

Federal Worker Here Seized by FBI Men Star 8-8-43 As Nazi Secret Agent

South American Admits Reports in Invisible Ink Before Pearl Harbor

A 35-year-old South American employed as a translator in the Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs was arrested by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents here yesterday on espionage charges, the Justice Department announced last night.

Identified as Roberto Lanás Vallecilla, a native of Cali, Colombia, the suspect has confessed to writing three letters in invisible ink transmitting information to the Nazis on United States national defense efforts, the department said. The alleged acts occurred prior to our entrance into the war and while Lanás was a resident of New York City.

Lanás roomed at a home in the 3100 block of Porter street N.W. and has been in Washington for about a year and a half.

The South American frequently had received large sums of money from sources in Lisbon, Portugal, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover said, and at one time he tried unsuccessfully to recruit an attractive New York model as an agent for Nazi Germany at a salary of \$450 a month.

Plan Falls Through.

"He had even given her demonstrations in the use of secret inks and in the development of invisible writing," the department announcement said. "Lanás planned to use her to deliver letters and dispatches to other espionage agents, but his plan did not succeed."

Lanás will be arraigned before United States Commissioner Needham C. Turnage tomorrow on a fugitive warrant and will be sent

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to New York City to face charges of violating the Federal espionage statutes, filed there yesterday.

The Justice Department said that as Lanás was accused of espionage prior to Pearl Harbor, the maximum penalty is 30 years imprisonment instead of death as provided under

the wartime act.

The daughter of Lanás' landlady, who was unaware of his arrest until informed by newsmen, said he had received a notice from his New York draft board this week to report for an Army physical examination. She said she understood Lanás had been given a temporary deferment because of his work with the Co-ordinator's Office, but that he had since been reclassified.

She described Lanás as "extremely polite" and well educated. She

said her family knew little about him.

The department stressed that Lanás' duties in the Inter-American Office were not such that he had access to confidential information. Officials of that office have been co-operating with the FBI for some time and have been aware of the situation, the department added.

Worked With ILO in Geneva.

The announcement related:

Lanás arrived in New York in September, 1940, after working as a translator for the International Labor Organization affiliated with the League of Nations at Geneva, Switzerland. He got his job in the Inter-American Co-ordinator's office in February, 1942.

The activities of the young South American first came to the attention of the FBI in the spring of 1941, on a tip from "highly confidential European sources" which indicated he might be acting as a German agent. Subsequently the FBI discovered a letter written in secret ink addressed to an individual in Lisbon and transmitting vital information about America's war production. The letter stated that from July, 1940, to March, 1941, about 7,000 planes were delivered to the Government, and also stated that 4,000 planes had been dispatched to England.

The innocuous portion of the letter, written in Spanish, purported to be a friendly note and stated merely that the writer could do nothing to assist in obtaining a visa to come to the United States.

It was signed "Yours until death, Gabriel."

Name and Address Fictitious.

The name and address signed to the letter proved to be fictitious. But the FBI began a patient search of numerous suspects.

Discovering that Lanás had received money from Lisbon, agents gathered specimens of his handwriting. Experts in the FBI labora-



ROBERTO LANÁS
VALLECILLA.

tory finally decided Lanás had written the secret-ink message.

Lanás' parents, four brothers and a sister still live in Cali, Colombia, the FBI said. He received his early education in Colombia and later attended Sapienza University at Rome and the Sorbonne in Paris.

The Justice Department said it was after his work with the labor organization in Geneva in 1938 and 1939 that he agreed to serve as a secret Nazi agent. The Germans

trained him in the use of secret ink and in Lisbon, the department said, arrangements were completed with the German Consulate for his activities in the United States.