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FOOTNOTE TO CICERO

Dorothy J. Keatts

One of the best known spy stories of our time is that of Operation Cicero, a textbook exercise in tradecraft set in neutral Ankara during World War II. It is, perhaps, of little importance that the exercise remained rather academic — that the information pilfered in the best traditions of the cloak-and-dagger business was never fully used by the Nazis; that the British, warned of the Ciceronian activity, took no effective action to stop it; and that Cicero himself was never brought to book. As a matter of fact, the academic nature of the exercise makes Operation Cicero a nice, neat package to handle, uncomplicated by consequences and relatively free of loose ends.

Cicero was the code name given by the Germans to the valet of the British Ambassador to Turkey. Cicero gained access to secret documents in the British Embassy in Ankara, photographed them, and sold the negatives to the Germans for large sums, paid in English pound notes. Apparently the Germans, suspecting the motives of Cicero's activity, delayed action on the information he provided. Before they were convinced of the authenticity of the documents, Cicero's operation was blown — happily for the literature of espionage, by a woman.

The case was first packaged and presented to the public by L. C. Moyzisch, Nazi military attaché at the German Embassy in Ankara in 1943-44 and purchasing agent in the Cicero transactions. Moyzisch's book, *Operation Cicero*, was a competent and factual piece of work. The movie version of the affair, called "Five Fingers," was designed for the market, of course, and bore the embellishments apparently necessary to successful merchandising. The Studio One television version appeared to be a batch of clips from the movie, with new faces and voices dubbed in. The general accuracy of the Moyzisch treatment was confirmed by Franz von Papen, German Ambassador in Ankara at the time of the Cicero operation, and by Allen Dulles,

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who reviewed the book for the American press. Both Herr von Papen and Mr. Dulles, however, intimated that other chapters on the affair might be written.

What those chapters may be, we do not know; and this essay is in no sense intended to suggest what either Herr von Papen or Mr. Dulles may have had in mind. This is simply a footnote to Cicero — a footnote on the woman in the case. The source is the American who was assigned the job of getting the woman out of Turkey before the Nazi agents could accomplish their mission of bringing her back to the German Embassy, dead or alive.

In his book, Moyzisch ascribes the collapse of the Cicero operation to the treason of his neurotic secretary, Elisabet. Elisabet, Moyzisch declares, sold out to the British and frightened Cicero into seclusion. In essence, Moyzisch probably is right, but his details need some revising and some supplementing.

Elisabet's real name was Nele Kapp. Her father, a prominent and respected German diplomat, was Consul General in Sofia during the war. It was largely as a favor to her father that Nele was allowed to go to Ankara to work. Nele's father detested the Nazi regime — silently, of course — and so did Nele. She had been brought up in English-speaking countries and had gone to school in Calcutta and in Cleveland, Ohio. During the early part of the war, she became a nurse in Stuttgart and later got into the German diplomatic service and was sent to her father's post in Sofia. Nele was very unhappy in Sofia and it was not long before she was transferred to Ankara as a code clerk. Here her unhappiness increased and her neuroticism developed — in fact, she was far more neurotic than Moyzisch indicates.

Apparently Nele wanted very much to get away from it all and decided to swap Nazi trade secrets for freedom. One of her first contacts was made in the office of a German Jewish dentist — the same one, incidentally, who was being patronized by some of her Nazi associates. She had a toothache, went to the dentist, and told him that she would like to be put in touch with an American. The dentist arranged for her to

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meet an American Foreign Service officer, also a victim of toothache. Nele told the American that her sympathies were entirely on the anti-Nazi side, that her father was an anti-Nazi, and that she wanted to give information to the Americans in return for a promise from them to get her out of Turkey — to America.

The Foreign Service officer transmitted her offer to the Ambassador, Mr. Steinhardt, who said "The Americans will promise nothing, but we will be glad to receive the information. If she cares to take it on that basis, that's fine." After all, Nele was German and was working for the Nazis. At that point Ambassador Steinhardt turned the whole thing over to the American Military Attaché, and Nele began to keep her part of the one-sided bargain.

Nele made a fairly full report of the Moyzisch activities — lists of Nazi spies who were working throughout the Middle East and other items which Moyzisch had thought important enough to cable to Berlin. Among these bits of information was the fact that on certain days of the month, usually on a Friday, Moyzisch got extremely excited, and the code room was locked. Nele reported that the man who called himself Cicero would phone, and everybody was shooed out of the place. All she knew about it was that it was very important and that it had to do with the British.

The American Military Attaché reported this bit of intelligence to Ambassador Steinhardt, who said that the British should be told. The British were told that there was a German agent called Cicero who was transmitting to the German Embassy something of great importance, that about every two weeks the Germans in the Embassy became very excited in transmitting this information by code to Berlin. The British, so far as we know, did not act on this advice. Had the Germans been putting to use the intelligence received from Cicero, the British would have had reason to suspect a leak. Actually, the Germans never did use the information.

This footnote really begins where Moyzisch's book ends — with the disappearance of Nele. She came to her American contact one day and said that the Nazis had found out about

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her and, in typical fashion, instead of confronting her with it they had offered her a vacation — two tickets to Budapest on the German plane which was to leave in two days from Istanbul. She was to go to Istanbul, get on this plane, visit her sick mother in Budapest, all at Nazi expense.

Nele said to the American, "I've got to get out. You've got to get me out!", and (with the Embassy's concurrence) he agreed to do it. It was a sticky business. Turkey was a neutral country, and if she were detected in the presence of Americans there would be trouble. It was decided that she should be sent to Cairo, where the American authorities would decide what should be done with her. But how could she be got to Cairo? All the roads, the stations, and the airports were carefully watched by Nazi agents, whose orders were that Nele should be caught dead or alive.

A plan was contrived, and Nele's disappearing act began. She was housed for a week with two American girls — secretaries from the US Embassy. This cover device led to such things as Nele being hidden under the beds when the girls' boyfriends came and to having her appearance changed. Her hair was very blonde — ash blonde — and the girls dyed it black. The girl who did most of the dye job got her hands so covered with dye that she couldn't go to work next day. Her boss came out to see the poor sick girl, bearing roses and condolences, both of which she had to accept with her hands under the covers. She finally got the dye off with gasoline.

The next step in the plan was this. The Taurus Express trains, both northbound and southbound, came into the station in Ankara at exactly the same moment and remained together in the station for about five minutes. The northbound train went to Istanbul but stopped soon at Ayash, a few miles out of Ankara. At this stop, one caught the train if he'd missed it in Ankara; it was possible to miss the train in Ankara and get to Ayash by automobile before the train did. The southbound Taurus went to Syria and to Baghdad and Iraq. One of the members of the escape party (our source) went alone to the station. Under pretense of going on an outing, some Americans from the Embassy went noisily to the girls' apart-

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ment, got the American girls, Nele, her luggage, and drove the disguised Nele to Ayash. The accomplice in the station at Ankara climbed into the rear car of the southbound train, moved forward a few cars, and then jumped out into the northbound train just as it was pulling out. His hope was that his followers (and he expected to be followed) would be searching the southbound train for him as the northbound Taurus left the station.

He leaped unwittingly into an empty car, in which the conductor was locking both front and rear doors. The doors had to be opened, as he had to get out of the train at Ayash, grab the girl and her suitcase, and get her in the train, all in a few minutes. The only person who could open them was the conductor. Our source told the conductor that he was in a terrible predicament. He explained that he was an American citizen and showed his passport. He said that he had just been married and his bride and her friends had missed the train. He explained that it was our custom after marriage to be conducted separately to the train — a silly American habit. The conductor, obviously looking for a tip, cooperated wholeheartedly. He promised to open both doors and to watch at one end while our source watched at the other for his bride. This worked beautifully. Our man jumped off, grabbed Nele, hopped back on the train, the conductor locked the doors again, and the train went off northward.

Elisabet was clutching some tablets in her hand the whole time of the escape — she called them sleeping tablets. Our friend gave her a loaded gun which she carried at all times. He also took along for the trip a bottle of whisky which she looked as if she needed — he was quite sure he did — and after they got on the train he gave her a fairly thick slug of it — straight Scotch. They lay down in the two berths — she took the upper berth and he the lower and, after just a few minutes, she said, "I'm going to be sick." He said, "Well, go to the bathroom and be sick." She replied, "All right, but you'll have to get outside. I'll knock on the door when you can come in again." So he very politely went outside, smiled at the conductor, waited for a knock, and went in again. This

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happened several times before they got off the train at about six in the morning and, as they were leaving the train, the conductor came up to the "bridegroom" and said, "Don't worry too much; they're often like that the first night."

But — Nele was not to go to Istanbul, where she certainly would have been seen. That Taurus Express carries a few cars which are taken off in the middle of the night to proceed to Balikesir, which was near a British camp. (Although Turkey was neutral almost until the end of the war, air bases by the score were built under Royal Air Force supervision for use in the event they became necessary. By now to some extent the British were partners in the operation.) The "newlyweds" got off the train in Balikesir, were met by a British officer, driven to the RAF installation, put up for the night, then driven in a British truck to Izmir. Here another difficulty was encountered. When the British representative took one look at Nele he said, "That girl is a German. I'll have nothing to do with her. The only good Germans are dead Germans."

This impasse was saved by an OSS man who had a caique (a small boat much used in these waters) coming in from Greece that night. Nele was taken in the caique to Cyprus and thence to Cairo.

In Cairo, Nele was interned in a prisoner-of-war camp, which made her very angry. She felt that she had been and could continue to be of service to the US Intelligence service. She wrote a letter to her American friend (who had helped her escape from Turkey) — which was intercepted, so that her friend was questioned by the Army authorities for consorting with the enemy. Despite this mess, Nele was sent to America, where she lived in Elizabeth, New Jersey, until the end of the war. Then she got a job as a restaurant hostess in Chicago, and is now living in California where she is married, — with one or more children. Our source last heard from her from California. He feels that she probably has never written anything of her story — that, from the tone of her letters, she probably would prefer to forget the whole thing.

What happened to Cicero? He didn't disappear entirely. He actually, at one time, went to the German Embassy — the

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postwar Free German Embassy — and claimed that he should be given real money to replace such counterfeit money as the Nazis had given him. At times he had small jobs for Turkish intelligence and, when last heard of, was a poor man, living in Ankara.

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