

The Detention of Gottfried Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen

Below is the ciphertext of the message sent by SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Kögel to RSHA Prague concerning Gottfried Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen.

Funkstelle:	Abgang:	Funk-
Abs. Dienststelle:	Tag: / / 4	Spruch Nr.:
	Zeit:	71
An: doe	Eingang:	
	Tag: 9 / 4 / 45	
vqh	Zeit: 2112	

Kopf: 1907 - 248 - HSD MCJ -

FUYDI DOKOK QZEON LTCLX
LHRHI VMSCJ KGUAA OCGXB
QTIMM XFCQV SJGVX UFPNS
EGXKE DIHDC VCAPQ GZAZD
PVAVP QYCGI JLTFM GKFTA
YFWYA VETOL RXFLF GKHTO
FBMGZ QBDRC FVQUL CYYBP
TNABA TPGQL YLSXE SNDXT
TPFER YYJKR DFEFQ JQRMZ
TPQBO EBUSN NDWWV FUJFQ
MZNCK TQXHP VDEDI VUYYL
OWAZS YQBWM HEDTI UAKNH
PFMTA VRE

The message was composed at 19:07 on 9 April 1945 and sent from KL Flossenbürg at 21:12. The message number in blue indicates that it is an outgoing message.

The Enigma concentration camp key (KL-Maschinenschlüssel) for 9 April 1945 is given below together with a few of the message keys for this day's outgoing messages. The message key for message Nr. 71 is indicated in red.

Enigma Keys for: 09.04.1945

UKW : B
W/O : 231 (with rotation)
Stecker : AM, BF, CD, EK, HQ, IO, LV, NT, SY, WZ
Rings : JEX

Message keys:

No:	Part:	1st.	CY	Indicator:	Start:	Stop:
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W/O for 17:30 - 23:59: 312 / EXJ

70	QWRPW	HSB	JIB	DZF	DAO
71	FUYDI 130	HSD MCJ	VQH WWL / DWL DAV		
72	NMXYM 103	RQX	ORR	HOA	ITD / OTD OZL

09.04.1945 - Nr. 71 - FUYDI - 1907 - 248 - HSD MCJ

X M X B X AN X RSHA X PRAG X GEHEIM X BETR X
 GRAF X GOTTFRIED X VON X BISMARCK X SCHOENHAUSEN
 X BEZ X DORT X FS X NR X EINS EINS SIEBEN NULL
 EINS X V X ZWO X VIER X VIER FUENF X
 CYDE
 OBENGENANTER WURDE AM X EINS EINS X EINS ZWO X
 VIER VIER X DURQ DEN X KRIM X SEK X VOGT X DES X
 RSHA X NAQ X FUERSTENBERG X UEBERSTELLT X KOEGEL X

The concentration camp messages use a large number of abbreviations. ‘X’ is used as full stop and as the point in abbreviations. Furthermore, it is used to indicate quotation marks to set out the name of persons and places. The four-letter group CYDE is an indication for the cipher operator to set one of the Enigma rotors (the leftmost wheel) to the letter D before he continues to decipher the rest of the message. Therefore this group is not part of the message text. Other common abbreviations are Q that is used to represent CH and SZ which stands for β – double-S ligature. M.B. is an abbreviation for “Mit Bitte” which here best can be translated as “With request”.

*Mit Bitte an RSHA Prag. Geheim.
 Betreff: Graf Gottfried von Bismarck-Schönhausen.
 Bezug: Dort Fernschreiben Nr. 117001 von 2.4.45.
 Obengenannter wurde am 11.12.44 durch den
 Kriminalsekretär Vogt des RSHA nach Fürstenberg
 überstellt.
 Kögel.*

English translation:

With request [for transmission] to RSHA Prague. Secret.
 Subject: Graf Gottfried von Bismarck-Schönhausen.
 Reference: Your Telex Nr. 117001 of 2 April 1945.
 The above-mentioned was on 11.12.44 handed over to
 Fürstenburg through Kriminalsekretär (Criminal Police
 Secretary) Vogt from RSHA.
 Kögel.

Gottfried Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen, born on 29 March 1901, was the second son of Herbert Fürst von Bismarck and the grandson of the Iron Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. He was a farmer and a member of the Nazi party (NSDAP) where in 1933 he was district leader (*Kreisleiter*) for the island Rügen. From March 1933 he became a member of the German Parliament (*Reichstag*). In 1935 he became chairman of the regional council (*Regierungspräsident*) for Stettin, and in 1938 he held the same position in Potsdam. He belonged to the inner circle of the friends of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and he quickly rose in the SS hierarchy, from SS-Untersturmführer (Second Lieutenant) in 1935 to SS-Brigadeführer from 30 January 1944.

On 29 July 1944 he was arrested and accused, in front of a Nazi People’s Court (*Volksgerichtshof*), of being actively involved in the assassination attempt on Hitler.

Since 1942 Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen had been in close contact with SA-Obergruppenführer Wolf-Heinrich Graf von Helldorf, Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg and General Friedrich Olbricht with the aim of stopping the war and starting negotiations with the allied forces. In the days preceding the attack he was in direct contact with Helldorf at army headquarters in Bendlerstrasse in Berlin. On 20 July 1944, on the day of the attack, he met there with Helldorf, Major Egbert Hayessen and Regierungsrat Hans Bernd Gisevius. He then learned that the meeting was seen as the last preparation for the takeover of key points and installations in Berlin. His involvement seems to have been on the periphery of the conspiracy even if he had direct contact with many of the major perpetrators.

On these grounds the Chief of the RSHA and the Security Police and Security Service, SS-Obergruppenführer Ernst Kaltenbrunner, decided to expel Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen from the SS. On 29 August 1944 his Reichstag membership was dissolved and on 1 September 1944 he was degraded to a common SS man and then expelled from the SS. The expel order carried the following comment from Heinrich Himmler:

“Sie sind erwiesenermaßen aktiv in den Attentatskomplex des 20. Juli 1944 verwickelt und haben dadurch Ihre Ehre verloren. Gez. H. Himmler.“

“It has been proved that you were actively involved in the assassination complex of 20 July 1944 and you have thereby lost your honour. Signed H. Himmler.”

On 4 October 1944 Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen was acquitted of the charges made against him by the Nazi People’s Court (*Volksgerichtshof*), but he was nevertheless sent to KL Sachsenhausen where, the historical accounts says, he stayed until spring 1945. However, the message above shows that it cannot have been that straight forward. He seems to have spent some time at KL Flossenbürg until 11 December 1944 when he was moved to Fürstenberg.

The reference to Fürstenberg can mean two things. Either he was moved to the special prison complex at KL Ravenbrück situated outside the village of Fürstenberg or he was moved to the prison cells in the SD police school (*Sicherheitspolizeischule*) nearby in Fürstenberg-Drögen. Both prison complexes were used by “Sonderkommission Lange” – The Special Committee Lange – a part of the “Sonderkommission 20. Juli 1944”, which was set up to investigate the assassination attempt on Hitler. Sonderkommission Lange was run by SS-Sturmbannführer and Kriminalrat Herbert Lange who was investigating the cases involving the general civilian sector and special cases. Even if the Sonderkommission Lange mainly dealt with the civilian sector, several higher military commanders, such as Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and General Friedrich von Rabenau, were kept and interrogated at Fürstenberg.

We do not know who Kriminalsekretär (Criminal Police Secretary) Vogt from the RSHA might be. Unfortunately the complete list of people working for the Sonderkommission Lange is not known. It could have been SS-Sturmbannführer Josef Vogt but the title Kriminalsekretär does not fit. Of course we do not know if the commander of KL Flossenbürg, Max Kögel, has got the title correct. Perhaps it should have been Kriminalrat instead of Kriminalsekretär.

Unlike many others in his position Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen survived the war and his stay in the concentration camps. But his luck did not last, on 14 September 1949 he was killed in a car accident in Verden south-east of Bremen.

References:

1. Johannes Tuchel, “Die Sicherheitspolizeischule Drögen und der 20. Juli 1944 – zur Geschichte der „Sonderkommission Lange““, (The Security Police School Drögen and 20 July 1944 – on the History of the “Special Committee Lange”), in Florian von Buttlar, Stefanie Endlich, and Annette Leo, “Fürstenberg-Drögen: Schichten eines verlassenen Ortes”, Edition Hentrich, Berlin, 1994
2. Ernst Klee, “Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer war was vor und nach 1945”, (The Persons Encyclopaedia for the Third Reich: Who Was What Before and After 1945), S. Fischer Verlag, 2003
3. Axis History Forum at <http://forum.axishistory.com/>