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Article:

On the Effects of Knavery:
From a London Working Lunch
to the Danish summer 1916 war scare

Author:

Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen ©
Institute for Military History and War Studies, Royal
Danish Defence College

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Abstract:

On 14 June 1916 the Danish army purchasing officer in London, Cavalry Major Count Frederik "Fritz" Moltke, had a working lunch with his contact in the Admiralty, the Danish language speaking Lieutenant Commander Frank Stagg. From the next table a MI5 counter-intelligence officer monitored the conversation that was meant to expose Moltke as a German spy and pass him incorrect information about the recent naval battle off Jutland. Later that summer Denmark was forced to transfer Moltke to the U.S., but at that time the disinformation passed to him and reinforced by the Danish Minister in London had already worsened a senses in Copenhagen that Denmark was moving closer become involved in the war. The article follows the chain of disinformation and events.

On the Effects of Knavery: From a London Working Lunch to the Danish summer 1916 war scare

Introduction

On 14 June 1916 three men lunched in a London restaurant, two at the same table. One was the Danish Count Frederik Moltke, Ritmester (Cavalry Major) of the Guards Hussar Regiment, the Danish Household Cavalry. The two others were intelligence officials. The officer sharing Moltke's table was Lieutenant-Commander Frank Stagg of the Secret Intelligence Service, Moltke's official contact since his arrival in Britain one-and-a-half years earlier. The other intelligence officer was there to monitor the conversation for MI5, the counter-intelligence service, and to report Moltke's reactions. He was probably the officer responsible for Moltke's case.

The meeting took place only two weeks after the great naval battle off Jutland. A few days later, in the evening of 5 June, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, and his staff were drowned when the armoured cruiser, HMS *Hampshire*, his transport from Scapa Flow to meetings in Russia, was lost in a massive explosion off the Orkney Islands. The explosion took place when the cruiser struck a mine laid by the U-boat U-75, but on 14 June the reason was still unclear and there were rumours that the explosion might have been caused by a device placed on board by German saboteurs before departure, or by a German U-boat torpedoing the vessel after information from a spy.

The two sources that describe the meeting seem to disagree about who took the initiative. The diplomatic despatch of the Danish Envoy, Count Henrik Grevenkop-Castenskiold, noted that it was Stagg who invited the Danish officer.¹ However, an anonymous report about the meeting written three days later on the basis of information from Stagg and the observations of the other participating intelligence officer emphasises that Moltke had invited Stagg by telephone the previous evening. The reason Moltke gave was that the Danish

1 Rigsarkivet (Danish State Archives) hereafter **RA**: London, diplomatisk repræsentation 1913-1929. Politiske rapporter (afleveret 1949). Pk. 467 1916-1917: Ritmester F. Greve Moltke L.954 of 14-06-1916 "Memorandum til Det kongelige Gesandtskab i London"; Depeche Fortrolig Nr. XXXVII of 15-06-1916 to Udenrigsministeriet.



From the previous week: Kitchener on the way to lunch with Jellicoe on board HMS *Iron Duke* a few hours before his death. (Imperial War Museum)

Government wanted additional information about the naval battle. He would be glad to receive new information that could correct the Danish impression of a German victory.²

It is most likely that both sides had a role in arranging the meeting. The Danish envoy had probably directed Moltke to clarify the extent to which the Admiralty supported the worrying views about the post-battle naval situation expressed in “*The Economist*” of 10 June. The periodical suggested that cruiser losses had seriously weakened the German Navy.³ This was important to the Danes because any defeat of the German Navy in the North Sea was seen as likely to be followed by a British attempt to enter the Baltic Sea through the Danish Straits.⁴

Stagg also needed a meeting. As we shall see he had both a personal and a professional motive to support the already existing MI5 opinion that Moltke was a security risk because he might be a German spy. If the lunch gave the counter-intelligence service additional arguments why Moltke should leave England, this would clearly be in Stagg’s interest.

A likely sequence of events that would be in line with the information of both

2 The National Archives of United Kingdom, hereafter TNA, FO 371/3361, pp. 341-349.

3 RA. UMN, Gruppeordnede sager, pk. 10-32, læg 10.G.62 “Eventuel engelsk aktion i danske farvande”, *The Economist*, 10-6-1916, “The Naval Battle and the Peace Question”.

4 For Danish threat perceptions: Michael H. Clemmesen, *Det lille land før den store krig. Danske farvande, stormagtsstrategier, efterretninger og forsvarsforberedelser omkring kriserne 1911-13*, (Odense 2012), especially chapters 38, 43.

The Danish War Office purchasing officer in London, the elegant Guards Hussars Major, Count Frederik Josias Valdemar Otto Moltke. He was 39 years old when the lunch meeting took place. (RA)



sources is that Moltke asked his Admiralty contact, Stagg, for a meeting on the request of Castenskiold. After having consulted MI5, the intelligence officer proposed the lunch format, and Moltke invited him to the following day.

The disinformation which Stagg used as a tool to provoke Moltke and achieve his purpose successfully shows that he was fully aware of Danish perceptions of the threat. It would trigger three months of intense war scare in Denmark, because it confirmed and reinforced the Envoy's and Danish authorities' worries. This may or may not have been Stagg's deliberate intent.

As a notorious activist he may have wished to provoke a change in Denmark's strategic position that would open new possibilities for British warfare in Northern Europe. On the other hand he could not know that his information would be consolidated and reinforced by the Danish envoy. However, no matter what Stagg intended beyond assisting the MI5, the final results would act as a catalyst for the start of new German war planning against Denmark in late August 1916, and provoked a formal decision one and a half months later by the leadership of the Royal Navy and British Army that nothing should be done to assist that country if Germany invaded.

Purpose of the article

The article has a double purpose and is divided in two parts to achieve both. The first part charts the paths of Henrik Moltke and Frank Stagg up to the lunch meeting and tries to identify Stagg's likely combination of motives for the disinformation that was sent to Copenhagen. Thereafter the article seeks to identify the effects in Denmark of Stagg's warning. The article ends with a short narrative about what happened later.

It is written in English rather than Danish to allow other than Nordic language readers some insight into the delicate situation of a small neutral state placed between major powers involved in an increasingly total conflict. By way of working in English, I have been able to benefit from a close cooperation with distinguished British naval historians, Dr Richard Dunley from start to finish and Dr Stephen Cobb in the final phase.

Moltke, Stagg and the latter's motives

Moltke's version of the meeting

Moltke wrote his report to Castenskiöld right after the working meal. Lieutenant-Commander Stagg, “employed in the Admiralty Intelligence Division” had used the occasion to make various statements about the Danish attitude to England after the naval battle. Moltke noted that “*Commander Stagg speaks and reads Danish fluently and has often been in Denmark.*” Stagg stressed that he had been astonished that Danish newspapers had described the battle as a German victory. This was a major mistake, and “*it could have very serious consequences if the Royal Government shared this opinion*”. The truth about the outcome was that all the valuable cruisers of the German advanced screen had been lost or heavily damaged and were now unusable. Thus Stagg reinforced the information in the “*Economist*” article. The German battle fleet had also been severely damaged. It would take three months before the German Navy would be ready for action again. Stagg then told Moltke to consider as a military professional what this would mean for the general situation, as “*the English Navy had gained freedom of action to use its power for other missions than keeping the German Navy contained and away from the English coasts. The logical next task for the navy was to fight for control of the Baltic Sea and an expedition against the Kiel Canal, Hamburg and the German Naval Bases.*” Stagg was unhappy that the British politicians had succeeded in diverting forces to Gallipoli that should have been used to attack the Canal via Jutland. However, with the death of Kitchener, who had been against a violation of Danish neutrality, and the result of the naval battle there was a new situation. The British Army would now act as General Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, decided. Robertson was an admirer of the German General Staff, and in any situation he always asked himself what the Prussians would do. Neutral rights meant nothing to him.

Stagg had been excited and insisted that it was a life-or-death struggle for England and that it was the duty of the Admiralty to exploit the success of the battle. Stagg said that he was personally a friend of Denmark, but he considered it to be an “*unforgivable*” mistake not to act now. “*The welfare of three million Danes should not stand in the way of the future of the British Empire.*” The French supported a landing in Jutland and he hoped that the ongoing conference in Paris would decide in favour of Admiralty wishes. Moltke's memorandum does not

mention any other British participant at the lunch, which makes it likely that he was witnessing what happened from a nearby table.⁵

Castenskiold's 10 and 15 June despatches

The Envoy, Count Grevenkop-Castenskiold, had already dealt with the post-battle situation in his despatch of 10 June. It had been triggered by the *“Economist”* article. The Envoy noted that the Admiralty considered that many key German warships now needed months of repair. This meant that the situation might develop in a critical direction for Denmark if the British Government decided that the time had come to try a naval entry into the Baltic Sea. Such an operation was likely to be encouraged by Russia. The mood against Germany was extremely bitter after the loss of *Hampshire* and Lord Kitchener. It was generally considered likely that the explosion had been caused by a bomb on-board the cruiser, and that the otherwise well-kept secret about the Field Marshal's voyage had been sent to Germany by a spy in the War office or Admiralty

On 15 June the Envoy forwarded Moltke's report with another despatch to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Castenskiold stressed that Stagg's information matched what he had heard at higher levels in the Admiralty and reported on 10 June. The Royal Navy considered Jutland a victory. *“Mr. Stagg may be regarded as a hothead, but I believe that a large number of army and naval officers share his opinion, and it is supported by newspapers such as “Morning Post” and “Daily Mail”.*” The view of Stagg as a *“hothead”* probably refers to the Turner incident in late 1915 (to be described later). Even if the Count personally doubted that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary would decide to conduct another very costly combined land and sea operation after the Dardanelles experience, violating neutral territory after having condemned German action against Belgium, *“it is however always best to accept that a time might come where Denmark would be requested to join the Allies”.* There was no doubt that any British action against the Straits and Kiel Canal would receive warm support from France and Russia.⁶

The envoy attached “The Economist” 10-6-1916 article, “The Naval Battle and the Peace Question”, to his despatch from that day. Here the article's information about ships sunk. (RA)

	British.	German.
Battleships	1	0
Battle cruisers	1	0
Armoured cruisers	1	0
Light cruisers	1	0
Destroyers	1	0
Submarines	1	0

5 **RA:** London, diplomatisk repræsentation 1913-1929. Politiske rapporter (afleveret 1949). Pk. 467 1916-1917: Ritmester F. Greve Moltke L.954 of 14-06-1916 “Memorandum til Det kongelige Gesandtskab i London”. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

6 **RA:** London, diplomatisk repræsentation 1913-1929. Politiske rapporter (afleveret 1949). Pk. 467 1916-1917: Depecher Fortrolig Nr. XXXVI of 10-06-1916 & Nr. XXXVII of 15-06-1916 to Udenrigsministeriet. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

MI5's version

MI5 and Stagg's version dated 17 June 1916 was attached to the later rejection of a Danish request (from November 1918) to clear Moltke of the suspicion of having acted as a German spy. The arguments for the rejection will be covered below. In the MI5 report, Stagg's identity was left out. He was simply "*a Naval Officer working in the Intelligence Department at the Admiralty, who is personally known to Count Moltke*". Actually Stagg had formally retired from the Royal Navy to join the Secret Intelligence Service (then MI1c) two years earlier. According to the report, Moltke had phoned him the day before and invited him to the meal, because the Danish Government was "*very anxious about the result of the North Sea battle*". Moltke would be "*very glad*" if Stagg could give him any facts "*which would put the matter in a different light from that in which his Government saw it*". So according to Stagg the suspicious thing that Moltke had done was to seek information that would give the British version of events to counter the German version that seemed to have convinced the Danish Government. This cannot really be considered an anti-British activity. From all we know of Moltke it was the exact opposite. However, the report continued that "*Obviously Count MOLTKE was seeking for information which has not been made public and which, presumably, it is the intention of the Admiralty to keep secret*".

Stagg had been "*instructed to see Count Moltke, and to lead him on and discover what he really wanted to know*". According to the report, Moltke had been "*pumping*" Stagg. He "*persisted that his Government were nervous as to the result*" (of the battle). He had not heard convincing evidence that the victory had been British and asked for details of the battle "*and the German ships which we believe have been lost*".

The latter indicates that Moltke sought information to counter the German narrative. He sought information that was vital for Danish security, information that any Danish diplomat in both Germany and England was obliged to seek in order to inform the country's decision makers.

However both Stagg and the other officer present "*were most infavourably impressed and conceived great distrust of his motives*,"⁷ in spite of the knowledge of Denmark and its very difficult strategic situation that Stagg would have possessed from his time in the country before the war. He had worked as a naval intelligence operative, officially studying Danish language in Copenhagen. He did not advise the other agent that Moltke simply had to seek this information. Instead Stagg had fed Moltke misinformation which, if believed, had the potential to destabilise Denmark's geo-strategic situation, and thereby he acted directly contrary to British interests which were to maintain Denmark as an unoccupied neutral country. However, the MI5 report of the lunch meeting did not describe what information Stagg had fed Moltke to challenge him. It is unclear whether the MI5 agent only witnessed the meeting, depending on Stagg's narrative of what had happened, or

7 TNA, FO 371/3361, pp. 345-347.

if he knew enough Nordic languages to understand the conversation. If the report described what had been said, the Foreign Office might have been piqued. As documented later neither the British diplomats, the Admiralty nor British Army wanted a change to Danish neutrality.

It unclear if or to which degree that Stagg's purpose was to send misinformation about the post-Jutland situation to Denmark or Germany. If that had been his main aim and he had really believed that Moltke was a German spy and had wanted to make the information credible in Berlin, he might have fed the information to the Dane in an indirect way that would have enhanced its credibility. Open information volunteered by a known intelligence officer is not something that will convince the opposition. Stagg could only consider it likely that the Envoy, Count Castenskiold, would make his misinformation credible, if Moltke told Stagg about the Envoy's worries when he asked for the meeting. We cannot know if that happened.

The impression given by the 17 June report is simply that Stagg wanted to get Moltke to seek information from him that was highly classified, so that the audience, the counter-intelligence officer, would have additional arguments to get Moltke out of England.

Frederik Moltke and his time in London until December 1915

In a Danish parallel to the Shell Crisis amongst the belligerents, the Danish Army and its strong supporter, King Christian X, had realised in the first months of 1915 that the very low stocks of artillery and small arms ammunition were a critical flaw in Danish defence capabilities. In the summer of that year a compromise was reached between the King and the Social-Liberal Government that wanted to reduce the Army's still substantial neutrality guard. The King got a decision to dispatch purchasing officers abroad and the government pressed on with its reductions in the neutrality guard.

Count Moltke was sent to London. His main task was to buy – and clear through the British blockade – metals and semi-finished products that would enable the factories of the Danish Army ordnance agency, the “*Army Technical Corps*” to produce the additional ammunition for field artillery and small arms essential in any extended defence against a German invasion. At the same time Deputy Director Viggo Falgren-Schäfer and Captain Gunnar Petersen were sent to the U.S. to shop for the Army Technical Corps from the Danish Consulate in New York.

Moltke had been working for the Army Technical Corps since the start of the war. He was probably seconded from his regiment to the Corps at the start of the war because he was one of his country's aviation pioneers, specialising in free balloons. He had been a founding member of the Danish Aeronautical Society in 1909, had got his balloonist certificate the following year, and published articles about military use of balloons in the Danish Military Review. In 1912 Moltke had been a driving force behind the collection of volunteer contributions to purchase



Frederik Moltke, the free balloon pioneer, ascending with his balloon "*Danmark*" before the war (his grandson's photo collection)

the first observation balloons for the Copenhagen Fortress. They were to be used in case of a German siege. It is likely that Stagg met Moltke, or had at least heard of him, during his time in the small Danish capital before the war.

The Technical Corps was responsible for all army weapons, but it still had a clear professional focus on artillery matters including support equipment such as observation balloons.

Prior to his transfer to London, Moltke had already proven his skills during a purchasing visit to Germany. During spring 1915 he visited a number of companies to investigate the possibilities of buying what the Corps needed for its activities, including the Riedinger Company, the main German balloon manufacturer that had also produced the privately funded balloons purchased before the war. The Technical Corps was now looking for opportunities to get equipment to expand the one observation balloon element into a regular balloon park to support the Copenhagen Fortress. Moltke quickly reached agreement with the firm. Denmark would replace the raw materials used in the production. However the balloons only reached Denmark in October after the German authorities had given formal export permission. By then the proven negotiator Moltke had already been dispatched on his more general purchasing mission to London.⁸

8 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, A. Material, Gen.major Nørresø 1905-1921, Pk. 1, "2. Ballonhylstre..." no date; A. Riedinger Ballonfabrik, Augsburg af 2-2-1915 to

One of the “Parseval” type observation balloons that Frederik Moltke purchased from “A. Riedinger” in 1913 with voluntary contributions and in 1915 as army purchasing officer. (his grandson’s photo collection)



On 30 July Count Castenskiold had notified the Foreign Office that Moltke would arrive in England by ship in early August “*to pay a visit to this country in order to try to obtain export licenses for certain articles to the Danish Army*”. After the Home Office’s approval on 4 August, the Foreign Office gave its permission on 7 August. On 14 August the British Envoy to Copenhagen informed London that the Count would leave the next day, on 15 August, meaning that he would reach England a couple of days later.⁹ Danish authorities had been trying to purchase military equipment in Britain since spring that year, without success. In April the Foreign Office informed the British Minister in Copenhagen, Sir Henry Lowther, that the industry had difficulty in meeting British Army requirements, let alone those of neutrals. In May Lowther informed London that the Danish reaction had been to send a retired general to England with an extended shopping list that included range finders, binoculars and various chemicals and machine tools for

Hochwohlgeboren Herrn Rittmeister Graf Moltke, Kopenhagen; Afskrift af Chiffertelegram fra Gesandtskabet i Berlin af 19-4-1915; Report about Moltke’s visit to Soemmerda: Til Hærens Laboratorium of 28-4-1915; T.A.Poulsen: Hærens ballonpark, *Dansk Flyvnings Historie* (Copenhagen 1936), pp. 39, 41. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

⁹ TNA. FO 383/85, (Danish Legation) of 30-7-1915 to The Secretary of State, Foreign Office; Home Office, No. 295531 of 4-8-1915 to The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office; Foreign Office, No. 107665/15, Immediate, of 7-8-1915 to the Danish Minister; FO 382/70, Henry Crofter Lowther of 14-8-1915 to the honourable Edward Grey....



Moltke's enthusiastic boss, the Danish Director of Ordnance, General Nørresø, in 1917. (RA)

manufacturing ammunition. However, Major-General Albert Arendrup seems to have failed, and nothing seems to have happened.¹⁰

Moltke arrived in late August and added impetus to the purchasing project. The Contraband Department of the Foreign Office noted on 27 August that "*a certain Count Moltke*" had already made contact regarding the purchase of ammunition. The department noted that "*the French have asked us not to facilitate such supplies at the moment, in view of certain intrigues of their own.*" On 2 September Count Castenskiold wanted information about whom Moltke should contact. However, when Castenskiold repeated the request on 16 September, the desk officer noted two days later that Moltke "*has already established relations with the Admiralty*". This probably referred to Stagg, and reinforces the idea that the two men had met previously. The Foreign Secretary replied on 23 September that Moltke now had contacts with all the British Government departments relevant for his work.¹¹

10 **RA.** Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, A. Material, Gen.major Nørresø 1905-1921, Pk. 1, includes all key documents in relation to the purchasing missions. Nothing is added to the initial directive to Arendrup: "Afskrift of 4-5-1915 Kjære Herr General (with a purchasing list)"

11 **TNA.** FO 382/70, War Office, No. 0158/256 of 8-4-1915 to The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office; Foreign Office, No. 34057/15, Confidential Cypher telegram No. 128 of 9-4-1915 to Sir H. Lowther; Cypher, Sir H. Lowther, No. 500, Confidential of 19-5-1915; The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, of 27-5-1915 to the Director of Military Operations; Contraband Dept. E.P. of 27-8-1915 to (War Dept.); (Danish Minister) of 2-9-1915 to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; Danish Minister) of 16-9-1915 to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; note by "S.G." of 18-9-1915 on No. 133366 of 17-9-1915; Sir Edward Grey of 23-9-1915 to the Danish Minister.

In September to November 1915 the Danish Social-Liberal government was openly criticised by the conservative and liberal opposition for neglecting national defence, and the Defence Minister had chosen to make certain concessions. He approved the construction of the “*Tune Position*” at the foot of the North-East Zealand peninsula creating a forward defence of the capital and making it more likely that the garrisons on Zealand outside Copenhagen would be able to reach the fortress in case of a German landing. The defence minister also gave the Army Technical Corps and Fortress Artillery Commanders permission to try to get modern heavy field artillery for the fortress as well as to fill the ammunition stocks by import and production.¹²

Building-up the ammunition stocks depended on the energy and efficiency of the purchasing missions to the U.S. and England, and Moltke’s energy and social profile made him the key person in the effort. On 20 June 1916, a week after the meeting and a short time before Moltke’s departure from London, Major-General Martin Nielsen Nørresø, the Danish Army Ordnance Director and commander of the Army Technical Corps, gave his description of Moltke’s achievements during his 11 months in London: He had “*proven to have an extraordinary ability to find the goods required, get export licences, facilitate insurance and dispatch to Denmark, etc. The Corps considered Moltke irreplaceable under the present conditions...*”

To underline his point the General attached the long list of the wares and material for army and naval authorities that Moltke had been able to get through the British blockade since 1 January 1916. He continued: “*The demands have been growing continuously, and as ... (Moltke) until that day had been able to get export licences for nearly everything needed, it would cause major damage to the army’s (and to some extent also the navy’s) ability to get key supplies...*” if Denmark should be unable to keep Moltke in place.

Nørresø suggested to the Danish War Office that Moltke’s position was “*consolidated and strengthened*” by appointing him Military Attaché.¹³

The Corps files for the period support the General’s views. Moltke had been incredibly diligent, proactive, persistent and effective from the time he arrived in London: looking for machine tools for shoemaking and ammunition production, tin plate for hand grenade production, cartridges for hunting guns, soda, nickel and nickel salt, zinc plates, aluminium, copper plates, officer signal flutes,

12 Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen, “Tunestillingen. Indenrigspolitisk middel og militær beskæftigelse”, Henriette Buus (ed.); *Første Verdenskrig ved Tunestillingen. Forsvarsvilje og hverdagsliv*, (Greve 2010), pp. 73-78; Anders Osvald Thorkilsen, “Fra fem høns til én forsinket og forpjusket fjer. Tungt artilleri som lokkemad i P. Punchs kontrol med hæren”, Michael H. Clemmesen og Anders Osvald Thorkilsen (eds.), *Mod fornyelsen af København forsvar 1915-18*, (Copenhagen 2009), pp. 87-114.

13 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, A. Material, Gen.major Nørresø 1905-1921, Pk. 1, Nørresø, Fortroligt, nr. 4774 af 20-6-1916 to Krigsministeriet. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

carborundum slices, TNT, aerial camera, fibres for weapons cleaning, uniform cloth, swords for officers and NCOs, copper for dynamos, bismuth, antimony, crucibles for arms production, Farman aircraft, industrial grinding wheels, horse nose bags, Vaseline, etc. The list is included to counter the MI5 allegations that Moltke did not do the job he had been sent to do. He constantly reported about his purchases and their status on the way home. If he found products available in the U.S. he could not purchase in Great Britain, he sent information home so that Petersen in New York could take action.

Parallel with his formal purchasing work, he constantly reported as if he were a military attaché accredited to London. He sent information about the new steel helmets, accompanied by a drawing given to him by the Belgian Military Attaché, he reported on the debate about conscription and about the situation and fortunes of war, supported by paper clippings. He sent reports about how the French had organised an automobile field repair workshop and about what the British papers wrote about German observation balloons. He wrote about the news about the Russian early summer offensive, about use of nails to reinforce boots, about French ammunition production and about the publication of the "*Times History of the War*".¹⁴

Moltke had also sought and found other ways to support the development of the defence of his home country and capital. A short time after his arrival London came under bombardment from German Army and Navy airships, and his observations and guidance could help in the development of the artillery air defence of Copenhagen, in order to meet a similar threat.¹⁵ After developing their airships and tactics during attacks on the English coastal areas during the first half of 1915, the two German armed services airship units shifted their focus to London from August.

On 7 and 8 September the Germans finally succeeded in reaching London with the German Army airship S.L. 2 bombing the British capital on 1 September and the navy Zeppelin L.13 succeeding on 8 September. The next effective raid took place on a west to east flight route by the navy's L.15 on 13 October.¹⁶ Moltke had been in London during the Zeppelin raids on 7 and 8 September. The first of these he had observed at close hand, and the same had happened on 13 October.

Moltke warned after the first of these raids in mid-September that the German airships could "*bring large amounts of explosives*". In case of war Copenhagen was likely to be bombed, and it was urgent and essential that a defence against the new

14 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, C. Kopibøger, kommissioner & udland, 1914-1920, pk. 2; C. Indgående skrivelser fra Krigsministeriet, 1915-1918, pk. 23.

15 Michael H. Clemmesen, "Overdækningen af fæstningen mod den nye trussel. Opbygningen af Københavns luftforsvar 1915-18", Michael H. Clemmesen & Anders Osvald Thorkilsen, *Mod fornyelsen af Københavns forsvar 1915-18*, (Copenhagen 2009), pp. 12-19.

16 Joseph Morris, *The German Air Raids on Great Britain 1914-1918*, (London 1925), pp. 53-63; Douglas H. Robinson, *The Zeppelin in Combat. A History of the German Naval Airship Division, 1912-1919*, (Atglen (PA) 1994), pp. 115-139.

What Moltke experienced: the 13 October L.15 raid. (from: Robinson, *The Zeppelin in Combat*) and bomb damage at the corner of Exeter and Wellington Streets (from: the Osprey book *London 1914-17*)



threat should be built up. He followed up with a cutting from the “*Times*” about the post-raid debate in the House of Commons, and he informed Copenhagen that Admiral Sir Percy Scott had been appointed commander of the London air defence. Scott, a gunnery specialist, had been retired before the war, but was recalled to organise the defence by Arthur Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty, on 11 September. According to Moltke, Scott had asked for French instructors to improve the work of the British air defence pilots. One of Lloyd’s directors had told Moltke that the damage from the raid was in excess of £1½-2 million.¹⁷

17 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, C. Kopibøger, kommissioner & udland, 1914-1920, Pk. 2, Fragment visible on on: HtK af 18-9-1915 to Hr. Ritmester F. Greve Moltke, Danish Legation, London; the follow-up report on “Luftskibsangrebet på London” is visible on copy book p. 140 over note of 27-9-1915. The quoted text translated into English by the author.



Admiral Sir Percy Scott, who allowed Frederik Moltke access to his concerns and developing plans for the air defence of London (Rogers, *The New York Times Current History: The European War* (April–June 1915). Volume 3)

He described his second observed raid on the next day, 14 October, after reporting about purchases for the Danish armament production that he had arranged from U.S. companies. Moltke had had dinner at St. James Club with an American diplomat and a Great Eastern Railway director when the anti-aircraft cannon in Green Park started firing. The railway man was a useful acquaintance, "*as his company would normally be informed, when a Zeppelin raid is expected*". He thereafter observed that the raid started half past 9 p.m. and lasted fifteen minutes. The air defence artillery fired very few rounds, "*probably because of the risk of damage from the falling shells*". Thereafter he had inspected the effects of the bombardment, including the damage to the Lyceum Theatre. He had been together with the American diplomat, who had called a car. Their diplomatic identity cards helped them through the police barriers.

On the day after that raid Moltke had a meeting with Admiral Scott. It was apparently his second meeting with Sir Percy, as he reported that the Admiral's former deputy, Commander Frederick Halahan, had been replaced by Captain L.S. Stansfeld. Moltke's estimate why the guns had been relatively inactive on 13 October was correct. Percy Scott considered the ammunition of the few available guns available more dangerous for the population than for the airships. Stansfeld informed Moltke that the raid had been carried out by three airships. One had



Moltke's map of Central London with the L.15 bomb hits he saw on 13 October 1915 in his contribution to the development of the air defence of Copenhagen against German bombardment (RA)

reached central London, another had attacked the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, but caused only slight damage. The London attack had used both high explosive and incendiary bombs and killed 32 people. The main problem of hitting the airships had been the inability of the controlling officers to estimate the altitude of their targets.¹⁸

At the same time as studying capital air defence problems, Moltke continued his constant and energetic efforts to purchase what the Danish Army needed, and he was also asked by Copenhagen to help send what Gunnar Petersen purchased in America back to Denmark. Petersen's main task at the time was to buy 30 million 8 mm cartridges from "*Maxim Munition Corporation*" for the Danish Army, but he also bought chemicals, metal, etc. necessary for the Danish ammunition production. In mid- to late November the Army Technical Corps asked Moltke to get the U.S. purchases cleared for transit

18 RA, Chefen for Hæren. Hærens tekniske Korps, Konstruktionsafdelingen, 1909-1943, A. Indgående skrivelser, Flyvemateriel, Antiballonskyts 1911-1932, Ritmester F. Greve Moltke ved Gardehusarregimentet p.t. London, Fortroligt, of 14-10-1915 to Hærens tekniske Korps; A. Materiale, Gen. major Nørresø, 1905-1921, Pk.1, Kontorchef Kruse meddeles Telegram fra Gesandten i Washington af 7-10-1915 med tilbud; Forsvarsministeren. Tilbud antages paa: ... af 9-10-1915.

so they could get through the British blockade. The various goods had been prepared to sail from early October and the successful arrival of the goods in Denmark would make it possible to start production of the necessary extra rifle and field artillery ammunition. In what must be considered an element in the attempt to appease the Opposition, the Danish Defence Minister had approved the large purchase on 9 October.

The British authorities were therefore informed that Moltke asked permission to have two sets of airplane parts (Gyro motors, propellers and tachometers) and a large quantity of metal, etc. needed for ammunition production shipped through the blockade from America to Denmark. The shipment included 80 tons of brass dies for home production of additional 8 mm cartridges, 42 tons of brass for 75 mm artillery cartridges, 20 tons of cupro-nickel caps, 6 tons of antimony ingots, 65 tons of lead ingots, 60 tons of lead wire, and 25 tons of “*yellow metal*” bars.¹⁹ To understand the British reaction it is important to appreciate that the Contraband Department would do anything to prevent such shipments ending up in Germany.

Moltke’s contact in London, who was to get the goods from America through to Denmark was Richard M. Turner of the Foreign Office Contraband Department. As we shall see, Turner was normally working in the Copenhagen Legation and was only in London as a result of accusations from Stagg.

The Contraband Committee considered Moltke’s attempt unacceptably irregular and referred the matter to the British Envoy in Copenhagen, as “*it has hitherto been understood that Count Moltke was only acting for purchase in this country, and we were not aware that he was also making purchases in America*”. The British apparently remained unaware that Moltke had not been shopping in the U.S. and that he was only acting under instruction from Copenhagen to help the purchasing officials in America. Moltke had been informed that the British Envoy in Copenhagen had been involved. The Committee considered that – as a minimum – the Danish Government should have approached the British Government through their accredited envoy, Count Castenskiöld.²⁰

19 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, C. Kopibøger, kommissioner & udland, 1914-1920, Pk. 2, HtK of 21?-11-1915 to Hr. Ritmester F. Greve Moltke, Danish Legation, London “Kaptajn Gunnar Petersen i Amerika ...”; HtK of 8-12-1915 to Hr. Kaptajn Gunnar Petersen, Kompagnichef ved 23’ Batallion, Danish Consulate, New York; Materielkontoret af 3-1-1916 til Konstruktionskontoret; HtK of 12-1-1916 to Hr. Kaptajn C. G. Petersen, Kompagnichef ved 23’ Batallion, Danish legation, New York making funds available..

20 TNA. FO 382/286, Count F. Moltke of 24-11-1915 to Richard M. Turner, Esq., Contraband Department, Foreign Office; “Communicated by Mr Wallace”; “Goods for the Danish Government from U.S.” 25-11-1915; Cypher telegram to Sir H. Lowther, Foreign Office, No. 1454, of 27-11-1915.

Frank Stagg from 1910 until late 1915

Frank Noel Stagg was born in 1884 and joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman at 15 in winter 1900. He retired as a lieutenant at the end of 1908, probably to work in naval intelligence. He started Danish language studies in Copenhagen in 1910. Notwithstanding his formal retirement, Stagg was promoted to Lieutenant Commander in spring 1914 and Commander on Armistice Day 1918.²¹ The German Navy noted his presence and his activities at the end of his studies, where Stagg made a reconnaissance of Danish ports, apparently to evaluate their utility as torpedo boat bases. However, the Germans considered him too junior to have any role in the planning of major operations.²²

After the formation of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI1c) in 1909, the new organisation started to build up networks in Denmark and Norway, but until 1913, Denmark remained a Naval Intelligence responsibility. Therefore it is logical that there are no records of relations between Stagg and the new organisation during his Copenhagen “studies”. He is reported to have moved from regular Naval Intelligence work to the new organisation in either autumn 1914 or September 1915, and he seemed thereafter to have roles in both Denmark and Norway. During the war he worked out of London visiting the two states.²³

It must have been in the MI1c role that Stagg visited Copenhagen and Christiania in autumn 1915. During his visit in Copenhagen he had private meetings on 28 and 29 November with the Commanding Admiral, Vice-Admiral Otto Kofoed-Hansen.

Stagg used his evening meeting on 29 November for disinformation similar in character to that which he gave to Moltke seven months later. He told the Admiral that England wanted to help his country and would be willing to land a field army of 150.000 in Jutland with three days warning in case of a German invasion. At the same time the Royal Navy would dispatch pre-Dreadnought battleships, monitors, destroyers and submarines to assist the Danish Navy and be willing to place that force under the Admiral’s command. The unimpressed admiral replied that as long as the Royal Navy stayed away from the Baltic Sea there was little risk of a German invasion. The most likely reason for Stagg’s rather grotesque disinformation was that he would provoke the Admiral to leak information that could be used as intelligence about planned Danish reactions. Another possible reason was that Stagg wanted to reinforce any German fears of an offensive across the

21 http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN_officersS2.html (accessed 11-10-2014)

22 Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv (BAMA), RM/5/1614. A. 2269. IV, Berlin 11-10-1912, Zum Immediatvortrag. O-Befehle 1912, ‘Richtlinien für Verhalten unseres Seekriegsführung Dänemark gegenüber’.

23 For MI1c in Denmark, see: Keith Jeffery, *The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949*, (London 2010) pp. 55, 87-89, 95, 97. Michael Smith: *Six. A History of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service*, (London 2010), pp. 5-17, 20-36, 122-128. Jeffery gives the second date for Stagg’s transfer from Naval Intelligence to MI1c: September 1915. The information that NID was responsible until 1913 is based on a comment from Richard Dunley during the editing of the article.

border towards the Kiel Canal. If so, Stagg failed as a credible source of information. After the Stagg visit the German envoy to Copenhagen reassured Berlin that there was no substance behind rumours that British and Danish troops planned to invade the Duchy of Schleswig. The German decision-makers should listen to him, not to agents.²⁴

In a third meeting on 3 November before Stagg departed for Christiania, the admiral emphasised to him that Denmark “*had all to lose and England nothing to gain by a Royal Navy entry into the Baltic Sea or a landing in Jutland*”. According to the admiral, Stagg had been surprised when he was informed that as an officer from a belligerent state he needed official permission to visit Denmark. Without it he would be interned.²⁵

The Richard Turner affair

However, the main reason for Stagg’s visit was not to influence the Danish Commanding Admiral or seek information about Danish defence or policies. Nicholas Lambert has described in “*Planning Armageddon*” how the British authorities in 1915 and especially during the autumn, had finally agreed to intensify the economic warfare against Germany. It should take place by gaining more control over exports from the three Nordic States and the Netherlands to Germany. The various trade intelligence elements in Whitehall had gained an ever clearer picture of the amount of contraband that reached the enemy with license from the Trade Attachés of the British Legation of neutral capitals. Captain Montague Consett, the brilliant, but often indiscreet and rude British Naval Attaché accredited to the Nordic States, drove the attempt to close this hole in the blockade. He did so in a close correspondence with the Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Reginald Hall. In September 1915 the Dutch had found a politically acceptable, voluntary way to control export to Germany using the self-interest of the private business associations whose members needed imports through the blockade to keep their business alive. On 16 November, immediately after Stagg’s visit, the Copenhagen Merchant’s Guild and the Danish Industrial Association assumed responsibility for managing imported contraband items. Nobody seemed to be concerned that these two organisations were neither suited nor motivated to manage imports for the Danish armed forces such as the purchases of Moltke in England and Petersen in the U.S.

Stagg had probably been sent to Copenhagen to inspect and energise the blockade work of the Legation to match the new development. The way he did so was in line with the naval attaché’s muscular approach, and the result was that

24 RA. AA Pk. 375 læg 13: Rantzaus Despatch to Berlin of (?) November 1915.

25 O. Kofoed-Hansen, *Daglige optegnelser under krigen*, Tage Kårsted (ed.), *Flåden under 1. Verdenskrig*. O. Kofoed-Hansen og V. Jøhnkes optegnelser, (Aarhus 1976); Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april. Historien om de fyrre år før den tyske operation mod Norge og Danmark i 1940*, (Odense 2010), pp. 131f.

Stagg lost the possibility of returning to Denmark during the war.²⁶ Consett's own lack of tact meant that he was replaced as Naval Attaché to Denmark in summer 1917.²⁷

On 26 October, before travelling to Copenhagen from Norway, Stagg sent a letter to a London contact, the former Copenhagen Consul Lionel Liddell²⁸ whom he must have known from his study time in Copenhagen. Stagg asked Liddell to persuade the Foreign Office (preferably the Assistant Under Secretary Sir Eyre Crowe) to insist that the Envoy in Copenhagen reassert control over his Legation's licensing of contraband for export. The consul, Robert Erskine, was constantly being overruled by the Commercial Attaché, Richard Turner. Turner was "*a perfect danger to our country and the sooner he is cleared out of it the better*". He had overruled the attempts of the group of consuls in Bergen to stop export to Germany, and complaints about Turner's work had been repeated in Christiania. Everybody "*is spitting blood about him*". If necessary Liddell should go through the intelligence officer Edward Calthrop of MI3, the War Office Intelligence Department, to get results.

When Stagg had returned to London in mid-November, he repeated his angry accusations against Turner in a meeting of the War Trade Advisory Committee during the discussion of the new agreements with the Danish organisations about voluntary control. Turner reacted on 19 November in a letter to Eyre Crowe to suggest "*a strict enquiry into the whole matter*" both to clear himself and to minimise the risk of "*similar difficulties*" in the future. Turner ended by noting that he would take Crowe's advice, and suggested a quick investigation as his continued absence from Copenhagen was putting strain on the legation.

Eyre Crowe referred the matter immediately to Lord Robert Cecil noting that Stagg's accusations were against the "*honour and integrity of our whole legation at Copenhagen*". Both Consett and Stagg should be asked to put their accusations in writing. These should be dealt with by the Foreign Office and Admiralty together. If the allegations proved to be without foundation, "*the two naval officers should be seriously dealt with, and that more particularly Lieut. Stagg's employment in Scandinavia should cease*". The Envoy to Norway should be asked discreetly to control his subordinates. Robert Cecil noted his agreement on the same day,

26 Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon. British Economic Warfare and the First World War*, (Cambridge (Mass), 2012), especially: pp. 396-398, 463-475. Lambert concludes from Consett's correspondence with Hall that Consett is also Cumming's MI1c-co-ordinator for Scandinavia; for the total Northern Neutrals' export to Germany see: Lance E. Davis and Stanley L. Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War. An Economic History Since 1750*, (Cambridge 2006), pp. 206-214; see also: Eric W. Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany 1914-1919*, (London 2004); M.W.W.P. Consett, *The Triumph of Unarmed Forces (1914-1918). An account of the transactions by which Germany during the Great War was able to obtain supplies prior to her collapse under the pressure of economic forces*, (London 1928), pp. 133-140.

27 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. April*, pp. 286-291.

28 For Liddell's pre-war role: Richard Dunley, "'Not Intended to Act as Spies': The Consular Intelligence Service in Denmark and Germany 1906-14", *The International History Review*, 2014.

19 November.²⁹ The Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Hall, was informed about Stagg's behaviour, and the Envoy to Norway, Mansfeldt Findlay, was discreetly asked on 20 November to control his "*over-zealous subordinates*". Findlay replied two days later that his only subordinate was Consett, and the Naval Attaché denied being involved in any accusations against the integrity of the Copenhagen Legation. Crowe realised that his first communication had been unclear and sent a follow-up telegram on 29 November. Now he made clear that the source of the trouble had been Stagg, "*who appears to have been acting the part of secret informer to the Admiralty*", and he repeated the Lieutenant Commander's accusations against Turner.³⁰

By now the accusations had leaked – or been leaked – to the press. On 20 November the "*Daily Mail*" published articles attacking the British legation in Copenhagen.³¹

On 23 November Robert Cecil had sought information about the substance of the problem from Captain Hall, but in vain. Both the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had been contacted by Hall and were informed about the case.³²

After Hall had been involved, Stagg realised that he had a problem and sought the support of Admiral Sir Edmond Slade, who had participated in the 13 November meeting. Here Stagg twice denied having attacked the "*personal integrity*" of Turner, and he could not understand how anybody could get that impression. Slade wrote immediately to Crowe that he "*did not think*" that Stagg had intended any personal attack on Turner. Nobody could refer to Stagg's letter to Liddell because it had been a personal communication.³³ However, the Contraband Department found that Stagg's explanation and apology was "*very incomplete*", and Robert Cecil agreed.³⁴

It was at this stage of the investigation of Turner's work when the contraband authorities had to deal with Moltke's effort to secure the large purchase of metal, etc. for ammunition production from the U.S. to Denmark. Turner had been Moltke's contact in the Foreign Office Contraband Department, and his activities had been considered irregular because the British were unaware that he was

29 TNA. FO 382/340, Stagg's letter of 26-10-1915 to Liddell; Robert Cecil of 14-11-1915 to "My dear Hopwood"; Richard Turner, Contraband Department letter of 19-11-1915 to "Dear Sir Eyre"; Note "Handling of Contraband Questions in Denmark: Suggest enquiry" No. 174920 of 19-11-1915.

30 TNA. FO 382/340, Crowe, Draft of 20-11-1915 to Findlay; Findlay telegram of 22-11-1915; Crowe, Private of 29-11-1915 to "My dear Findlay".

31 TNA. ADM 12/1539A. Note: "Newspaper Attacks on British Legation at Copenhagen". Articles published by the Daily Mail Nov 20.

32 TNA. FO 382/340, Bryan B. Buckley of 23-11-1915 to "Dear Mr. Locock".

33 TNA. FO 382/340, Stagg letter of 23-11-1915 to Slade; Slade letter of 24-11-1915 to Crowe.

34 TNA. FO 382/340, Notes on "No. 177144 of 24-11-1915 "Handling of Contraband Questions in Denmark"; Robert Cecil's note of 24-11-1915 on No. 179637 "Handling of Contraband Questions in Denmark".

simply acting under directive from Copenhagen. Moltke was blamed because he was the one making the request. By using the accused Turner (whom he probably knew from Copenhagen) as his contact, Moltke hardly helped himself.

On 29 November Stagg wrote another apology, but he basically repeated what he had written to Slade some days earlier. He denied to have made any charges “*against Mr. Turner’s personal honour. The statement I did make was that there was a lamentable lack of British Control over imports into and exports from Denmark*”. Turner was just part of a system that did not work in the interest of the British Empire. The lack of control had probably already cost the Allied forces thousands of lives.³⁵ On that day Crowe informed Findlay that Stagg’s accusations against the Copenhagen Legation had reached both the City and “*Danish gentlemen of high social position, who enjoy the personal confidence of Sir E. Grey*”. The talk had to stop.³⁶ On 3 December Stagg asserted to the leader of the enquiry that he had not withdrawn accusations against Turner, because he had never made any.³⁷ This left the enquiry open-ended and the matter was referred to Robert Cecil for decision. On 7 December Cecil concluded that Stagg’s accusations were “*wholly devoid of foundation*”, and that he was “*unable or unwilling*” to deliver documentation. He hoped “*that Commander Stagg will not be further employed in the Public Service, at any rate in Scandinavia*”. The next day Turner was informed that he had been cleared, and on 9 December the legations in Copenhagen, Christiania and Stockholm were informed that Stagg “*had preferred not to make the attempt*” to document the charges, and Turner would now return to his work in Copenhagen. On 10 December another telegram supplemented by noting that “*If Lieutenant-Commander Stagg’s present performance is a fair sample of secret agent work, that only strengthens the conviction ... that Admiralty receives many statements on subject of contraband trade which cannot be substantiated as well as some which have not foundation in fact*”. Cecil and Crowe did not seem to appreciate that as secret agent Stagg could not support his accusations and conclusions with evidence as this would expose his sources.

On 25 December the Admiralty concluded that Stagg “*should not be allowed to return to Denmark in any official capacity*”.³⁸ The decision did not block his return as secret agent. By then Stagg already had another problem with Captain Hall: the disappearance of the air defence artillery plan.

35 TNA. FO 382/340, Frank N. Stagg, Admiralty of 29-11-1915 to Ernest M. Pollock.

36 TNA. FO 382/340, Crowe, Private of 29-11-1915 to “My dear Findlay”.

37 TNA. FO 382/340, Frank N. Stagg, Admiralty of 3-12-1915 to Ernest M. Pollock.

38 TNA. FO 382/340, Ernest M. Pollock, No. 188193 of 6-12-1915 to Lord Robert Cecil; Robert Cecil of 7-12-1915 to the Secretary of the Admiralty; Sir E. Gray of 8-12-1915 to “Dear Mr. Turner”; F.O. Confidential telegram No. 1516 f 9-12-1915 to Sir H. Lowther (Repeated to Christiania and Stockholm); F.O. No. 2003 of 10-12-1915 to Sir H. Lowther; Admiralty, Secret, No. 49132/15 of 25-12-1915 to the Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office.

Stagg and Moltke in London autumn 1915 to summer 1916

As already noted, Stagg's contact visits to Denmark and Norway in autumn 1915 are likely to have been linked to his transfer to Mansfield Smith-Cumming's MI1c, but no matter which intelligence service he worked for then, his professional focus and knowledge seemed to be narrowly linked to blockade issues. This would explain why his remarks both in 1915 and later in 1916 seemed disconnected from Admiralty policies in relation to Denmark, which was to maintain status quo with the country unoccupied and avoid actions that might provoke German reaction. A wish not to provoke an unwanted German reaction may be why the Royal Navy cancelled its planned "sweeps" into Kattegat three times in 1916 – in April, May and August.³⁹ Considering the very nervous German Navy reactions to the Operation "A.G." raid in early November 1917 and the mining Operation "A.H." in mid-April 1918, the cancellation was justified if the British wanted to maintain status quo.⁴⁰

According to the MI5 memorandum of 17 June 1916, Moltke had been introduced to Stagg by the Secretary of the Danish Legation – the envoy's deputy – Count Eduard Reventlow⁴¹ on his arrival in London, "*saying that Count Moltke was interested in anti-aircraft matters*".⁴² That information probably came from Stagg who had no good reason to inform the MI5 case officer of any previous knowledge of Moltke from his time as an intelligence officer in Copenhagen. The counter-intelligence memorandum noted that Reventlow had connection with Eva de Bournonville, "*the convicted spy*". Reventlow had been her contact in the legation after she failed to get employment as a copyist there in September 1915. He had been asked to help her keeping the money she had brought, acting as her bank giving her cash when she needed it. Bournonville was soon caught as a German spy, sentenced to death and later had her conviction changed to life imprisonment.⁴³

Stagg brought Moltke into contact with Sir Percy Scott's organization, and the Dane was given full access to the air defence plans and allowed to work "*two or three days*" in the Admiralty. In addition Moltke had been given access to a large part of the anti-aircraft defence units "*as if he had been accredited representative of an Allied nation*". An Entente ally is probably what Frederik Moltke – like other

39 TNA. SDM 137/1938; ADM 137/1881. List of contents of Home Fleets files in 'H.F. 0022'

40 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, (2010), Chapters 21, 23, 45.

41 Count Eduard Vilhelm Sophus Christian Reventlow was a known friend of the Allies, and he was made Permanent Under-Secretary of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1922 by the pro-Allied liberal Government. He was to end his career as envoy to London in 1940, when the German occupation of Denmark made this impossible: <http://www.denstoredanske.dk> (accessed 12-10-2014).

42 TNA. FO 371/3361, p. 345. "re Count Frederick MOLTKE".

43 RA. Udenrigsministeriet, *Fortrolige skabssager* (efteraflevering II, 1993), 13-Dan. 22/19, Pk 17; Det Kongelige Gesandtskab, London, No. 1039 "Frøken Eva Bournonville. Ges. Telegram No. 1083 af den 20' d.M." of 22-11-1915 to Udenrigsministeriet.

Danish army officers – considered himself to be, even if the geostrategic misfortune of his country made active participation in a war against Germany suicidal.

However, in December 1915 it was discovered that “*an Anti-Aircraft map, showing the anti-aircraft defences of London*” had disappeared from the Admiralty room where Moltke had been working because of “*a series of somewhat unfortunate omissions on the part of the officers concerned*”, meaning primarily Stagg.

The discovery that the plan was missing and that Moltke might have been responsible must have taken place in early December, because on 15 December the Danish envoy complained that “*lately*”, what Castenskiold described as “*Scotland Yard*”, had been making inquiries about Moltke at the Danish Consulate General. Moltke had notified his War Office contact. However on 11 December he had been visited by two alleged police inspectors who wanted information about a person who had been in possession of Moltke’s visiting card. Later Moltke had obtained information that the real purpose had been to inspect his flat “*to obtain some information as to his position*”. His War Office contact had advised him that the Legation should raise the matter on Moltke’s behalf. The Foreign Office asked the Home Office to look into the matter.⁴⁴ The Home Office report from 10 February 1916 made clear that no police inspectors had visited Moltke. Neither the Metropolitan Police nor the City of London Police had been involved, and the Home Secretary could not do more until he had further information. The reply was given to the Danish Envoy on 15 February.⁴⁵ The British left it to Moltke and Castenskiold to guess from where the “*inconvenient*” visit had come.

It did not seem to occur to anybody in MI5 or the Admiralty that it would have been both unnecessary and stupidly counter-productive to actually steal the plan. The moment it was realised that the plan was stolen and probably in enemy hands, its tactical information would lose much of its relevance, as guns could re-deploy to new positions. If Moltke had indeed been a spy, he should have limited himself to noting the fixed gun locations and calibre, the search-light positions and the deployment and plans for use of the mobile weapons. With the limited strength of the London air defence artillery organisation in autumn 1915, an interested professional such as Moltke would have been able to memorise all relevant information in an hour or so.

During their investigation British intelligence had discovered that Moltke’s brother was the Danish envoy to Berlin. He was “*stated to be very pro-German*”, and Frederik Moltke’s wife was “*constantly*” visiting her brother-in-law in the German capital. At the same time Frederik Moltke’s “*pecuniary circumstances*” appeared to have improved dramatically. His “*expenditure was lavish and remarkable*”.

44 TNA. FO 372/660, No. 191759 of 15-12-1915 “Count Moltke”.

45 TNA. FO 371/827, No. 26903 of 10-2-1916 “Inconvenience caused to Count Moltke by the police authorities”.



Count Carl Moltke, the Danish Minister in Berlin since autumn 1912, who was accused of being “very pro-German” and working for German intelligence with his half-brother in London and his sister-in-law. (Danish Royal Library)

In fact there is absolutely no indication that Frederik Moltke’s half-brother in Berlin, Carl Moltke, was pro-German. He had been a naval officer until 1898, when he changed career to the diplomacy, and during his naval career he had been seconded to the French Navy. He had married an American in 1907, and his regular correspondence with his mother shows a Danish patriot worried about the plight of the Danish minority in Schleswig. When he became Foreign Minister in the first Social-Democratic government in 1924, he made clear that he disagreed with its pacifist security policy.⁴⁶ Frederik Moltke’s grandson finds it highly unlikely that his grandmother made frequent visits to Carl Moltke during the war years, as she took care of his then very young father back in Denmark.⁴⁷

The 17 June 1916 report pointed out that Frederik Moltke “*was constantly in and out of the War Office, and cultivated the acquaintance of Naval and Military Officers, inviting them out to dinner, and generally appearing as if he was endeavouring to obtain information*”. It failed to see or accept that what Moltke did was

46 RA. Moltke, Carl, diplomat, og hustru. 1884-1948, Breve og personlige papirer, Breve 1916-1921, pk. 7; http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon/Samfund,_jura_og_politik/Myndigheder_og_politisk_styre/Diplomat/Carl_Moltke (accessed 28-10-2014).

47 Henrik Moltke, 16-11-2014.

what any de facto service attaché or any other diplomat – neutral or allied – was meant to do.

MI5 had investigated whether Moltke had actually purchased munition in England, but found that he had only placed an order for six horse ambulances. Considering the Danish officer's intensive purchasing offensive, buying from a large number of English companies and constantly engaging the contraband authorities, it is possible that the counter-intelligence organisation had already made up its mind that it wanted to get rid of Moltke and tailored its report to support that conclusion.

As to the information about Fredrik Moltke's wife and half-brother in Berlin, the lack of accurate information about his purchasing activities highlight the weakly researched character of the memorandum. Before Moltke left for England, he had been active in the expensive ballooning sport and had sponsored the Danish aviation pioneer, Ellehammer. Frederik Moltke is not likely to have had problems financing his hosting of contacts in London. Even if we can't be 100 per cent certain, the counter-intelligence service had apparently returned empty-handed from its investigation and search in winter as no information was included in the arguments in the 17. June memorandum. The purpose of that document – to support a decision to get Moltke out of the country – means that it must be considered a summary of the Moltke MI5 file still not available to historians. Therefore it is likely to employ all arguments supporting the notion that he was a spy.

Warnings were issued to the various departments, *“but it is obviously impossible to warn individual officers until after their intimacy with a person who is suspect has been discovered”*. The substance of the latter sentence is rather strange. Of course a nation at war can forbid professional and social contact with a suspected spy, even with a charming nobleman such as Frederik Moltke.

From early December 1915 the British contraband authorities worked to limit Moltke's purchasing activities. It had established that crucibles from the U.S. to Denmark should move via a British port, meaning that the Danes had to obtain export licenses from London. This became difficult due to *“lack of crucibles among England's allies”*. In Moltke's and Nørresø's opinion the general misunderstanding in December about the imports from the U.S. to Denmark had arisen because his list had reached the Contraband Department before the Envoy Castenskiöld's note had been sent.

During the spring of 1916 Moltke had continued his purchasing activities, successfully obtaining export licenses for goods directly relevant for arms production, bypassing the effective control system established locally between the self-interested Danish merchants and industrialists and the now more disciplined British Legation in Copenhagen. However, by 8 May 1916 the British had demanded that all Moltke's export licences should be processed by their Copenhagen legation. This would mean that *“the English authorities with whom (Moltke) had effective routine relations, and whose goodwill in relation to Denmark had often*

been proven, would be replaced with others". The Foreign Office and the Copenhagen legation would take over, meaning that the earlier smooth action would cease. General Nørresø naturally objected to the idea that the defence production demands would be limited to what the private Copenhagen Merchant's Guild and the private Danish Industrial Association considered relevant and necessary. He reacted, as any normal state authority would do.⁴⁸

As the British already had and kept full control over what was actually licensed for export to Denmark, the changed procedures do not seem linked to whether he was a spy or not. They must first and foremost be seen as an effective attempt to limit and control exports of contraband goods to Denmark, and as long as Moltke was in London, he seemed to be able to charm a passage through the blockade. It is not likely that Nørresø or Moltke became aware of MI5's suspicion. If so, neither would have believed it could be serious. Nørresø's proposal on 20 June that Moltke should be appointed Military Attaché to ease his work underlines this.

Moltke left England via Newcastle-Bergen and arrived in Copenhagen on 26 July. As was typical of him, he used his travel message to inform the Army Technical Corps about his latest successful – and last – British export license: for horse nose bags. When Moltke was sent to the U.S., after two weeks in Denmark, the reason given to Captain Gunnar Petersen was that the new British diplomatic procedures meant that it was a better idea to move Moltke to America. He would depart for New York on 10 August. He would gradually take over Petersen's work as the production of rifle ammunition progressed.⁴⁹

When Moltke had approached Stagg on 13 June with the request for a meeting, the latter could get two birds with one stone. Building on the existing suspicions of the Director of Naval Intelligence, who had been "*disturbed by ... Count MOLTKE'S activities*" and MI5 Stagg could save himself by removing the stigma resulting from the loss of the map.⁵⁰ At the same time as getting Moltke out of the country he would be helping the British authorities gain more effective control over exports to Denmark and undoing the damage done as part of the Turner affair.

The effects

The worsening Danish defence situation winter-spring 1916

The disinformation that Stagg gave to Moltke on 14 June to trap him in the eyes of the security agent had thereafter been reinforced by the Danish envoy in his

48 RA, Chefen for Hæren. Hærens tekniske Korps,; A. Materiale, Gen. major Nørresø, 1905-1921, Pk.1, Udenrigsministeriet, 1^o Departement, Journal Nr. 13. Q. 18 of 21-7-1916 to Krigsministeriet; Nørresø, No. 3639 of 8-5-1916 to Krigsministeriet. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

49 RA, Chefen for Hæren. Hærens tekniske Korps, Hærens tekniske Korps of 9-8-1916 to Captain C.G. Petersen, Dansk Konsulat, New York.

50 TNA, FO 371/3361, ff. 345-347

despatch the following day. The information nourished an existing panic in the Danish Army.

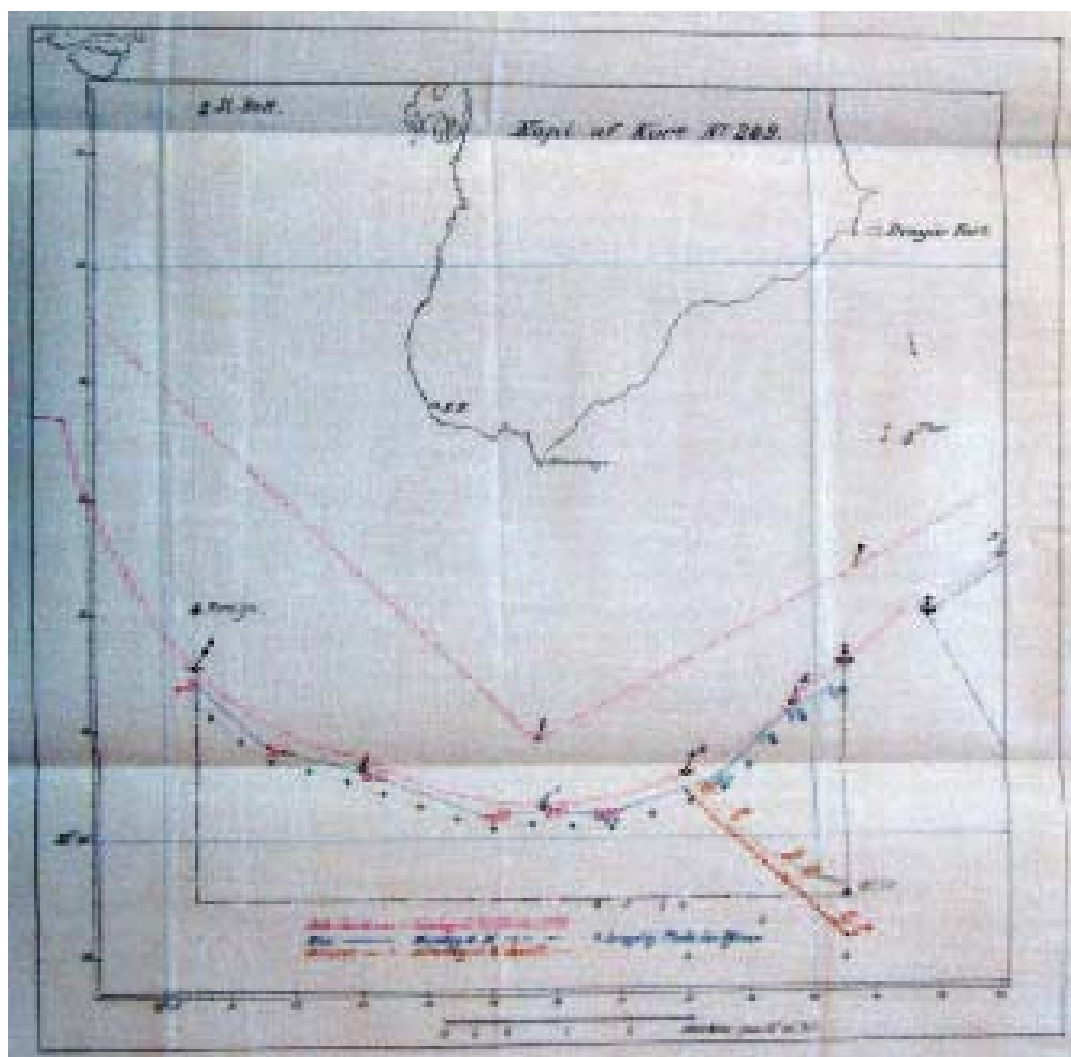
The deployment in late summer 1915 of additional British submarines into the Baltic Sea had brought about the worst German violation of Danish neutrality to date when German torpedo boats destroyed the stranded submarine E.13 in Danish territorial waters in the Flint Channel between Denmark and Sweden. Another such incident was likely to lead to exchange of fire between Danish and German naval vessels, and Admiral Kofoed-Hansen was eager to take steps that would minimise the risks of that happening.

The opportunity to do so came soon. The success of the growing number of British submarines operating from Russian bases against both German warships and iron ore ships off the Swedish eastern coast led to a firm German decision to prevent further submarine deployment through the Danish Straits. From September 1915 to May 1916 the Sound was closed by an ever increasing number of mine and net barriers, and the German minefield in the Great Belt was similarly strengthened and supplemented with a barrier between the Danish island of Falster and the German coast that also hampered access to the Kiel Bight. Both Sweden and Denmark had been challenged by the British submarine operations, and both participated in closing the Sound because this would reduce the risk of further awkward or dangerous incidents.

However, the combination of minefields at the southern end of the Sound had one secondary effect: it undermined the joint Danish army-navy plans for defence against a German sea landing in Køge Bay. A force landed here might quickly capture the narrow waist of the Northeast-Zealand peninsula between that bay and Roskilde Fiord. Thereby the withdrawal of forces from the southern and western parts of the island of Zealand would be blocked making the planned use of Copenhagen Fortress as the national redoubt impossible because of lack of forces. The anti-submarine barriers also blocked the planned deployment of Danish coastal submarines from the Copenhagen Naval Base to Køge Bay, where they were to attack the German landing force transports. During spring 1916 the situation worsened when the German Navy built up a powerful guard squadron just south of the barriers. It included a pre-Dreadnought battleship, an airplane tender, torpedo boats and a significant number of lighters. The force was clearly visible from the Danish Army coastal fortifications.⁵¹

The other development since mid-1915 that worsened the defence situation was the reduction of the army Neutrality Guard in Zealand (mentioned earlier) established to protect the Fortress against a coup attack and give security to a mobilisation. The main worry of the Commanding General had always been to ensure that half of the Zealand field army regiments, which had their mobilisation places and depots in provincial towns on the island, would reach the

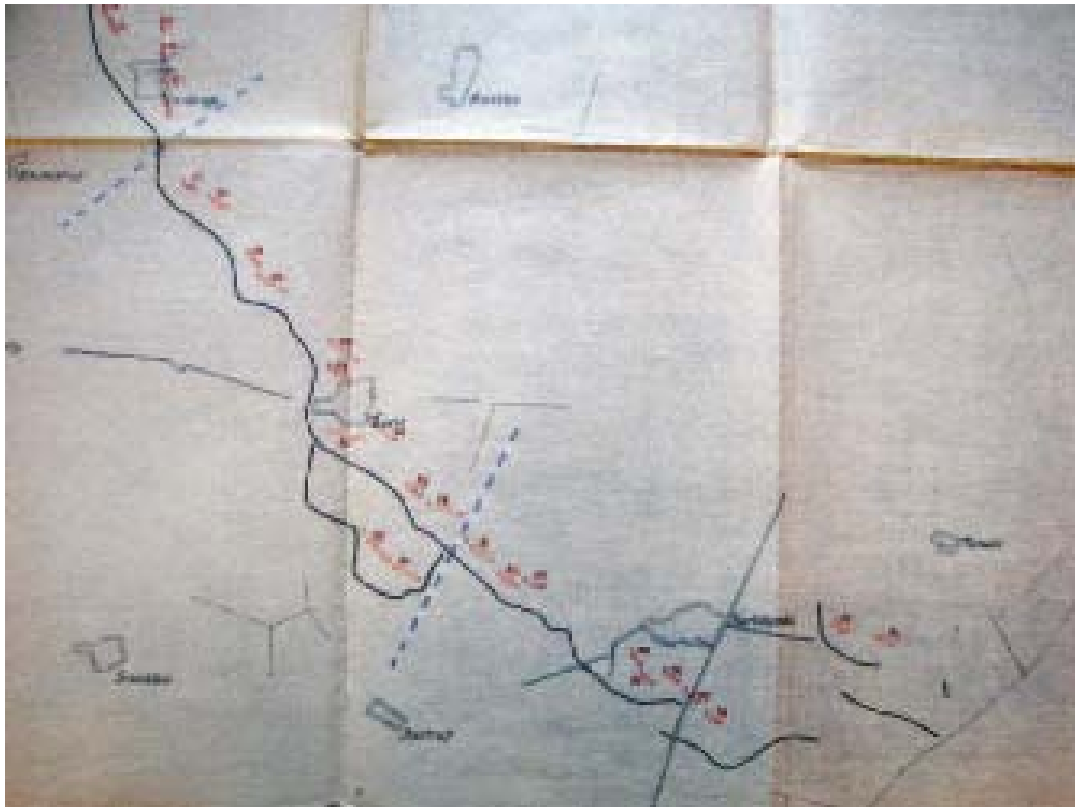
51 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april. Historien om de fyrre år før den tyske operation mod Norge og Danmark i 1940*, (Odense 2010), pp.125-137.



Trace showing the Danish Navy's observations of the supplementary mine and net barriers placed in the Sound south of the island of Amager (upper centre) in March-April 1916. Hereby the deployment route of the Danish submarines into Køge Bay was considered blocked. The German composite squadron that was stationed to protect the barrier was placed just south of it. (RA)

Fortress safely and in time. These regiments had their initial deployment guarding the island's western, southern and south-eastern coasts. Until the neutrality guard reductions their safe withdrawal to Copenhagen could be achieved by a forward deployment of the regular Copenhagen regiments – the other half of the Zealand field army – to secure the peninsula's Bay-Fiord “waist”. Until the reductions approved by the King to achieve government support for the ammunition purchasing missions the Copenhagen reserve regiments protected the Fortress against a coup. With the reductions the reserve regiments had been demobilised and the Commanding General had been forced to move regular regiments from the “waist” to guard his Fortress.

However in November 1915 under critical pressure from the pro-defence op-



Trace from March 1916 showing the status in the construction of the “Tune Position”. Note that the position is without flank positions defending the coast. Such coastal defence positions were established during the summer, but the influence of Stagg’s warning is an open question. (RA)

position the Government authorised a different solution to his problem: a field fortified line across the “waist” that could support the withdrawing field army regiments from the Zealand provincial garrisons back to Copenhagen. The large excavation and construction work started immediately and proceeded through winter and spring 1916.⁵²

The arrival and high visibility of the German guard squadron with its battleship artillery and its transport lighters and observation hydroplanes was already a serious concern before the report of the lunch conversation between Moltke and Stagg had arrived from London. The lighters might hold troops that could land and capture the eastern sector of the Tune Position or the island of Amager with no warning, supported by the heavy guns of the battleship. If that was achieved, it would undermine the defence of the Fortress. From 3 June an army division headquarters had therefore been made responsible for co-ordinating the guard-

52 Ibid., pp.139-153; Michael H. Clemmesen, *Tunestillingen. Indenrigspolitisk middel og militær beskæftigelse*, Henriette Buus (ed.), *Første Verdenskrig ved Tunestillingen. Forsvarsvilje og hverdagsliv*, (Greve 2010); Martin Jespersen & Jens Ole Christensen (eds.), *Københavns Befæstning. Til Fædrelandets Forsvar*, (Copenhagen 2012).

ing and defence of the Køge Bay coast, and on 9 June followed a decree that raised the local combat readiness level. The next day the responsible division noted that the most urgent issue was the blocking and defence of Køge Harbour against a coup.⁵³

Uncertain effects of the mid-June reports: the army

With the semi-panic about the threat to the Køge Bay area since early June, it is difficult to separate out the impact of the information from London as opposed to the broader reaction to heightened tensions. It is possible that Frederik Moltke cabled the information from Stagg that the British could start an operation to enter the Baltic within three months directly to the Danish General Staff Duty Officer in line with the procedure established in 1911, where he had become responsible for receiving urgent intelligence messages and diplomatic cables outside normal working hours.⁵⁴ If so, the first reaction might have been the request to the navy on 14 June to start nightly patrols along the coast from Copenhagen to Køge. Patrols using either torpedo or patrol craft started two days later.⁵⁵ The Mosede coastal battery close to where the Tune Position reached Køge Bay had been under construction since 1914, but it had not yet been completed. On 18 June the British secret agent BRUTUS, a Dane, reported after a conversation with the King at the Skaw two days earlier and Danish officials accompanying him that both the King and the military authorities considered the situation “*extremely serious*”, especially because of the warships and the large number of lighters (“200”) that the Germans had assembled south of Saltholm in the Sound.⁵⁶ On 19 June the battery received a confidential instruction stating its mission: to counter landing attempts together with the navy and in cooperation with Tune Position field artillery. When resisting a force already ashore, the battery would be subordinated to the infantry division made responsible for the Tune Position eleven days earlier.⁵⁷ It is very difficult to directly link these steps to a possible early warning from London as they may just have been a natural continuation of the ongoing improvement of coastal defence readiness, however the information will undoubtedly have added to the atmosphere of panic. Likewise it is impossible to prove that the warning inspired the orders given on 20 June to expand the infantry po-

53 RA. Generalstabens Operationssektions Indkomne Sager 1916, Pk. 6; GST F-SEK Indkomne Sager 1978-1951 Pk. A. 23, Chefen for 1' Division, Fortroligt B. No. 116; 117; 118 of 03-06-1916; No. 126 of 10-06-1916 til Overkommandoen; 2' Division, Fortroligt, A.B.M. Indkomne Sager No.196; Overkommandoen, Fortroligt, Nr. 371 of 09-06-1916 to 2' Division.

54 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Det lille land før den store krig*, (2012), p. 166.

55 RA. Flaadens Overkommando, Indkomne sager, 'Direktiver og Ordre for den udrustede Flåde', Flaadens Overkommando, Fortrolig O. Nr. 527-528 of 16-06-1916 to Chefen for den flydende Defension.

56 TNA. FO 371/2754, CX445, 18-6-1916 "Following from BRUTUS, June 16th, at SKAW..."

57 RA. Generalstabens Fæstningssektion 1878-1951 Pk. A 23, Kystartilleriregimentet, Fortroligt, No. 2540 of 19-06-1916 to Overkommandoen.

sitions in front of the Copenhagen Fortress Northern Front, or to the decision on that same day to double the infantry force on the south coast of Amager just north of the German squadron. When the Commanding General instructed the Artillery General one week later to make certain that light machineguns of the Mosede Battery could be used against airplanes, the order was most probably triggered by the sight of the German airplane tender visible from the battery, and the same applies to the Commanding General's directive of 29 June for the organisation of the Tune Position air defence.⁵⁸

Possible and certain effects of the mid-June reports: the navy

It is far easier to trace how the information influenced the Danish Navy. Count Grevenkop-Castenskiold's despatch had reached Copenhagen on 22 June, and Admiral Kofoed-Hansen immediately discussed its content with Herluf Zahle, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Admiral still did not consider it likely that the attack would come, but on the other hand he could not rule out that England be foolish enough to attempt an entry. If it happened, he was worried that the Danish generals would be unable to act in a sensible way: meaning countering the British landings with force. The Admiral expected that the British would give the Danish Government an ultimatum when their fleet passed the Skaw. In his opinion it had to be rejected and Germany informed about Danish willingness to fight England.⁵⁹

On the same day, 22 June, Carl Moltke in Berlin cabled the false, but worrying, information that a German newspaper, the "*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*" had reported that the British Government had put out "friendly" feelers to the Danish Government to investigate its reactions to a British operation into the Baltic Sea.⁶⁰ The information indicated that some German authorities expected that there would be a British operation to follow up the outcome of the battle.

One week later the Admiral withdrew the modern torpedo boat stationed at Bornholm for mine clearing and neutrality patrols against British submarines.

58 RA. Generalstabens Fæstningssektion 1878-1951 Pk. A 23, Arméingeniørkommandoen, Fortroligt, I.K. Nr. 1247 of 20-06-1916 to Overkommandoen; Generalstabens Operationssektions Indkomne Sager 1916, Pk. 6, Sydfronten u.nr. of 20-06-1916 to Overkommandoen's Operationssektion; Arméartillerikommandoen, 1914-1919, A Indkomne Sager, 1916 6 22 – 12 31, Pk. 4, Overkommandoen Fortroligt F.983(?) af 28-06-1916 til Arméartillerikommandoen, Overkommandoen, Fortroligt, F.984 af 29-06-1916 til Arméartillerikommandoen.

59 O. Kofoed-Hansen, Daglige optegnelser under krigen, Tage Kårsted (ed.), *Flåden under 1. Verdenskrig. O. Kofoed-Hansen og V. Jøhnkes optegnelser*, (Aarhus 1976) 22-06-1916 and O. Kofoed-Hansens erindringer, samlede 'Optegnelser' pp. 41-46; The quoted text translated into English by the author.

60 RA. Berlin, diplomatisk repræsentation og militærmission, 1913-1935, Politiske indberetninger (aflev 1940), 1916, pk. 480, Gesandtskabets Chifferteleggram No. 158 af 22' Juni 1916 til Udenrigsministeriet.



The concern about a possible reckless RN operation spread in July 1916 from the old Commanding Admiral to the young Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the latter's friend, the German Envoy Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau onwards to Berlin and the Baltic Sea Fleet. (Danish Defence Library, Photo Collection)

He gave the reason that the “*current demanding*” conditions made the decision necessary.⁶¹

The Admiral's position and actions have to be seen within the context of his understanding of the demands of Denmark's geostrategic position. If his country chose an alliance with Germany's enemies and Germany won the war, Denmark would cease to exist. If on the other hand his country was coerced into an alliance with Germany and the Western Powers won, the country would be re-established, because the victors would understand that Denmark had been forced by its geostrategic situation to side with Germany.

Kofoed-Hansen was not alone in his analysis. In spite of the strong anglophile attitude of the Royal Family, among the army and naval officers and in the general population, Danish Governments had informed Berlin in 1906-07 and again on 3 August 1914 that Denmark would never join Germany's enemies. A practical result was that Danish defence plans and rules of neutrality were intended to deny the Royal Navy bases for operations in the Baltic Sea. The hope was that by paying attention to German defence interest and needs on Danish territory, an invasion from the south might be avoided because it was unnecessary. Admiral Kofoed-Hansen became known as a leading and strong-minded supporter of the need for a neutral defence profile acceptable to Germany in the years before the war, and when the German Envoy had requested a mining of the Great Belt “*against all belligerents*” on the morning of 5 August, the Admiral succeeded in extracting a positive response from a hesitant political leadership. This did not

61 RA. Flaadens Overkommando, Kopibog 1916, I, Flaadens Overkommando O.571 of 03-07-1916 to Amtmanden i Bornholms Amt.

mean that the Admiral was unwilling to fight if the Germans invaded. Four days earlier he had forced a very unwilling government to accept that the navy would fight even in case of a German invasion. In Kofoed-Hansen's understanding both duty as a neutral state and national honour required this.

However, in late October 1914 he had allied himself with the like-minded Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erik Scavenius, and thereafter forced the rest of the government as well as the Naval Ministry Director and the local navy squadron commander to accept that any attempt to force the new Great Belt Barrier would be met by force, even if such an operation was likely to be suicidal. The anglo-phile King, Christian X, had been furious, but he could not force the Admiral to change his directive.⁶²

The more the Admiral considered the new information from London, the more worried he became, and on 1 July he handed an estimate of the situation to the Foreign Minister with a copy to the Defence Minister. The memorandum had been written in late June. Kofoed-Hansen remembered the information that he had received from Stagg on 29 October 1915 based on "*the usual English tendency to underestimate the enemy linked to a completely unrealistic overestimate of Denmark's ability to resist Germany*".⁶³

As mentioned earlier, the Danish submarine force had been built primarily to participate in the joint defence against a German landing on the east coasts of Zealand. However after the outbreak of war the flotilla started to exercise for another mission: the deployment to counter a (British) bombardment force approaching Copenhagen from the Kattegat through the Sound.⁶⁴ With the access to Køge Bay increasingly blocked by German anti-submarine barriers, the Navy had experimented with submarine operations in the Great Belt in January and April 1916.⁶⁵ No later than early June 1916 Kofoed-Hansen had established a routine rotation of divisions from the growing number of submarines to work with the combined squadron of coastal defence ships and torpedo boats guarding the Great Belt mine fields.⁶⁶ With no ability to locate submerged submarines, this

62 Michael Clemmesen, *The Danish armed forces 1909-1918. Between politicians and strategic reality*, (Copenhagen 2007), pp.33-41; Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, (2010), pp. 95-99.

63 O. Kofoed-Hansen, *Daglige optegnelser under krigen*, Tage Kårsted (ed.), *Flåden under 1. Verdenskrig. O. Kofoed-Hansen og V. Jøhnkes optegnelser*, (Aarhus 1976) 22-06-1916 and O. Kofoed-Hansens erindringer, samlede 'Optegnelser' pp. 41-42. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

64 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Det lille land før den store krig. De danske farvande, stormagtsstrategier, efterretninger og forsvarsforberedelser om kriserne 1911-13*, (Odense 2012), pp. 180-196; Clemmesen, *The Danish Armed Forces 1909-1918*, pp. 24-26, 42-47.

65 RA. Flaadens Overkommando Kopibog 1916, 1, Flaadens Overkommando, O. No. 9-13 of 03-01-1916 to Chefen for Undervandsbaadsflotillen, m.fl.; Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 401-800, Chefen for Undervandsbaadsflotillen U-Nr. 142 of 03-04-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando 'Maanedsrapport'.

66 RA. Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 1201-1600, Chefen for 2' Eskadre, Fortroligt, Nr. 743 of 04-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando, 'Rapport Nr. 24'.

was a very significant addition to the squadron combat power and a significantly increased threat to any force attempting to force the barrier.

By early June the Danish Navy had nine operational diesel submarines, and it now started exercising the possibility of operating in the Kattegat,⁶⁷ and on 26 June it started to look for a suitable place for a submarine station and a flying boat station for the Great Belt and Kattegat operations. The reconnaissance seems to have been considered urgent, and by mid-July three places had been rejected as less than suitable for flying boats. On 17 July a possible place had been found at Slipshavn close to Nyborg and flanking the open route used by merchant ship traffic at the western end of the minefields.⁶⁸

Still not convinced by Moltke and Castenskiöld, Foreign Minister Erik Scavenius continued to seek additional information about British intentions. The Danish journalist Marinus Yde had been working in London for a British agency when the war started. He had returned home in 1915, but in April 1916 he had been sent to London paid by Danish trade interests with the approval of Scavenius to explain the Danish position and policies in Britain.⁶⁹ He was now asked to seek information from his well-informed contacts. On 4 July Yde reported on the conversation that he had had the same day in the “*The Economist*” office with its editor, Francis Hirst. After Yde had rejected an offer of employment, he made it clear that he came to seek information about what Hirst thought about the rumours about an English attack on Kiel. The initiative to contact Hirst underlines the key role that the 10 June “*Economist*” article had as a catalyst. The Editor told Yde that both the Admiralty and Government had their “*selection of less gifted persons, who would always be prepared to accept any activist plan, however lunatic*”. However in Hirst’s opinion it would be impossible to get 22 government ministers to agree. Yde noted that he agreed with Hirst. There was no visible troop redeployment.⁷⁰

The Envoy, Count Castenskiöld, also sought additional information, and on 19 July he reported what the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, Lord Charles Hardinge, had told him: the British had information that the Germans were conducting reconnaissance in Jutland to prepare an occupation of the peninsula. Castenskiöld urged England not to press Denmark too much, but Hardinge just noted that all the neutrals were pleading, however “*if all import to*

67 RA. Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 1201-1600, Chefen for Undervandsbaadsflotillen, U-Nr. 215 of 01-06-1916.

68 Ibid., Marineministeriet No. 3846 of 13-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Premierløjtnant A. Grandjean of 13-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Premierløjtnant Laub of 14-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Chefen for 2^e Eskadre Nr. 804 of 17-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando.

69 www.denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon/Samfund,_jura_og_politik/Myndigheder_og_politisk_styre/Diplomat/Marinus_L._Yde (accessed 1-11-2014).

70 RA. Udenrigsministeriet, Gruppeordnede Sager, 10 G53-G80, Pk 10-32, Marinus L. Yde, Privat og Confidentielt, of 4-7-1916 to Hr. Departementschef, Kammerherre Herluf Zahle. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

One likely effect of the Stagg lunch: The accelerated establishment of a permanent station for a group of Danish submarines and flying boats to the Great Belt to reinforce the navy's 2nd Squadron's ability to meet a British attempt to breach the Danish mine barrier. (Nyborg City Archive)



Germany from these countries had been cut, it would have ended the war". Castenskiold concluded in his cable that as he had expected, Hardinge was in line with the Admiralty, the War Office and a large and influential part of the press, even if he showed greater awareness of Denmark's especially difficult position.⁷¹

The Danish Navy continued its preparations in the Great Belt. On 20 July Kofoed-Hansen decided that a combined station for submarines and flying boats should be sited either at Korsør (the squadron base harbour) or near Nyborg and ordered the creation of a detailed construction plan. Six days later he received the squadron plan for the construction of the facilities in Slipshavn, the site identified ten days earlier, and on 28 July the Admiral sent his approval to the Naval Ministry. The use of the station started immediately, using tents until the planned wooden barracks had been constructed. The logistic support for the submarines and crews was established from late August.⁷²

Kofoed-Hansen remained worried throughout that summer, and on 22 July he made clear to the Defence Minister that it was "*imprudent*" to let the monarch stay in Jutland for two months. (The fact that Christian X's journey was linked to his inspection of army manoeuvres was likely to deepen the Admiral's worries).

71 RA. Udenrigsministeriet, Gruppeordnede Sager, 10 G53-G80, Pk 10-32, Kgl. Gesandtskab London, Castenskiold, Chiffertelegram of 19-7-1914 to Udenrigsministeriet.

72 RA. Flaadens Overkommando, Kopibog 1916, I, Flaadens Overkommando, O. 608 of 20-07-1916 to Chefen for 2' Eskadre; Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 1601-2000, Chefen for 2' Eskadre, Nr. 832 of 26-07-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Flaadens Overkommando Kopibog 1916 2, Flaadens Overkommando, O. 635 of 28-07-1916 to Marineministeriet; Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 1601-2000, Chefen for Orlogsværftet, Sekretariatet Løbe Nr. 3777 of 12-08-1916 to Marineministeriet; Flaadens Overkommando, Sagsakter, Pk. 0.3, 1916, 2001-2400, Chefen for Undervandsbaadsflotillen of 30-8-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Marineministeriet No. 4695 of 01-09-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando; Chefen for Undervandsbaadsflotillen U-Nr. 362 of 01-09-1916 to Flaadens Overkommando.

The Admiral was concerned that the King might be tempted to act independently of the government in case of a British landing. Five days later the navy commander had another conversation with the Defence Minister where the latter made clear that he did not object to the use of force in case of a British attempt.⁷³

On 23 July Kofoed-Hansen met the German Envoy, Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau face to face for the first time. The Admiral used the occasion to congratulate the diplomat on the German victory at Jutland. The Envoy thanked the Admiral and noted that he knew from the foreign ministers about the decisive support (*"tatkraftigste Unterstützung"*) that the Admiral gave to Scavenius' pro-German neutrality line. That was especially important just at the current moment (*"gerade im gegenwärtigen Augenblick"*).

Scavenius and Rantzau maintained an open and very close exchange of ideas and information throughout the war, including about the risks of British operations and potential German reactions.⁷⁴ In July 1916 Rantzau considered the risk of a British operation via Denmark more critical than any time earlier in the war, even if he noted that Scavenius thought it likely that any British operation would be limited and have the aim of provoking a German occupation of Jutland. On 20 July Rantzau had reported that the attempt had been started by *"the notorious English spy Narvey"*. Two days later the German Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs concluded on the basis of Rantzau's report that *"it would be unwise to reject the possibility of a sudden English operation out of hand"*. On 23 August 1916 the Commander-in-Chief of the German Baltic Fleet, Grand Admiral Prince Heinrich, asked what the Admiralty Staff intended to do if Denmark was drawn into the war on the enemy side. Prince Heinrich's question ante-dates by a few days the Romanian entry into the war that is normally considered the motivation for restarting the planning for a war against Denmark that had been frozen by Wilhelm II's decision to accept Danish neutrality in February 1905.⁷⁵ Thus Stagg's information on 14 June was an additional reason why the German Admiralty Staff considered it necessary in autumn 1916 to develop what became the first version of *"Fall J"*, the contingency war plan against Denmark. The infor-

73 O. Kofoed-Hansen *Daglige Optegnelser under krigen*, Tage Kaarsted: *Flåden under første verdenskrig. O. Kofoed-Hansen og V. Jøhnkes optegnelser*, (Århus 1976).

74 RA. German planning file copies brought to Denmark, Pk. 91-læg 8, Ganz geheim Telegram from Rantzau to Auswärtiges Amt 23-07-19; Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, pp. 155-159, 329-342; Viggo Sjøqvist, *Erik Scavenius. En biografi. Bind 1. 1877-1920*, (Copenhagen 1973).

75 RA. Håndskriftsamlingen, XVI. Danica, Auswärtiges Amt, Pk. 87-88, Telegramm, of 21-7-1916, Nr. 16, Der Unterstaatssekretär an Exzellenz von Jagow (with copy to Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres); Telegramm of 3-9-1916 from Der k. Gesandte, Kopenhagen Nr. 1281 to Auswärtiges Amt (translations by author); Gerhard P. Gross, German Plans to occupy Denmark, "Case J" 1916-1918, Michael Epkenhans & Gerhard P. Gross (eds.), *The Danish Straits and German Naval Power 1905-1918*, (Potsdam 2010), pp. 156-157 and n. 13; Carl-Axel Gemzell, *Organization, Conflict, and Innovation. A Study of German Naval Strategic Planning 1888-1940*, (Lund 1973), pp. 163-174, 225-227, 238-245.

mation of a now more likely British attempt at entry combined with the risk of a new Danish government formed by the Opposition, the opportunism of another neutral, Romania, and the economic pressures against Denmark that would follow a resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare, made planning against Denmark essential. For a Dane it is also interesting to note that by Erik Scavenius's close and completely open relationship with the German Envoy, which he considered to be essential for keeping Denmark out of the war, the Danish minister had added a catalyst to renewed German war-planning against his country.

One likely effect of the reports from the 14 June 1916 meeting: the Army begs Britain for assistance – and the London reaction

When the worrying news arrived from London in mid-June the dynamic, but over-worked and high-strung Danish Chief of the General Staff, Major-General Berthel Palle Berthelsen, had been ill and immobilised with a serious lumbago attack. On 23 June Kofoed-Hansen proposed in vain to the Defence Minister that the minister should use the illness to replace the General, whose views on Danish neutrality policies were directly contrary to those of the Admiral.⁷⁶

However, by mid-July Berthelsen, a general with keen political sense, was back, and soon he noted developments that inspired him to action. In August-September 1916 a domestic political crisis (caused by lack of government openness and truthfulness in relation to negotiations to sell the Danish West-Indian Islands to the U.S.) was close to provoking the fall of the Danish government. The crisis might create a window of opportunity to improve the Danish defence capabilities.

The domestic political crisis combined with the strategic crisis brought about, in part, by the report of the Moltke-Stagg lunch. The political response was to scale back all defence efforts. The army experienced a sudden freeze on both routine and supplementary defence preparations. The call-up of reserves for the annual large-scale autumn exercises was cancelled. Further development of the field fortifications in Jutland (preparing the Lim Fjord position) was vetoed. The argument given by the Defence Minister was that such works would undermine German confidence in Danish neutrality, especially after the Romanian entry into the conflict.⁷⁷

The only possible explanation to present-day historians is that Rantzau had informed the Danish Government and the Defence Minister, Peter Munch, via Scavenius, about the recent start of German planning against Denmark and its focus on Jutland. Munch, a powerful intellectual, had been the author of his party's (*Det Radikale Venstre*) defence policy when the party programme had been

76 Det Kongelige Bibliotek (The Danish Royal Library) (KB), Ny Kgl. Samling 5082, 4^o, August Tuxens Brevsamling, II. Breve fra fremmede, 4. Fra J.V. Gørtz, Læg 1916, Letters of 14-06 and 14-07-1916; O. Kofoed-Hansen Daglige Optegnelser under krigen, Tage Kaarsted, *Flåden under første verdenskrig. O. Kofoed-Hansen og V. Jøhnkes optegnelser*, (Aarhus 1976).

77 KB. Ny Kgl. Samling 5082, 4^o, August Tuxens Brevsamling, II. Breve fra fremmede, 4. Fra J.V. Gørtz, Læg 1916, Letter of 20-09-1916.



Always the irregular political activist for the "Defence Cause", the Chief of General Staff, Major-General Palle Berthelsen, here in summer 1915. He begged England to assist Denmark in various ways if the British Government actually planned operations in the way outlined by Stagg. (National-tidende)

developed in spring 1905. His views were clear and constant through the next 35 years as a leading politician: Service in the military promoted conservative and anachronistic militaristic attitudes in conflict with the future that he sought for his nation; from the start of his service as Defence Minister he sought to democratise the armed services and improve the social conditions of their personnel. Second, the armed forces of a small state such as Denmark were a useless waste of resources, as it was obvious to any sound mind that they would always remain too weak to prevent or stop an invasion by a Great Power. Military resources stronger than those required for policing the borders might actually undermine security by attracting or provoking interest such as the existence of the Danish fleet that had led to the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807. The main threat for a small state in war was therefore not great power operations that could not be prevented anyway, but the serious losses and destruction that would be the result of armed resistance. The stronger the defence forces, the more destruction would become possible.

When Munch became Defence Minister in a minority government in summer 1913 he had committed himself to administer the armed forces according to the defence laws in spite of his and his party's fundamental disagreement with their substance. His party had fought a parliamentary election in 1910 to have the laws changed – and lost.⁷⁸ During autumn 1915 the Opposition had challenged

⁷⁸ Tage Kaarsted, *Hvad skal det nytte? De radikale og forsvaret 1894-1914*, (Odense 1974); Carsten Staur, "P. Munch og forsvarsspørgsmålet ca. 1900-1910", *Historisk Tidsskrift*, Bind 81, Hæfte 1,

his willingness live up to his commitment, and in order to prove his loyalty he had been forced to accept the construction of the Tune Position and committed himself to the purchasing and armament programmes. Now the West-Indies' domestic crisis combined with increased external threats, but Munch apparently decided to accept the domestic political risks to minimise the risk of destructive defensive fighting in Denmark.

Berthelsen decided to react to the crisis caused by the sudden loss of political support for the defence preparations and readiness by contacting the new British Minister, Sir Ralph Spencer Paget, directly in a letter to seek assistance. It is possible to piece together the information received during the first weeks of September that probably triggered the General's decision. In a letter dated 22 August he had thanked the Danish Envoy in Berlin, Carl Moltke, for his General Summary despatch ("*Almindelig Oversigt*") from 15 August. In the despatch Moltke assessed that the German situation on the Western Front was stable, and that Germany had succeeded in containing the crisis on the Austrian southern part of the Eastern Front by sending German troops. He went on that the German Deputy Foreign Secretary remained confident that the Romanians would remain neutral.⁷⁹ This confident evaluation proved mistaken, and the situation changed quickly following Romania's decision to enter the war against Germany. On 31 August Carl Moltke reported that there were widespread rumours in Berlin that Denmark would follow Romania in declaring war. The rumours continued the following days despite Moltke's efforts to counter them. The Germans had noticed that a number of Danes had returned home to join the forces, and Moltke warned Danes against travelling to Germany. On 18 September the "*Lokal-Anzeiger*" noted that the Scandinavian States were under strong British pressure to join the war against the Central Powers.⁸⁰ The urgency, and the German focus on the Jutland Peninsula, was highlighted by intelligence work conducted in Denmark on 22 and 23 September concerning the massive field fortification being constructed across North Schleswig.⁸¹ This was interpreted as a sign that Germany had intelligence about an impending British operation.

1981; Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, chapters 8 to 15; Clemmesen, *Det lille land før den store krig*, pp. 388, 463, 485.

79 RA. Berlin, diplomatisk repræsentation og militærmission, 1913-1935, Politiske indberetninger (aflev 1940), 1916, pk. 480, Berlin, No. LXXVIII "Almindelig Oversigt" of 15-8-1916; Chefen for Generalstaben of 22-8-1916 to Hr. Greve C. Moltke.

80 RA. Berlin, diplomatisk repræsentation og militærmission, 1913-1935, Politiske indberetninger (aflev 1940), 1916, pk. 481, Gesandtskabets Chiffertelegram No. 277 of 31-8-1916 to Udenrigsministeriet; Berlin, No. LXXXI "Dansk Tysk Politik" of 4-9-1916; Berlin, No. LXXXVI "Nordisk Ministerkonference i Christiania" of 18-9-1916; Lokal-Anzeiger No. 478 (Morgen) 18-9-1916, "Der englische Druck auf Skandinavien".

81 RA. Gørtz Privatarxiv: Breve from GL Tuxen, Letter of 22-09-1916, 2' Generalkommando, Detachementer, Esbjerg 1914-1919 Pk. K1, 2' Generalkommando, Strængt fortroligt Tilintetgøres, of 23-09-1916 to Detachment Esbjerg.

The General's request for help started explaining that the mobilised army in Jutland only consisted of fourteen weakly-supported infantry battalions. In case of a German attack it would have to withdraw to the Lim Fjord island of Morso (Mors) without being able to offer any resistance before then. He emphasised that any deployment of British troops to Jutland would be a futile waste. The Danish defence planning had deliberately abandoned Jutland and Funen in order to have sufficient forces for the defence of Zealand and Copenhagen.

After having mentioned the Tune Position he generated his first request. The German *Hessen*-class pre-Dreadnought could bombard the Copenhagen suburb of Valby from its position behind the minefield. As a first priority Denmark therefore needed four, preferably eight, heavy cannons of 31-38 cm calibre with 100 shells each for the coastal forts on the south coast of Amager.

As a second priority the Army needed high explosive shells for the field artillery, machine guns, 50.000 infantry rifles and at least 70 million small arms rounds:

"If England does not contemplate entering the Baltic or if intention is to keep Denmark entirely out of the war the whole matter has no interest. Should on the other hand there be possibility, even most remote, that Denmark can be involved in the war it will then be of very greatest interest for England either to see Denmark gets stores she lacks or that British Army should bring them with them when they come." The letter underlined that an effective defence of Copenhagen would require 50.000 more men than presently available.

In relation to the heavy cannon the British were only asked to make a U.S. firm – to be named later – send an offer directly to Danish Army HQs, not to the War Office. The letter urged that the "*present*" Danish government should not be informed about Britain's role as facilitator.

The British Minister, Ralph Paget, probably received Berthelsen's letter on 25 September, when he warned London by telegram that he had received the document. The letter was then translated from Danish and sent to London on 28 September.

Two days later Berthelsen must have felt that the domestic political "window" to gain support for a stronger defence effort was closing. The new Government formed on 30 September was the old cabinet with observers from the supporting and opposition parties, so Munch continued as Defence Minister.

In his covering letter Paget doubted that Denmark could resist "*for any length of time*", no matter what guns and ammunition they got. The cannon would only give the Germans an excuse for invading and add to the "*other good things here*" that they could seize. The Envoy made clear that assistance should depend on whether the Danish Government made a commitment to co-operate with the British, but he doubted that "*we could even induce them to venture to give this*".

On the arrival of the letter and Paget's note in London one week later, it was sent to the British War Office for comments.⁸²

Even if Paget was critical, Britain seems to have acted as the facilitator Berthelsen had requested. In early December the Danish War Office purchasing mission in the United States received an offer from Bethlehem Steel Corporation for the delivery of six 35 cm cannon with a delivery time of 18-24 months. At that time the Danish artillery specialists had already decided that half the guns should be placed in a battery on the south point of Amager and the other half in a battery at Hundige further up the coast from Mosede Battery and the Tune Position flank. However, Berthelsen had been too optimistic in his estimate of the Army's ability to get government approval for the offer. The "*present*" government had stayed in power. On 3 January Peter Munch informed the mission in America that the offer was of no interest.⁸³

It took less than a week for the British Admiralty War Staff and the War Office General Staff to produce a common reaction to Berthelsen's begging and Paget's discouragement. Staffing had started on 1 October, when the Admiralty War Staff had produced a detailed report on the "*Coast Defences of Denmark*". The next day the chief of staff, Sir Henry Oliver, drafted an appreciation named "*Denmark*" for the First Lord of the Admiralty and First Sea Lord analysing the possibilities of supporting Denmark. The arguments were to be used in the discussion with the Army about possible actions. During his many months in office Oliver had always been and remained highly critical of any Royal Navy operations east of the Skaw, and he had no problems in securing War Office support for his pessimistic views.

The agreement between the British armed services was given in the form of the secret memorandum on "*The Military Situation in Denmark*" printed for the Cabinet on 11 October. It closely followed Oliver's 2 October appreciation. It noted the recent "*nervousness in Denmark*" about possible German hostile designs. It repeated Berthelsen's description of the defence situation and concluded: "*It must be clear ... that the Danes are not at present in a position to protect their country from a German attack*". It was also clear that any signs of a British expedition to Denmark were likely to trigger a German invasion. The only places that were likely to be available for landing, when the British forces arrived, would be the district north of the Lim Fjord or within the Copenhagen defences. This assumed that the necessary British Army forces were available and could be se-

82 TNA, FO 371/2754, pp. 272-277; Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, pp. 161-165, argues why the author of the letter must have been Berthelsen. The translation into English is the one done by the legation for its report.

83 RA. Arméoverkommandoen, Arméartillerikommandoen, 1914-1919, A Indkomne Sager 1916 6 22 - 12 31, Pk. 4, Hærens tekniske Korps, Fortroligt, K. 4756 of 04-12-1916 to Arméartillerikommandoen; Den flydende Defension, Løbe-Nr. 1062 Fortroligt, of 24-08-1916 to Arméartillerikommandoen; Krigsministeriet, 3 Kontor. Pk. C.26. Kopibog over artillerisager 1914-1924: 1917 1 -829, Krigsministeriet, C.a. 13 of 03-01-1917 to Hærens tekniske Korps.

cretly assembled and embarked. However, even if this were possible, they “*could not be supplied and maintained in Denmark except at the greatest risk to our naval supremacy, on which the Allied cause depends, unless the German fleet was disposed of*”. The sea transport of the force and later supply transports had to sail close to the main German naval base and were very vulnerable to U-boat attacks. A large force of destroyers backed by capital ships would therefore have to be maintained in Danish waters. It would also be difficult to find the necessary transports because of other urgent requirements and the loss of tonnage to U-boats. Even if the expeditionary corps was sent, it was unlikely to be able to match the maximum force that Germany would be able to build up against it. Therefore an operation to support Denmark was not likely to be successful.⁸⁴

It had taken less than three months for the distorted echo of Stagg’s warning to reach its source and its logic to be rejected. Only the aggressive retired Admiral-of-the-Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson disagreed with Henry Oliver. In a memorandum from late March 1917 he recommended that the Royal Navy response to a German invasion of Denmark should be the use of the Danish island of Zealand and possibly that of Funen as base for offensive operations into the Baltic Sea.⁸⁵ However, as the old admiral had no influence on operations, his opinion was irrelevant. On the other hand it is very likely that activists from the Naval Intelligence such as Stagg, Consett and Hall shared the old admiral’s wish for a more aggressive strategy than the one managed by Balfour and Oliver in London and Jellicoe with the Grand Fleet. Even before Wilson finished his memorandum, Consett worked to get the Norwegians to allow the Americans to base their battle fleet at Stavanger, if or rather when they joined the Allies.⁸⁶ Even the DNI, Reginald Hall, would work for a limited operation through the Sound before 1917 ended, an operation that should help the British Baltic submarine flotilla to escape home and keep the powerful Russian Novik-class destroyers and Russian naval code breakers out of German reach.⁸⁷

Stagg’s “irresponsible” misinformation to Admiral Kofoed-Hansen in autumn 1915 and to Frederik Moltke during the working lunch probably mirrored what he would like to see happen, and if his presentation of his wishes as those of more responsible naval decision-makers triggered German concern or even action, he could only see that as justified and beneficial for his country and service.

84 TNA. ADM 137/1881, p. 191 and verso, Secret, The Military Situation in Denmark, Prepared by the Admiralty War Staff and the General Staff, War Office, (signed Robertson) 11-11-1916; ADM 137/500, pp. 3, 56-91; For Oliver’s constant views: Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, pp. 113f, 125, 130, 136, 205, 209, 219, 236, 240, 251, 277.

85 TNA. ADM 137/500, pp. 92-95, Arthur Wilson of 25-3-1917.

86 Michael H. Clemmesen, *Den lange vej mod 9. april*, (2010), chapter 33.

87 Ibid., chapter 22.

Frederik Moltke and Frank Stagg thereafter

No surviving documents in the Danish legation or War Office files inform us how the British wish to get Moltke out of the country was communicated to the Danish Envoy – if at all – or directly to the Copenhagen authorities. The most likely reason is that both the British and Danish authorities wanted to handle the matter discreetly and possibly only verbally. Therefore Moltke's posting to the purchasing mission in the U.S. was dealt with as an Army Technical Corps matter, made necessary by the less liberal British export licensing regime. It could be presented as logical as the remaining main purchasing activities were in America. The only result of the new posting was that the Danish King approved a one-year extension of Moltke's secondment to the Army Technical Corps on 26 July 1916, the day when he returned to Copenhagen. Another extension was approved on 20 February 1918, after it had been decided to close the purchasing mission in the U.S., and was valid until 31 July 1919.⁸⁸

During his time in the U.S., Moltke worked in New York City. His title was the impressive "*Director of Army Contracts Attached to the Danish Legation*", but the purchasing work load is likely to have dwindled significantly six months after his arrival in America as a direct result of the Danish Government's effective freeze on defence preparations from autumn 1916. The inclusion of representatives from the Opposition parties as a result of the autumn West-Indies' crisis had removed the risk of the Opposition using Munch's administration of the defence laws to attack the Government as had happened in autumn 1915. Hereafter the Defence and Foreign Ministers only needed to convince the representatives in the ministers' meetings that additional defence preparations were a bad idea for a variety of reasons. In relation to purchasing projects, Munch could stop them without having to involve others.⁸⁹ The resumption of German unrestricted U-boat warfare in February 1917, and the U.S. entry into the war two months later must have combined to reduce the likelihood of additional defence contracts even further, and in summer 1917 there followed formal U.S. export restrictions.

With his purchasing work load reduced, the energetic Moltke got involved in other matters. A communication from him in the Danish Washington legation

88 RA. Krigsministeriet, 1. Kontor, Forestillinger 1916 og 1917, Pk. 1122, Forsvarsministeren, A.A. No. 117 af 25-7-1916 to Kongen; Forestillinger 1918-1919, Pk. 1123-1124, Forsvarsministeren, A.A. No. 20 af 19-2-1918 to Kongen; Kundgørelse A for Hæren, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919.

89 For Munch's defence improvement management in early 1917, see: Tage Kaarsted (ed.), *Ministtermødeprotokol 1916-1918. Kirkeminister Th. Povlsens referater*, (Aarhus 1973), 15-1-1917; P. Munch, *Erindringer 1914-1918. Under den første Verdenskrig*, (Copenhagen 1961), pp.187-197; Michael H. Clemmesen & Anders Osvald Thorkilsen, *Mod fornyelsen af Københavns forsvar 1915-18*, (Copenhagen 2009) follows two examples; for a third one dealing with American tractors for the approved new artillery, see: RA. Krigsministeriet, 3 Kontor. Pk. C.26. Kopibog over artillerisager 1914-1924: 1917 1-829, Krigsministeriet, C.a. 165 of 26-01-1917 to Overkommandoen; Krigsministeriet C.a. 257 of 09-02-1917 to Hærens tekniske Korps; Gørtz Privatarkiv: Breve fra GL Tuxen: Letter of 08-02-1917; KB. Ny Kgl. Samling 5082, 4^o August Tuxens Brevsamling, II. Breve fra fremmede. 4. Fra J.V. Gørtz, Læg 1917-1928, Letter of 04-02-1917.

files documents a successful attempt to have the error in the “*New York Times*” article “*Terrorizing Norway*” on 28 June corrected two days later. The article accused the Danish Foreign Minister of having supported pro-German policies at a May Stockholm conference, but Moltke’s intervention with the editor made the newspaper publish a correction making clear that the statement had been made by Thorvald Stauning, the Social Democratic representative in the Government, as a private person and party leader.⁹⁰

Even with his official workload reduced, Moltke continued to act as a combination of purchasing official and de facto military attaché. As long as he received requests from home he continued his energetic shopping, and as late as mid-January 1918 sent a massive report with 33 annexes that included a description of a new shell or grenade and a new machine gun. However, on 21 February 1918, Moltke was recalled, even if the delivery of the 30 million 8 mm cartridges that he had taken over from Petersen had still not taken place. He had earlier been informed by telegram that the Danish War Office considered a reorganisation that would mean his withdrawal, and on 18 February it was decided to end his work in New York. The Envoy in Washington should be responsible in the future, including shipping the small arms ammunition to Denmark. Nørresø wrote that he regretted Moltke’s withdrawal, but when back in Copenhagen his knowledge about the U.S. contacts would be available to all. The General ended by writing that he looked forward to speaking with Moltke again “*after such a long time and so many stormy events*”. He was also happy that the family would be united and signed: “*your devoted and grateful*”.⁹¹

It was probably only when back in Denmark that Moltke heard about the rumours and suspicion, and in late October 1918 he tried to clear himself via the London Legation. He must finally have realised that it had been a mistake for him not to have taken seriously the suspicions that he must have felt 18 months earlier and confronted them. That suspicion had not faded with his move to New York but moved with him, and now he failed to be cleared. The Director of Naval Intelligence concluded on 9 November that he did “*not consider it possible so say ... (that Frederik Moltke’s) actions were entirely free from suspicion during his stay in England*”. In commenting on Moltke’s attempt to be cleared, M.I.5 attached the old 17 June report and added the information that since June 1916 “*Count Moltke has been attached to the Danish Legation at Washington and whilst there became the subject of strong suspicion*”. The comment, however, was made with-

90 RA. Washington D.C., diplomatisk repræsentation, Politiske Depecher til Udenrigsministeriet, 1917-1921, Pk. 251, Ritmester Moltke, New York, Telegraferer indhold af artikel i ”Times” ang. Stauning, af 28-6-1917 (and the following documents); Director of Army Contracts attached to the Danish Legation, New York, A.880 of 9-7-1917 to Højvelbaarne, Hr. Kammerherre C. Brun.

91 RA. Chefen for Hæren. Hærens Tekniske Korps, C. Kopibøger, kommissioner & udland, 1914-1920, Pk. 2, Ritmester F. Greve Moltke, p.t. New York, Fortroligt A.1296 (”Hermed 33 bilag”); Nørresø, M.1314 of 21-2-1918 to ”Kære Ritmester, Greve Moltke”; C. Indgående skrivelser fra Krigsministeriet, 1915-1918, Pk. 23. The quoted text translated into English by the author.

out describing the grounds or sources for that suspicion. The security service recommended rejection of Moltke's attempt to clear his name. On 28 November the Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, First Lord of the Admiralty during Moltke's time in London and the disappearance of the London air defence plan, informed the Danish envoy of the rejection, using the words of the Director of Naval Intelligence.⁹²

One may consider what incriminating information the MI5 and MI1c could have had in addition to what was presented in the 17 June memorandum. Reading the outline article, the British historian Richard Dunley considered it possible that the Dane's MI5-file contained more incriminating information about suspicious behaviour.

From the arguments used in the memorandum, the author consider it most likely that any such information would reinforce the suspicion generated by Moltke's energetic de facto military attaché activities from his interest in air defence to the search for secrets about the results of the naval battle.

MI5 would know that Moltke continued to seek classified information from his many contacts, information that the British had to hate see leaving the country. One possibility is that such additional information came from an ability to read what Moltke and the Envoy sent by coded telegram to Copenhagen. The British have released the decrypted transcript of Danish (and other) diplomatic telegrams from the early post-war period, and it is most likely that the code had been broken earlier. If the suspicion was supported by severely restricted information from sensitive decryption activities it is clear why the memorandum could convince those few informed even without more evidence or arguments.⁹³

At the end of the war the situation for Moltke worsened. In late 1918 the Royal Navy finally entered the Baltic as Stagg had warned on 14 June 1916. Copenhagen became the main British base for intervention in the Baltic States and the Finnish Gulf, and the operations were supported by a Secret Service operation. It is clear that the Danish authorities were made aware of the British accusations against Moltke. It is only unclear whether the information came directly from Stagg or from another source. The situation forced Moltke to act again. A suspected German spy had no future in any Danish Army, and in 1919 Denmark had become a de facto British ally against Soviet Russia. In June 1919 he applied for early retirement from the Army. In all other cases the War Office proposal to the King included a rather extended argument as to how and why he should decide as recommended. In Moltke's case this did not happen, making all-too-evident that both the Defence Minister and the King knew the reason for the application. It

92 TNA. FO 371/3361, pp. 342, 344, 348-349, N.I.D. L5727 of 09-11-1918; MI5. War Office (?).F.273/78/M.I.5. of 25-11-1918; F.O. No. 194794/W.30 of 28-11-1918 to the Danish Minister.

93 TNA. HW 12/2, one example is: "THE COPENHAGEN NEGOTIATIONS" The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Copenhagen No.440 of 26-11-1919 to the Danish Legation, Washington, the decrypt of 9-12-1919 distributed to D.N.I., W.O.(5), F.O....

simply noted that Moltke had asked permission to retire and that the King should give his approval. This was granted on 25 June.⁹⁴

Even after retirement, Moltke apparently considered it essential to clear his name. In mid-October 1920 he approached the Secretary of the British Legation, Hubert Grant Watson, and asked for an opportunity to go to England to explain himself to the relevant British officials. He had informed Grant Watson that “*Nothing definite*” had ever been brought against him. Both in England and later in America he was simply “*asked to leave*”. Moltke was now the “*President of the local club here*”. He was “*determined to fight the rumours that he acted as a German spy*”. Grant Watson was convinced that Moltke “*got himself into a false position rather through stupidity than knavery*”. Even if the Foreign Office desk officer noted on 29 October that “*Count Moltke appears to have been a most undesirable person*”, Sir Eyre Crowe asked the Director of Military Intelligence on 5 November if a visit would be possible. MI5 consulted with Naval Intelligence and both agreed that a visit by Moltke had “*no useful purpose*”, and the Copenhagen Legation – both the Envoy and Grant Watson – was informed.⁹⁵ As is clear from the narrative neither MI5 nor Stagg’s organisation had a good reason to change their opinion.

MI5 had no good reason to do so, as the service had closed the case of the missing air defence plan by naming their prime suspect and getting him punished by destroying his reputation. Stagg had been responsible for the “*knavery*”. He gave Moltke the rope to hang himself in front of the already convinced MI5 agent, most likely the Dane’s case officer, by doing what Stagg knew he would and should do: asking “*suspicious*” questions about “*secret*” matters. If Stagg actually aimed at nourishing German paranoia by the misinformation to provoke an aggression that brought a British response, the “*knavery*” was also directed against what he considered a lame Allied strategy towards Denmark. It would be a continuation of the effort that he had started with accusations against Richard Turner.

Even after Moltke’s retirement from the Army, the rumours seem not to have been believed among his peers. During the following years he was asked to serve on the board of key Danish armament and heavy industry companies such as the Danish Recoil Rifle Syndicate and the Danish Explosives Factories.⁹⁶ If consulted, General Nørresø, still Director of Ordnance, would have been a strong advocate of such employment.

Stagg’s career in Scandinavian intelligence did not end in 1918. In spring 1940 the 55-year-old Stagg returned to work as Naval Control Service Officer in Co-

94 RA. Krigsministeriet, 1. Kontor, Forestillinger 1918-1919, Pk. 1123-1124, Forsvarsministeren, A.A. No. 146 af 24-6-1919 to Kongen.

95 TNA. FO 371/5385, “Extract from letter to Mr. Palairet from Mr. Grant Watson of 15-10-1920” and the F.O. covering note of 29-10-1920; F.O. No. N 1433/1433/15 to the D.M.I of 5-11-1920; Director of Military Intelligence, P.F. 273/78/MI5 to F.O. of 15-11-1920.

96 Information from Henrik Moltke 16-11-2014.

penhagen and Trondheim.⁹⁷ After the Germans occupied Denmark on 9 April 1940 in line with an updated version of the “*Fall J*” operation planning that his disinformation had probably contributed to trigger in 1916, Stagg was evacuated on the diplomatic train. From late autumn 1940 he became daily leader of SOE’s Scandinavian organisation. Here he became responsible for the recruitment and training of the Danes thereafter dispatched to build the resistance network.⁹⁸

Final observations

After the failures of the Dardanelles operation and the Western Front offensives in 1915, the Entente Powers sought victory in 1916 by combined massive offensives in both east and west, reinforced in the west by Kitchener’s new army. The Royal Navy was still hoping for victory in a major naval battle, but it also realised that it had to make the economic pressure against Germany more effective. By June 1916 the naval battle had failed to reach a decision and Kitchener had been killed on his way to Russia to make the combined warfare more effective.

Among the Central Powers, summer 1916 was a period of desperation and fatigue. The German Army manpower pool was emptying at Verdun, in South-East Russia to prevent an Austrian collapse and finally at the Somme. To seek a decisive naval battle had proved too risky. Air bombardment of the enemy homelands had not triggered panic and collapse. The only potential ‘quick fix’ was effective submarine warfare. Otherwise Germany would be limited to active strategic defence for many months ahead, limiting damage by effective counter-offensives like that in Romania or pre-emptive operations such as those now prepared against Denmark, the Netherlands and later Norway.

To this unstable phase of the war Stagg added his equivalent to the “*butterfly*” of Chaos Theory. Germany’s actions and planning to compensate for her weaknesses influenced the situation of her small neutral neighbours. The Danish Army was already deeply worried by the development, and what Stagg said added a new element to their worries and of course a possible opportunity should British assistance materialise. It probably inspired Berthelsen in his plea to the British Envoy that was bound to be rejected by the combination of Oliver’s risk-adverse Admiralty War Staff and Robertson’s Western Front-centric General Staff.

The Danish Commanding Admiral’s previous experience with Stagg reinforced his worry that the Royal Navy and British Government might actually be willing to risk a Baltic operation, and his views were communicated to Berlin via the Danish Foreign Minister and German Envoy to Copenhagen, undermining Danish security. First it helped provoke renewed German war planning against the country. Second it inspired an ideologically-based reduction of Danish de-

97 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Noel_Stagg (accessed 14-10-2014)

98 Knud J. V. Jespersen, *Med hjælp fra England. Bind I*, (Odense 1999), pp. 76-77.

fence readiness that actually increased the German requirement to defend her northern front herself, if necessary by occupying parts of Denmark.

Another example of a somewhat similar “*butterfly*” effect of faulty intelligence during the same phase of the war was the information from a meeting in the American community in London on 20 May 1917 that the U.S. Navy would operate from a base in Southern Norway. The faulty intelligence probably came from a Swedish source. After the information had reached Ludendorff, war preparations against Norway were accelerated and the plans against Denmark consolidated to cover the entire Jutland peninsula.⁹⁹

Finally it should be emphasised that Frederik Moltke’s problem was and is a general one: when accused of working as an agent for a foreign power on the basis of circumstantial evidence, it is impossible to clear yourself effectively. The accusers have no interest in changing their opinion, and even if the side that you were supposed to work for should deny any employment, that denial lacks credibility. As the accusation takes the form of a widespread rumour, the accused cannot be cleared through a libel case in court, especially if the source of the rumour is foreign. Even if Moltke had left a personal record such as a diary, it would be seen as doctored and the stains of suspicion would remain.¹⁰⁰

Resumé

Den 14. juni 1916 mødte den danske indkøbsofficer i London, ritmester grev Frederik Moltke, sin britiske kontaktofficer fra Admiralitetet, den dansktalende efterretningsofficer orlogskaptajn Frank Stagg til en arbejdsfrokost. En anonym kontraefterretningsofficer fra MI5 overværede mødet, fordi de britiske efterretningstjenester mistænkte Moltke for at være tysk agent og for i det sene efterår 1915 at have stjålet en plan visende artilleriforsvaret ved London fra Admiralitet.

Moltkes opgave ved mødet var at hjælpe sin gesandt, grev Castenskiold, med at afklare briternes syn på udfaldet af Jyllands-slaget to uger tidligere. Gesandten var nervøs for, at briterne var så optimistiske efter slaget, at de ville udnytte situationen til at trænge ind i Østersøen, hvilket ville udløse en tysk operation mod Danmark. Danskerens energiske forsøg på at få Stagg til at give oplysninger, som MI5-agenten opfattede som hemmelige, gjorde, at kontraefterretningsofficeren i en rapport tre dage senere med succes argumenterede for, at Moltke måtte presses ud af England.

Stagg, hvis primære arbejde med at hindre, at kontrabande nåede Tyskland, havde haft andre problemer med den effektive indkøbsofficer, og han gjorde

99 Karl Erik Haug, “*Falls Norwegen auf die Seite unserer Feinde tritt*”, *Det tysk-norske forhold fra sommeren 1916 til utgangen av 1917*, (non published master thesis, Trondheim 1994), pp. 124-128; Karl Erik Haug: *Tyske Krigsplaner og Norge under 1. Verdenskrig*, (Norsk) *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Oslo) 4/1995.

100 According to his grandson Henrik Moltke, Frederik Moltke left no personal archive.

åbenbart intet for at forklare MI5-manden, at Moltkes professionelle nysgerighed var et naturligt resultat af grevens rolle som de facto militærattaché. Da briterne i forvejen havde saboteret Moltkes arbejde med at importere råmaterialer til dansk ammunitionsproduktion, valgte myndighederne i København at flytte den effektive ritmester til indkøbsarbejde i New York.

Moltkes rapport om frokostmødet forstærkede gesandstens nervøsitet, hvilket blev understreget i en depeche til København dagen efter mødet. I den danske hovedstad blev selv den skeptiske danske flådechef, viceadmiral Kofoed-Hansen, overbevist om, at der rent faktisk var øget risiko for et britisk passageforsøg. Via den danske udenrigsminister, Erik Scavenius, og hans tætte bekendte, den tyske gesandt, nåede opfattelsen af en øget engelsk trussel til Berlin i juli og august og var muligvis medvirkende til at udløse den første tyske krigsplanlægning mod Danmark siden februar 1905. Den danske hærledelse, der af andre grunde i forvejen så den tyske trussel mod Sjælland som stærkt øget, endte med at søge hjælp direkte fra den britiske gesandt, uden om den danske regering.

Den engelske mistanke forfulgte Moltke til USA, og i slutningen af februar 1918 måtte han rejse hjem til København. Her blev han klar over karakteren og alvoren af den britiske mistanke, og han forsøgte forgæves at blive rensset. Dette blev afvist af briterne uden reel begrundelse, og da han ikke kunne få genoprejsning, søgte og fik Moltke sin afsked fra hæren. Herefter søgte han med støtte af den britiske legation i København om britisk tilladelse til at rejste til London, så han kunne forklare sine handlinger i 1915-16, og igen blev han afvist. Det sejrtrækkende Storbritanniens myndigheder så ingen grund til at ændre mening.

De personer, der kendte den danske greve, var dog aldrig i tvivl om hans loyalitet, og han beskæftiges nu med bestyrelsesarbejde i dansk industri, herunder våbenindustrien.