

Using the UK FOIA, part II

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Why does the UK government not want me to know the names of attendees at two European intelligence meetings, which were hosted in London and that took place more than 65 years ago? It's a question that really does need answering, particularly when one considers that everything that was said at the meetings – and the name of the principal UK attendee at both meetings – has been released to me. Even some of the attendees' military ranks have been released – but all bar one of the names of the people who attended the meetings are 'secret'.

First let me give you little background . . . Two years ago I was conducting research on stay-behind networks in post WWII Europe – the infamous 'Gladio' networks. I already knew that the Western Union Clandestine Committee (WUCC) had played an important part in the establishment of those networks and I was intrigued to find some WUCC papers listed at the National Archives website. Those papers were, however, being retained by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as they were still deemed 'sensitive' – even after the expiration of the usual thirty year rule.¹

With a spirit of 'nothing-ventured-nothing-gained', I sent an email to the relevant department at the FCO seeking access. After a prolonged dithering from the FCO, I was pleasantly surprised when the post brought me a thick manilla envelope: I had been given a copy of the minutes of the first two meetings of the WUCC! It had, surely, been all too easy. Oh, how right I was.

In spite of the fact that these papers dated from 1949, all but one of the names of the meeting attendees had been redacted. The name that was not being redacted was 'Major General Sinclair' (aka John 'Sinbad' Sinclair who was at the time deputy-chief of MI6). If nothing else, this name alone told me I was on the right track.

¹ See my article 'The Western Union Clandestine Committee: Britain and the "Gladio" networks' in *Lobster 72* for the full background:

<<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster72/lob72-western-union.pdf>> and see 'Using the UK FOIA' in *Lobster 74*:
<<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster74/lob74-uk-foia.pdf>> for the first instalment about using the UK FOIA.

Deducing redacted information

Both sets of minutes commence with a list of who was in attendance and this is where the redactions have taken place. The names are listed by country represented: the United Kingdom first, then France, the Netherlands, Belgium and lastly the United States of America. Then there are two names for the Secretariat.² The order of listing is the same for both meetings but there were more participants at the second one. This was, presumably, because it was not clear which contributors from Special Operations would be needed until after the first meeting had taken place.

By not redacting Major General Sinclair's name, nor the military ranks, the FCO have actually given me an excellent tool to use, along with publicly available information, to work out what some of these redacted names are.

I am going to reproduce here the layout of the pages with the list of attendees, so that it can be clearly seen that it is easy to work out the number of letters in the redacted names.

The list of attendees for the first meeting looks like this:

UNITED KINGDOM	Major General Sinclair (Chairman) Commander []
FRANCE	Colonel [] Commandant []
NETHERLANDS	Colonel []
BELGIUM	M. []
U.S.A.	Mr. [] (as an observer only)
SECRETARIAT	Mr. [] Major []

I hope you will immediately understand my point about being able to deduce the length of the redacted names, because everything is so neatly paginated. Even if it weren't, I could still place a tape measure on the printed paper and obtain a physical length for the gaps where the names should be and compare

² It is detailed elsewhere in the papers that, as the meetings were being hosted in London, the Secretariat would be made up of UK personnel (i.e. staff from MI6)

that against the open text.

The list of attendees for the second meeting looks like this:

UNITED KINGDOM	Major General Sinclair (Chairman) Commander []
FRANCE	Colonel [] Commandant [] Commandant [] (afternoon session only)
NETHERLANDS	Colonel [] (For certain items only) Colonel [] []
BELGIUM	M. []
U.S.A.	Mr. [] Mr [] (as observers only)
SECRETARIAT	Mr. [] Major []

What you may also note from seeing this list, is that one of the attendees at the second meeting has had their entire name (appellation and surname) redacted. I will come to this later but, for now, I will detail how my deductions progressed.

Starting with UK attendees, the surname of the second participant (who attended both meetings) is redacted and all that it says is 'Commander'. Measuring the length of redaction, which is half an inch long, I've been able to compare it to the typeface for 'Major General Sinclair'. This has enabled me to conclude that the second attendee was Commander Kenneth Cohen, as his surname is five letters long as is the redaction. At the time of the meetings, Commander Cohen held the position within SIS of 'controller of Europe' – an absolute shoe-in as an attendee.

Kenneth Herman Salaman Cohen joined SIS in 1936 and served until 1953. As well as English, he spoke French, German and Russian and received

French, Belgian, American and Czech medals of recognition for his war service. His career at MI6 included the post of Chief Staff Officer Training in 1943 and, then, promotion to Chief Controller Europe in 1945.³

Looking next at the French names, it can be seen that the first French attendee (a Colonel) was at both meetings. Using the same method to compare the redaction to the open text, this surname is seven or maybe eight letters long. The most likely candidate is therefore Colonel Marcel Mercier of the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage.

Following the WUCC meetings Colonel Mercier was posted to Berne, Switzerland, in 1952, under cover as Commercial Attaché. Whilst there, he ran operations against Communist North African Nationalists who were seeking asylum in Switzerland. Mercier collaborated with Swiss Federal Police (contrary to Swiss law). In late March 1957 his contact in the Federal police (General Rene Dubois) was found to have shot himself. Mercier was expelled from Bern soon after.⁴ He continued his war against African Nationals as a handler of *La Main Rouge* (The Red Hand) in Algerian French North Africa. *La Main Rouge* were already active before Mercier was posted to Algeria but their campaign of violence definitely intensified after his arrival.⁵

I mentioned earlier how one of the participants has their full name redacted: this is the third participant from the Netherlands who attended only the second meeting. Both the appellation and the surname are redacted in only this instance. The length of the redaction still reveals the number of letters redacted, which is fifteen. I think it safe to assume one space between the appellation and the surname, thus leaving a total of fourteen letters. I believe the reason that the appellation is redacted here is because the person was not a member of the military, nor exactly a civilian. I believe this person was Prince Bernhard, whose name, as written here, is fourteen letters long.

Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld was a naturalized Dutch citizen, who had married into the royal family of the Netherlands in 1937 and became Prince Consort to Queen Juliana of the Netherlands when she ascended to the Dutch throne in 1948. He was originally born Bernhard Leopold Friedrich Eberhard Julius Kurt Karl Gottfried Peter zur Lippe-Biesterfeld at Jena in

³ Information on Commander Cohen is available at <<http://www.specialforcesroh.com/showthread.php?31552>>.

⁴ See the AP news feed story 'Lid blows off spy ring in Swiss capital', *The Straits Times* (English-language newspaper in Singapore) 16 June 1957 at <<https://tinyurl.com/y8dxdxc>> or <<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19570616-1.1.10>>

⁵ See Thomas Riegler, 'The State as a Terrorist: France and the Red Hand' in Vol 6, No 6 (2012) of *Perspectives On Terrorism* – available online at <<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/229/html>>.

Germany on 29 June 1911. As a student in the mid 1930s he'd been a member of the cavalry based Reiter-SA and Reiter-SS units. The Prince's obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* on his death in 2004 includes the following comment about those Nazi affiliations:

'He had joined, he said, because had he not been a member of such an organisation it would have been made harder for him to pass his law exams; moreover, membership brought with it the free use of a garage. He resigned from the party in 1937 - although his letter, now in the National Archives in Washington, DC, ended with the words "Heil Hitler".'⁶

As many *Lobster* readers will be aware, Prince Bernhard played an important role in the establishment of the Bilderberg Group in the 1950s.⁷ The first item on the agenda at that initial Bilderberg meeting was 'The attitude towards communism and the Soviet Union.' The fourth, and final, item was also relevant: 'The attitude towards European integration and the European Defence Community.' This kind of topic continued to be a recurring theme at Bilderberg meeting for much of that first decade of its existence. Items such as 'Communist infiltration', 'The Western approach to Soviet Russia and communism' and 'Possible changes in the attitude of the U.S.S.R. to the West' are to be found on the (now openly available) early Bilderberg agendas.⁸

I have had no luck divining the other European names (suggestions from readers are most welcome) but the American names have not been much of a challenge. Using the same method of calculating the length of the surnames of the participants, it has been easy to deduce the first listed attendee from the United States (who attended both meetings). The redaction of the surname is 1 inch long and, referring to the typeface as before, I can calculate that 1 inch of type is thirteen letters long. The most likely candidate I can find for a potential American attendee with a surname that long is Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter. It is noted in the list of attendees that the visitors from the United States were there as 'observers only'. This would likely have meant that the Admiral would not have had his military rank recorded and been noted merely as 'Mr Hillenkoetter'. At the time of the WUCC meetings, Admiral Hillenkoetter was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

⁶ See <<https://tinyurl.com/y999oz2w>> or <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1478171/HRH-Prince-Bernhard-of-the-Netherlands.html>>.

⁷ It is fairly common knowledge that the first Bilderberg meeting took place at (and the Group itself is named after) The Hotel de Bilderberg in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. What is not so well known, perhaps, is that the Bilderberg hotel chain operates eighteen properties in the Netherlands. See <<https://www.bilderberg.nl/en/>>.

⁸ The agendas for all Bilderberg meetings are now available on the Group's own website. The earliest years start at <<http://www.bilderbergmeetings.org/conferences/1950.html>>.

According to the CIA biography of Admiral Hillenkoetter, he had previously undertaken 'Several tours as Assistant Naval Attaché, France: 1933-35, 1938-40, 1940-41 (Vichy regime), and 1946- 47'⁹ and was highly conversant with European matters. Previously appointed by President Truman as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in charge of the Central Intelligence Group, when the CIA was formally established in 1947, Admiral Hillenkoetter was its very first Director.¹⁰

The second listed U.S. participant from the second meeting did not attend the first meeting but, using the exact same method again, I have been able to deduce that this person had a surname about six letters long. My prime candidate is Frank Wisner – who, at the time of the meeting he attended, was Director of the CIA covert action department 'Office of Policy Coordination' (OPC). The OPC was a unique part of the CIA. While the 'National Security Council Directive on Office of Special Projects' (NSC 10/2) stated that the OPC would be funded from the CIA's secret budget, its command structure would be completely independent from the CIA Director. The power would, instead, lie with the State Department appointed Director of OPC – our Mr Wisner.

It has been said by his former colleague Thomas Braden that he (Frank Wisner) 'brought in a whole load of fascists after the war, some really nasty people.'¹¹ With regard to those fascists, the CIA itself has acknowledged (in its own academic journal on intelligence matters, *Studies in Intelligence*) that some highly questionable people were recruited after WWII.

'The sometimes brutal war record of many emigre groups became blurred as they became more critical to the CIA. DCI Hillenkoetter, for example, gave the chairman of the Displaced Persons Commission an ambiguous answer when the latter asked for a status report on some of the ethnic groups CIA used. Hillenkoetter did not deny that many emigres had sided with the Nazis, but did so, he said, less out of "a pro-German or pro-

⁹ See <<https://tinyurl.com/ybbaj9ay>> or <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/directors-and-deputy-directors-of-central-intelligence/hillen.html>>.

¹⁰ Admiral Hillenkoetter's name was one of the 'great and the good' who were listed as the dozen supposed members of the Majestic 12 committee in the psy-ops operation run by the US Air Force against the UFO community in the USA. See Mark Pilkington, *Mirage Men* (London: Constable, 2010).

¹¹ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (London: New Press, 2015), p. 34

Fascist orientation, but from a strong anti-Soviet bias.”¹²

The CIA itself seems to have spent quite a lot of time at the start of the new millennium examining these past links to ex-Nazis. A number of articles in *Studies in Intelligence* cover the subject in some detail. Additionally, Kevin Ruffner of the CIA’s History Staff authored a long study titled ‘Eagle and Swastika: CIA and Nazi War Criminals and Collaborators’. Of particular interest is chapter 7, ‘Could He Not Be Brought to This Country and Used?’, which frequently mentions OPC and Frank Wisner’s use of two specific ex-Nazi sympathisers as anti-communist warriors.

‘The fact that the Office of Policy Coordination wanted Nicholas Poppe and Gustav Hilger as consultants and brought them to the United States for permanent residence is a significant step. It indicated that American intelligence had expanded its idea of what constituted insightful perspectives on the Soviet Union. German diplomats and Russian social scientists with Nazi records, in addition to German wartime intelligence officers and agents, were now regarded as valuable assets in the struggle against the Soviet Union. While the use of Poppe and Hilger turned out to be rather benign, OPC had other, more sinister plans to develop “secret armies” by utilizing émigré groups. Inevitably, these plans brought Wisner’s OPC into greater contact with other collaborators of the Third Reich.”¹³

The remaining name I have been able to work out is for the second person in the Secretariat, a Major with a surname of 12 or 13 letters (quite a long surname). The most likely candidate for this is Major Richard Arnold-Baker – another WUCC participant who was originally from Germany. Born Werner Gaunt von Blumenthal on 26 July 1914 in Munich, he changed his name by deed poll at the age of 24,¹⁴ having escaped Nazi Germany to come to Britain. In May 1940 Richard Arnold-Baker was one of three members of the British legation in Berne¹⁵ who rode by bicycle all the way to Bordeaux when a

¹² See <<https://tinyurl.com/jesfw4r>> or <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/STUDIES%20IN%20INTELLIGENCE%20NAZI%20-%20RELATED%20ARTICLES_0015.pdf>.

¹³ Kevin Conley Ruffner, ‘Eagle and Swastika: CIA and Nazi War Criminals and Collaborators’ (Washington, DC: CIA History Staff, April 2003) available online at <<https://tinyurl.com/ycrjalht>> or <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA%20AND%20NAZI%20WAR%20CRIM.%20AND%20COL.%20CHAP.%201-10,%20DRAFT%20WORKING%20PAPER_0001.pdf>.

¹⁴ See <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34558/page/6238/data.pdf>>.

¹⁵ It has been noted in several books on the history of MI6 that these kind of overseas posts often required regular contact with resident MI6 officers.

German invasion seemed likely. Safely back in Britain, he was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps in November 1940 and then served in MI6 during most of the war.¹⁶ He was certainly working for MI6 when, in May of the next year, he had adopted the cover name of Captain Barnes as part of the group of MI6 officers who interrogated Rudolf Hess.¹⁷ He was promoted an Honorary Major on 1st January 1949.¹⁸

I hope I have shown that the information that the FCO are claiming should stay secret after 65 years can easily be worked out – by exploiting the method that has been used to make the information secret, i.e. the redactions themselves.

What has most bemused me has been the poor handling of the case by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). They are the public body who are supposed to act as an impartial arbitrator when members of the public appeal against such denials of access to information. It's become blatantly clear to me, however, that the ICO have not displayed the slightest independence from the FCO and have, in fact, been guided by the FCO as regards the continued redactions.

In August of 2017 I had my original appeal to the ICO denied. They agreed with the FCO that the redacted names should remain secret. One of the arguments put forward to justify the continued redaction was that all of the other information contained in the WUCC minutes had been released to me. It seems logical to me that this actually cuts both ways and actually weakens the argument for continued redaction. I have progressed my case to a higher level and part of my case for that higher appeal has included questioning how, if everything that was said at the two meetings is not now considered secret, how can the names of the people who said those words be secret. At the moment, my appeal is due to be heard by the First Tier Tribunal – the body that considers appeals to a higher level following a decision by the ICO.

I will update Lobster with the results of my higher level appeal and - if any of the redacted names are released to me – I will compare them with the ones I have mentioned here in this article.

¹⁶ As did his brother Captain Charles Arnold-Baker (née Wolfgang Charles Werner von Blumenthal).

¹⁷ Following his crash-landing in Scotland, Hess was first taken to the Tower of London. Meanwhile, Mytchett Place near Aldershot was transformed into Camp Z with guards ferried in from nearby Pirbright Barracks. See chapter 1 of Stephen McGinty, *Camp Z: How British Intelligence Broke Hitler's Deputy* (London: Quercus, 2011)

¹⁸ See <http://www.unithistories.com/officers/Army_officers_A07.html>.

With confidence, I can say that this one is going to run and run. More, indeed, anon.