

New-Nazi Spy Suspect Arrested in New York Pleads Guilty Quickly

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Consulting Engineer
Aided Lehmitz Collect
Information for Germans

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By the Associated Press.

NEW YORK, June 29. ⁴³ Erwin Harry de Spretter, a consulting engineer, the second prisoner arrested by the FBI on charges of collaborating in espionage work for the German high command, pleaded guilty when arraigned today before a United States commissioner.

He calmly entered his plea after being informed of his rights. Then Commissioner Martin C. Epstein ordered him held for action by a Federal grand jury and fixed bail at \$50,000.

Ernest Frederick Lehmitz, with whom De Spretter was charged with working in sending vital information to the Nazis, entered a similar plea of guilty yesterday when arraigned before the commissioner.

Makes Full Confession.

"This prisoner," said Acting United States Attorney T. Vincent Quinn at the arraignment today, "has made a complete confession concerning his activities. He said he got into this work because he needed money, and that he realized the consequences if he were caught."

Like Lehmitz, De Spretter was calm and self-possessed during the proceedings.

The 53-year-old prisoner spoke

with a trace of a foreign accent. He affected a small, neatly trimmed goatee, wore shell-rimmed eyeglasses and was expensively dressed. He is short of stature and most bald.

The arraignment came a short time after E. E. Conroy, chief of the FBI New York office, announced the arrest of the engineer.

De Spretter, a consulting engineer for national defense plants who was educated at the University of Heidelberg, furnished Lehmitz with technical information and other data concerning national defense, with the intention of having Lehmitz forward it to Germany, Mr. Conroy said.

Fed Tips to Lehmitz.

De Spretter met with Lehmitz on a number of occasions, Mr. Conroy related, and gave his observations on shipping in the New York Harbor.

Mr. Conroy said De Spretter admitted he had obtained most of his information in a manner similar to that used by Lehmitz—watching the New York Harbor and activities on the Staten Island water front. Both men lived on the island.

De Spretter furnished Lehmitz on one occasion with a copy of a confidential book published by an aircraft manufacturing company which contained detailed specifications of its planes as well as photographic drawings, Mr. Conroy said. For this, De Spretter received \$100 from Lehmitz, he added.

Unlike Lehmitz, De Spretter was not a citizen of the United States, the FBI chief said. He was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, of a German father and Spanish mother. After a German education he was drafted in the German Army dur-

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Spies

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ing the first World War. He came to the United States in 1923, but never took out more than his first papers.

Advised War Contractors.

The prisoner, Mr. Conroy said, was president of the Aetna Heat Treating & Brazing Corp. and his specialty was the examination of specifications and furnishing technical advice on heat radiation and allied technical matters.

He was consulted by numerous companies which held national defense contracts, Mr. Conroy said, and that, combined with his specialized knowledge, put him in the position to furnish Lehmitz with a volume of information of great value to the enemy.

Was Air Raid Warden.

Lehmitz is an inconspicuous, middle-aged man, who was a zealous air raid warden and whose neighbors considered him a model citizen. He is German-born but a United States citizen for 19 years. The FBI charged Lehmitz had supplied the German war machine with information on troop movements, shipments of men and war material, convoy sailings and shipbuilding, all collected near his Staten Island home, strategically located near a waterfront teeming with battle preparations.

Charged under the Wartime Espionage Act, Lehmitz did not hesitate when arraigned for pleading before United States Commissioner Martin C. Epstein, but said "guilty" without showing any emotion. Bail was set at \$50,000.

Important Arrest.

United States Attorney Harold M. Kennedy called Lehmitz's arrest "one of the most important arrests made in an espionage case in this country."

The arraignment before a commissioner is preliminary to grand jury consideration of the case. Lehmitz and De Spretter will be prosecuted under the Wartime Espionage Act, which provides a sentence, upon conviction, of death or 30 years' imprisonment.

Lehmitz's neighbors expressed astonishment at the espionage charges against the quiet, tall man whose Victory garden was the neatest in the area and who rented rooms to sailors, merchant marine men and Army officers.

But Mr. Conroy, agent in charge of the FBI, said that Lehmitz was a German-trained spy whose methods of collecting and passing along information included fraternizing

with and working among men in water-front restaurants and bars and the use of invisible ink to get the information out of the country.

From stray bits of information obtained from drunken or careless lips and from watching the ships sailing in and out of New York Harbor, Mr. Conroy said, Lehmitz was able to piece together information concerning activities at New York, Norfolk and Newport News, Va.

Reported Transport Sailings.

Most of the information was written in invisible ink between typewritten lines of rather dull-appearing letters to friends in neutral countries such as Spain, Switzerland and Portugal. From there the information went into the feeder which supplied the Axis with Allied information.

Details concerning the construction and repair of ships at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the loading of freighters at Norfolk and Newport News, Va., and the type and number of guns and tanks being carried in a convoy were included in the letters, the FBI agent added.

Typical of his activities, Mr. Conroy said, was one secret message reporting that transports were leaving with thousands of our troops, some destined for Australia and others for England and Africa. The report included the number of ships in certain convoys, their destination and a description of their cargoes, Mr. Conroy said.

The same message reported that an aircraft factory working at full capacity, 24 hours daily, produced three planes a day, he said.

Lehmitz also furnished information gained through his work as an air-raid warden, Mr. Conroy noted, in pointing out that one message carried information concerning air-raid precautions, shelters and domestic preparations against bombing.

"Indescribable confusion" was the way Lehmitz described air-raid precautions here, Mr. Conroy said.

Timed Invasion Landing.

Lehmitz's printed messages between the lines of typewriting contained much information concerning Allied invasion plans, Mr. Conroy said, adding that in one letter he wrote, "Place and time of the intended landing attempt not possible to confirm, whether the continent of Europe, from Great Britain or Spanish and Portuguese islands."

In the typewritten letters whose lines hid the secret writing, Mr. Conroy said he wrote on such American subjects as Victory gardens, Washington's Birthday and strawberries and cream.