the attack. Kaplan explained she had tried to kill Lenin because she didn't like the way he was running the country, called him a traitor to the revolution, and denounced the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. Kaplan followed the example of another Russian woman terrorist, Vera Zasulich, who shot the governor of St. Petersburg in 1878.[xxxvi] Kaplan was executed September 3, 1918 thinking she had killed Lenin and ended the Bolshevik regime. Though a connection from Kaplan to Reilly has never been fully established, biographer Spence insinuates that Reilly was the guiding hand in the attempted assassination.[xxxvii]

The day after the assassination attempt on Lenin, the Cheka raided the British Embassy in Petrograd, which resulted in the death of Capt. Cromie. The Cheka began to hunt down Allied agents. Lockhart was arrested, as was Elizaveta Otten, one of Reilly’s women who kept a safehouse for him. Disguised as a workman Reilly tried to contact Cromie in Petrograd only to learn that the captain had resisted the Bolshevik raid on the embassy with two Browning pistols in each hand. He killed a commissar and wounded several other Cheka raiders before being killed in a hail of bullets. Reilly was able to return to Moscow with a Chekist pass where newspapers were denouncing the “Anglo-French bandits” who had hatched what they called the “Lockhart Plot.” Already Lockhart was being pinned as the chief criminal with Reilly his chief spy, though they had nothing to do with Uritsky’s murder or Kaplan’s plot to kill Lenin. Along with the usual arrests came a strange set of eight arrests of women who all claimed to be Reilly’s wife. They were all placed in the same cell with thirty other women, which made for
numerous arguments between the women. How Reilly was able to marry all of these women or even if he did is not known.[xxxviii]

A 100,000-ruble reward was placed on Reilly’s head with a stipulation to the Cheka to shoot him on sight. Lockhart was thrown in prison. Reilly found agent George Hill and suggested that he turn himself in for the release of Lockhart. Hill realized that the Cheka might decide to shoot both of them and dissuaded Reilly. Lockhart was exchanged for the Soviet representative, M.M. Litvinov, who was detained as a retaliatory move by British intelligence. Reilly used a variety of disguises and a passport provided by Hill to allow him to escape Russia.

A combination of Bolshevik price controls on crops and a drought created one of the greatest disasters of the twentieth century: the Russian famine of 1921. Anti-Bolsheviks, like Reilly, were certainly inspired to act against the Bolshevik regime during the 1921 famine. Conservative estimates of deaths were three million with some estimates as high as ten million, which could have been higher without foreign relief that Lenin fortunately allowed. As author Bill Emmott writes, famines rarely happen because of a simple failure of crops; they are the result of a disruption of food caused by war or government action. These famines, Emmott claims, are bought about by central governments that create chaos in food production and distribution to exact political brutality. This tactic was used effectively by the Soviet Union from 1917 through 1991 and China during various times of the twentieth century to bring about the deaths of 97 million people.[xxxix]

Mata Hari and Her Search for the Ace of Spies and Lt. Canaris

Major Coulson, in his controversial biography on Mata Hari, relates the story of a possible connection between the Dutch dancer and the Ace of Spies. Coulson writes “the audacious exploits of an English agent” had defied the German’s best efforts at detection. This English agent was the British agent known as ST1, Sidney Reilly. After a “particularly impudent performance” by Reilly, the Germans decided to call in the expertise of Mata Hari whom Reilly was believed to have known. Coulson claims that Reilly was known as “Mr. C,” and was an English Army captain who was the “Admiralty’s ‘ace’ in espionage.” Coulson correctly recounts the fact that Reilly was talented with languages and knew several European countries, but he mistakenly claims Reilly was an Irishman.

Coulson writes of a meeting between Mata Hari and Reilly in a “Balkan town.” Instructed by her German handlers “to scrape up an acquaintance with the man who was believed to be in possession of some exceedingly valuable knowledge much envied by the Germans,” Mata Hari allegedly turned on her renowned charm and asked Reilly if they had not met before, possibly India? Reilly is said to have replied, “More likely in Berlin.” This telling retort, according to Coulson, should have tipped off Mata Hari that Reilly knew of her German connections. Coulson does not describe whatever transpired between the two. If the encounter ever happened, which is unlikely considering Coulson’s lack of corroboration and documentation as well as any subsequent Reilly or Mata Hari scholars mentioning such an incident, then in fact Mata Hari was unable to obtain any information on the ace of spies.[xl]

Mata Hari’s liaison with Reilly ranks with another legendary piece of nonsense: her romantic liaison with Lt. Wilhelm Canaris of German intelligence, the man who would eventually head the Nazi’s military intelligence group, Abwehr. Writer Kurt Singer wrote in 1953 that while both
Canaris and Mata Hari were in Spain during the war they established a relationship. Canaris, as the story goes, sent Mata Hari to travel to France with a code book he knew the French could decipher, which would lead to her capture and execution. Singer claimed that the Germans hoped to embarrass the French by executing an innocent woman, as the Germans had with the British nurse Edith Cavell causing an outrage in Britain. However, questions about the dates of their rendezvous, and a lack of any kind of corroboration from witnesses, cast a serious doubt on any kind of relationship. Author Nigel West documents that they weren’t in Spain at the same time, and he notes that there were no witnesses to document Singer’s claim.

**The Trust and The Window**

The key organization in the downfall of Sidney Reilly was the Bolshevik intelligence network known as The Trust (also known as the Paris Trust), which was formerly known as the Monarchist Association of Central Russia. Created by Leon Trotsky and Felix Dzerzhinsky, its main concern was to pose as an anti-Bolshevik organization to lure counter-revolutionaries back to Russia where they would be exposed and eliminated.

Reilly was well aware that The Trust may not be a group of anti-Bolsheviks but a trap for people like him and Savinkov, but he was encouraged to take the risk by Boyce who felt true anti-Bolsheviks manned The Trust. It appears that both Savinkov and Reilly thought Boyce was right and were willing to run the risk The Trust would be the key to the Bolshevik’s downfall. Savinkov was the first to be sucked into The Trust, apprehended by the Cheka, and eventually committed suicide in May of 1925 according to Bolshevik reports though according to Brook-Shepherd “the possibility that Stalin – rather than Dzerzhinsky – took that life for him can certainly not be ruled out.”

In June of 1925, not knowing of Savinkov’s fate, Reilly attempted to enter Russia again for the purpose of joining with Savinkov and The Trust in overthrowing the Bolsheviks but in what manner no one was sure. He was to enter Russia through The Window, which was allegedly a safe means to enter Russia through Finland with the aid of anti-Bolsheviks. Reilly believed that The Trust only needed leadership like Savinkov and himself to finally rid Russia of the radical Bolsheviks and the hideous Cheka. No official communication was ever received from British intelligence as soon as Reilly entered The Window. Biographer Andrew Cook interviewed OGPU officials who claimed that Reilly was interrogated, not tortured, then shot in Sokolniki Park in Moscow soon after his apprehension in 1925.

In June of 1927, two years after the disappearance of Reilly, an official communiqué was released from the Bolsheviks in Moscow. It described an incident in the summer of 1925 when a man holding a Soviet passport with the name of Steinberg was wounded and arrested while illegally crossing the Finnish border. Steinberg confessed, said the communiqué, that he was in fact Sidney George Reilly who “came to Russia for the special purpose of organizing terroristic acts, arson and revolts, and that when coming from America he had seen Mr. Churchill . . . who personally instructed him as to the reorganization of the terroristic and other acts calculated to create a diversion.” Strangely the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Communist Party was released the same day, which paved the way for the long Stalinist regime. In 1940 Stalin would send a special agent to Mexico to kill his rival Trotsky.
Rumors flourished concerning Reilly. Some said he was dead, or he had escaped from prison. MI5 feared he had made a deal with the Bolsheviks; after all he was a Ukrainian and a brilliant agent who could easily become an asset to the Bolsheviks for the right price. There was the possibility he was working in China as a Soviet agent and maybe he had faked his own death. In 1931, a British official reported that a Russian sailor who said he had to desert the ship at all costs had approached him. The sailor claimed he was Reilly and had been held prisoner in Moscow, then moved to a prison in Odessa where he had escaped. The British official, not knowing what Reilly looked like, helped him with money and clothes and the mystery man disappeared from the ship into the Middle East.

The Legends and Legacies of the Ace and Queen of Spies

In 1930 the German government published an official work on Germany's spying during World War I and pronounced Mata Hari innocent of any spying activity. Dr. Schragmuller, the head of a German intelligence group in Antwerp flatly stated, “all of H21’s information for Germany is false. She was never one of ours.” In 1932 Colonel Lecroix, head of military justice in France, read the sealed dossier on Mata Hari and announced that he could not find any “palpable, tangible . . . proofs of her guilt.” In 1985 biographer Russell Warren Howe reviewed the sealed dossier himself and confirmed Lecroix’ announcement as to Mata Hari’s innocence. Over the years there have been numerous efforts to win a pardon from France; in October of 2001 a set of lawyers from her birthplace in Leeuwarden tried to win a new trial. [xlvi]

Mata Hari has been the source for numerous novels and films. Greta Garbo starred with Ramon Novarro and Lionel Barrymore in the 1932 version of Mata Hari, a film where Garbo (who became a spy for the Allies in World War II) portrays the Dutch dancer as a cigarette-smoking, manipulator of men. Barrymore plays one of the lovers and Navarro is a Russian fighter pilot who sweeps Mata Hari off her feet just before her arrest. A 1964 French version, Mata Hari, Agent H21, found Jeanne Moreau in the starring role. Marlene Dietrich played an Austrian spy femme fatale in the 1931 film Dishonored, which was undoubtedly inspired by the life of Mata Hari.

On May 8, 2002, London’s Associated Press announced the public disclosure of 212 top secret MI5 files, the ninth and largest MI5 release ever, that provided details and secrets concerning Reilly, World War II spy Dusko Popov, as well as Stalin, and the British nurse Edith Cavell. The files seemed to confirm author Gordon Brook-Shepherd’s account of Reilly’s demise in the book Iron Maze. As Reilly made his way through Finland, via The Window in order to negotiate with The Trust, he was captured and kept in the Lubyanka jail in Moscow. The Bolsheviks hoped he would provide more information about British agents. A six-page, typed statement by an unidentified informant dated March 9, 1927 tells of how the informant had told Reilly he was in danger of being caught, which allowed Reilly to leave Russia only to return and be captured. “The Bolsheviks,” wrote the informant “at first concealed his arrest but the English somehow or other found it out, and the Bolsheviks in order to escape the possible demands by the English of his release murdered him when he was taken out for exercise.” The informant claimed that Reilly was taken outside the jail into some hills and shot several times with a revolver, and then the Bolsheviks planted an article in the press that said Reilly died after being wounded when he tried to enter Russia through the Finnish border.[xlvii] The May 2002 records also suggest that Stalin may have ordered Reilly’s execution.
With the execution of Mata Hari, John Quiggin of the *Australian Financial Review* wonders, “In retrospect, she appears to have been guilty of little more than a taste for self-dramatization and indiscreet gossip,” where the Germans, “with the disastrous sense of PR they displayed throughout the Great War, chose to shoot a British nurse, Edith Cavell, easily represented as a Madonna figure to contrast with the symbolic Whore, Mata Hari.” As for the Lockhart Plot the public can see it for what it was: “on the one hand a real, if pitiful, anti-Soviet conspiracy concocted (or perhaps deliberately provoked) by the megalomaniacal Sidney Reilly . . . and . . . a superb example of police provocation brilliantly conceived and expertly executed by the crafty agents of the Cheka.” And now, Quiggins reminds us, terrorists have replaced spies and their associated fears, which in some ways is a “reversion to the nineteenth century, when the bomb-throwing anarchist was a focus of popular fears and the subject of novels by such writers as Chesterton [*The Man Who Was Thursday*] and Conrad [*The Secret Agent*].”[xlviii]

It is author Gordon Brook-Shepherd’s contention that Reilly was never interested in espionage apart from his ambition to make money. Like Mata Hari’s use of espionage as a means to free herself of the life of a courtesan, Reilly used espionage to advance his desire of toppling the Bolshevik revolution and replacing them with his own government, making Russia in effect his ultimate business adventure. Both Mata Hari and Reilly were in fact, as Mata Hari claimed in her defense at her trial, “cosmopolitan” with very little interest in nationalism or a devotion to any cause other than using people and groups to improve their financial lives while inflating their egos.

Despite Reilly’s reputation as immoral and egotistical there seems to be no clear indication that he was ever disloyal to the Allied cause, though biographer Van der Rhoer advocates that Reilly’s amazing success in every aspect of his business and espionage life until his uncharacteristic string of failures of disposing the Bolsheviks suggests that he was a triple, quadruple, or quintuple agent who eventually provided the most important information to the Bolsheviks after playing the “intelligence field” comprising the British, Germans, anti-Bolshevik Russians, Bolshevik Russians, Japanese, if not the Americans as well. The stories that Reilly survived past 1925 are numerous. Eugeni Kozhernikov, a British double agent, who deserted Russian intelligence in 1927 claimed Reilly worked for Russian intelligence in 1926 in Afghanistan and Persia as well as a narcotics pipeline in the Far East.[xlix] Biographer Kettle hinted at Reilly’s possible work with Israel’s Mossad. The theory that Reilly was a Soviet spy as early as 1918 has also been entertained by authors Richard Spence and John Long based on comments made to the British Ambassador in Oslo on September 30, 1918 by U.S. Consul-General in Russia Dewitt C. Poole, who regarded Reilly as a Soviet agent. Robert Bruce Lockhart and George Hill, writes John Ainsworth, rejected the idea as preposterous and defended Reilly’s allegiance to the Allied cause. A strong case could be made that Reilly had a genuine hatred for the Soviet regime and worked diligently to save the world from what would become one of the most vicious totalitarian regimes in world history. Whether he failed in ousting the radical Bolsheviks from Russia or secretly aided them in an amazing act of double and triple cross, and then disappeared into his beloved Russia or the obscurity of some other part of the world where he felt equally comfortable, he remains, partially or completely by self-design, one of the great mysteries in all of twentieth century European intelligence.

End Notes

[i] Spence, Richard B. “Sidney Reilly in America, 1914-17,” *Intelligence and Security*, v. 10, n. 1,


[vii] Even Reilly’s name is controversial. Some biographers spell his name “Sidney” (Kettle, Lockhart), others “Sydney” (Brook-Shepherd), and in one case both spellings in the same book (Deacon’s *Spyclopedia*).


[xxi] Ibid. , pp. 194-5.


[xxiv] As historian John Keegan notes, Russia’s prisoner losses “exceeded battlefield casualties by three to one,” with Russia’s battlefield deaths at 1.3 million. These staggering numbers pale beside what happened in the same place in Europe a mere two and a half decades later when three million of the five million Soviet soldiers captured by the Nazis died of starvation and mistreatment. Keegan, John. *The First World War*, Knopf, New York, 1999, p. 343.


[xxvi] The word “terror” comes from the Latin “terrer” – to cause to tremble. Author Don DeLillo defines terror as the “language of being noticed.”

[xxvii] *Ochrana*, also known as Okrana, was the intelligence and secret service, sometimes called secret police, of the Russian Czars from 1881-1917.


[xxxi]ii Of Maugham’s opinion of the human race, he wrote, “Their heart’s in the right place, but their head is a thoroughly inefficient organ.” Swainson, Bill, ed. *Encarta Book of Quotations*, St. Martin’s, New York, 2000, p. 622.


[xliii] As unlikely a source as Winston Churchill wrote a tribute to Savinkov in his book *Great Contemporaries* that documented his opinion of the 21 most influential men of the age.
Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, 1907, is considered the first political thriller of the twentieth century whose plot deals with Russians involved in anarchist bombings in London. Conrad grew up in Russian controlled Poland. He hated the Russians for enslaving Poland and forcing his father into exile. The beginning of the century saw the rise to prominence of the spy novel like John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*. The final decade saw retired spymasters reach the pinnacle of power in the United States (George Bush Sr.) and Russia (Vladimir Putin).
If this really was a book about great spies of the 20th century, people like Mata Hari and Sidney Reilly, aka ‘Ace of Spies’, would have been in the book. The first mistake I encountered was when the author, who is French, writes of ‘Lyons,’ in France. The city is not Lyons - it is LYON. There certainly hasn't been any proof reading or editing of the book.