

COUNT FIVE AND DIE

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THE long tentacles of German Intelligence were strained to their utmost just before D-Day, for the readiness of the Allied Forces to invade the Continent was known but not the country where they would strike. Holland or France was every man's guess, and Allied Intelligence planned to bluff the enemy into concentrating a considerable fighting force in one country while the Allied Forces landed on the relatively less guarded beaches of the other.

In charge of this subtle strategy was Major Julien Howard, an Englishman with a fine record of secret achievements, some of which accounted for the stern set of his mouth and a certain tension in his manner which on occasions was ominously felt by his staff.

His second-in-command was a dark-haired, good-looking young American, Captain Bill Ranson. Very shortly after beginning to work with the major, Bill was aware he was not in his full confidence, and Howard knew that the American captain lacked confidence in him, although both concealed their criticisms of each other from those working under them.

Under the cover of being a new documentary film company known as Arista Films, Howard was magnificently supported in his project by a mainly Dutch staff. A pretty English girl, Mary Jane Lennie, was the unit's decoder; the receptionist was also English; and everyone, young, middle-aged and elderly, was eager and willing, and superbly courageous. Among the Dutchmen was Jan Gucht, a tall, fair, powerful lad in his twenties, who was the liaison man between the London unit and the Dutch Underground movement; another courageous boy was Piet Van Ryt, the radio operator, and there was Mr. Hendrijk, an older man with a drooping moustache who printed warning leaflets and other information which his wife Karlotta wrote in Dutch on Howard's instructions. The most pathetic figure of them all was Dr. Mulder, a scholarly man of sixty-odd who had been Professor of Psychology at the Hague University for twenty-two years. The Gestapo had seized his Jewish wife and killed her, and, escaping to London with his last valuable possession, his young son Willem, the professor had joined the unit as the psychological warfare expert.

In their offices on the third floor of a building in Wardour Street, the staff of the Arista Film Company in their separate ways all helped to spread false information across the water to the Dutch Resistance Movement—believing it was true—and only Major Howard and Bill knew that what was believed to be the greatest secret of the war was the greatest bluff.

As the chief man in contact with the Dutch Resistance, Jan Gucht was flown to Holland to warn the Underground leaders of the imminent invasion, and in his place Rolande, a strikingly beautiful girl with flaxen hair, was smuggled into the country.

Bill, ordered to meet the plane which brought her from Holland, was taken aback when he discovered that the new radio operator was a girl, and he chuckled wickedly to himself at the thought of the English major's reactions about the sex of the newest member of the staff of "Arista Films."

Rolande had left Holland with only a small rucksack and the trousers and jacket she was wearing, and as she and Bill walked towards the car he told her that the first thing to be done was to buy a minimum wardrobe.

Standing beside the open bonnet of a small car, apparently repairing a breakdown, was Martins, the small lame porter of Arista Films, and as Rolande walked past he covertly took in every detail of her appearance. With a satisfied smile he watched the American and the new radio operator drive away, and when the car was out of sight he limped into a near-by telephone booth and made a call.

Howard was introduced to Rolande in the flat which he shared with the American and was as taken aback as Bill had been on finding that Jan had been replaced by a girl. But, unlike Bill, her attractions left him unmoved. What he demanded was efficiency, and, assuming that Rolande would not have been sent out without that essential quality, he took her over to the company's office and introduced her to her colleagues.

With eager, anxious faces the Dutch nationals asked for news of their country, and if Rolande knew their favourite haunts and their home towns. Taking a note from her handbag, she handed it to Karlotta.

"It was given to me by a man," was all the explanation she gave.

Karlotta's trembling fingers snatched at it. "It's from my sister. They are well and alive," she exclaimed, almost swaying with relief.

Having no relatives left in the country, Dr. Mulder asked if his favourite Chinese cook was still at Riesel's, his favourite restaurant, and a little hesitantly Rolande replied that he was.

"The Chinese chef was at Boorn's," Karlotta cut in significantly.

There was a tense silence and, standing in the background, Major Howard watched suspicion dawn on the

faces of the Dutch staff. Rolande smiled disarmingly and counter-attacked by tripping Dr. Mulder up in a memory test about a statue in a wing of the University of Hague where he had taught for twenty-two years. A relieved laugh broke out.

"As a psychologist I should have been the first to know how easily one believes that which is suggested to one," Dr. Mulder smiled genially.

The major unobtrusively opened the door which shut off his private office from the other rooms and, sending for Holman, an English member of the staff, he told him to search Rolande's things before they were collected and taken to her apartment. As Holman left to carry out the order, Bill's voice could be heard calling everyone into Howard's office, where there was a large detailed map of Holland set in the wall behind his desk.

"Up to to-day we've all been working on Holland as a whole," he told his staff as they sat down. "but from now on we're going to concentrate on a particular area... a twenty-mile strip of Dutch coast ten miles on each side of a town called Oostvorne."

The expressions on the faces in front of him were grave and absorbed, and as he continued the briefing about the supposed place of invasion, Howard noted each one, and he saw as he pointed to the place on the map that Rolande's half-parted, smiling lips closed tensely and her attention became wholly riveted on what he was saying.

"Our job will be to collect everything that's known on that twenty-mile strip," Howard concluded, and he added rather abruptly: "That's all I wanted to say to you."

Ranson looked troubled. He felt the major should have warned the staff about "careless talk," and before the little group of men and women trooped out of the office he jumped to his feet. Howard frowned.

"You want to add something?" he asked the captain.

"I do," Bill answered and, turning to the group, he said: "Watch what you say and what you do. Think before you say anything and then don't say it, anyway. That's all," he finished.

With a nod of dismissal Howard sent the personnel back to their jobs, and as the last one left he turned to Bill angrily.

"If I'd wanted that said I would have told you," he snapped.

Bill felt his temper rising. "You handed out the 'biggest secret' of the war like it was tea and cakes," he returned.

The major walked over to the window covered by a Venetian blind.

"It's possible I have information that you don't have, Ranson," he answered curtly. "There isn't much time left. The Germans haven't even nibbled yet... and they've got to bite."

Ranson made an awkward conciliatory gesture, but Howard saw that in his heart his captain was dissatisfied with the way the great bluff was being handled.

In the outer office Bill found Rolande waiting for him and, taking her arm, he piloted her towards the narrow stairs, passing Martins on the way. Bill stopped and introduced them and then, picking their way out between a large number of crates, he and Rolande emerged into the street. Calling a taxi, Bill took the new operator to her own apartment, where she found her clothes and rucksack lying on the bed.

"I am so happy it is to be my country," she told Bill, after thanking him for his help.

Bill took her hand and held it. Both were a little disturbed by the physical contact.

"Good-night," Rolande said stiffly, taking her hand away.

"Good-night," Bill returned, but his smile said everything the two brief words did not express.

Watching for the captain to leave were Martins and his colleague Brauner. Both were acting under the orders of Faber, an officer in the German Army who was practising as a London suburban dentist, and as Bill passed into the street they unobtrusively made their way in through the open entrance and, climbing the stairs, knocked sharply on Rolande's door. They were her real colleagues—German secret agents.

BILL'S rapidly-growing attachment for Rolande quickly became an open secret, but although their pleasant interludes together relieved some of the strain of work, it did not lessen the anxiety all felt as the days passed and the messages which came in on the short-wave receiver reported that Jan had not contacted any one of the six Underground groups.

"Isn't it obvious to all of you by now the Gestapo's got him?" Howard shouted as Piet, with a hard, set face, handed him one morning the latest negative report just decoded by Mary Jane. Piet stared at the Englishman, astounded by his anger and irritation, and then, without replying, he turned and walked out of the office.



Bill, ordered to the plane which brought her from Holland, was taken aback when he discovered that the new radio operator was a girl
Rolande (Annemarie Durringer), Bill Ranson (Jeffrey Hunter)



Dr. Mulder asked if his favourite Chinese cook was still at Riesel's, his favourite restaurant
Rolande, Karlotta (Marianne Walla), Dr. Mulder (David Kossoff)



The Major walked over to the window covered by a Venetian blind.
"It's possible I have information that you don't have, Ranson," he answered curtly
Major Howard (Nigel Patrick)
"You just stop them... it's a trick," she said with conviction
Rolande, Faber (Rolf Lefebvre)



"If these are to be printed by Tuesday," Hendriek was saying as he rejoined the others, "I shall have to stay on here to-night."

Bill nodded.

"That should be O.K. I'll check with Howard," he answered.

Piet smiled wryly.

"Be careful he doesn't bite your head off. He's worse than ever this morning," he warned the captain.

Ranson's news for his superior was not more encouraging than Piet's.

"Still no troop movements into Holland," he said, tossing his report on to Howard's desk. "Hendriek wants to work over to-night," he went on as the major made no comment.

To Bill's surprise Howard refused the required permission.

"I don't want anyone working to-night," he said emphatically. "There's been too much night work lately. We're all under a strain. I don't want a crop of nervous breakdowns on my hands."

Bill looked at the major incredulously. He had expressly asked for the leaflets to be ready by Tuesday. Solicitously he asked him how he was feeling. White with anger, Howard answered scathingly and denied he was undergoing any unusual strain.

"You look to me like a man that's cracking up," Bill retorted. "A set-up like ours can't afford that kind of boss."

Howard controlled the biting reply which sprang to his mind, and speaking in an even tone he said:

"What about having a little confidence in me . . . and once in a while acting as though I knew what I

was doing? I know it will be difficult," he went on, "but why not give it a try?"

Bill stood uncertainly silent.

"O.K., I'll try," he said without conviction.

That evening, while Rolande and Bill were having a drink, the American saw Parrish, the English security man, whose job it was to watch the office at night.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, calling the man aside.

Parrish grinned.

"Major Howard gave us leave," he answered, jerking his head in the direction of Miller who alternated the day and night watches with him.

Bill sensed that something was wrong.

"Have a good time," he said, dismissing Parrish in an easy tone and hurried to the telephone.

Bill expected the major himself would be at the office, for he had said as much that morning, but on receiving no reply to his call he returned to Rolande.

"I'm going back to the office," he told her in a disturbed voice, and briefly explained the reason.

"May I come with you?" Rolande asked.

Bill helped her into her coat and, hailing a taxi, drove quickly to the Wardour Street address. The office was in darkness, but it appeared normal.

"I'll just go through," Bill said in an undertone, and walked quietly to a glass-panelled door which led off the larger office to a flight of stairs. As he approached it he heard a movement on the other side. Drawing his gun, he paused. Suddenly from the top of the stairs came the sound of shots which shattered the glass panel.

Untouched, Bill returned the shot, flattening himself against the wall for protection. There was an ominous thud as of a body falling down the stairs, and pushing

open the door, both Bill and Rolande saw a man sprawling into the passageway. Rolande recognised him as Brauner. Bill switched on the low-powered blue black-out light and, handing Rolande his gun, he pulled the wounded man into the office and left her to guard him while he searched the building.

Howard's office was in a state of chaos, and hearing a clatter of footsteps outside, he looked through the window and saw the little lame porter making off through the back entrance. He closed the window thoughtfully. As he did so the sound of a shot came from the larger office. Swinging round, he ran to where he had left Rolande with the badly-wounded man. Realising that in his dying delirium and despairing appeal to her to help him that Brauner would implicate her if he did not die before he was arrested, Rolande had shot him.

"He tried to snatch the gun. I had to do it. I had to," she cried as Bill reached her and lowered her head into her hands.

In a mute and dazed state Bill took Rolande back to her apartment, and, admitting to herself that she loved him, Rolande found herself in his arms.

Calling the captain to account for his unexpected return to the office, the major told Bill that he and Rolande had ruined a carefully-laid plan. False information about the invasion plans had been left in the safe, information it was vital to get the Germans to act on, and the raid about which the major had received a "tip off" had looked like being a success until the American and Rolande had made their untimely entry. Now it was not known exactly how much the German agents had had time for, as no one believed that the dead man had raided the premises alone.

"And Martins? Did you know about him?" Bill demanded.

The major looked at Bill steadily.

"Yes, we gave him all the rope he wanted . . . as far as he's concerned we've just lost a porter, that's all," he went on, and explained that by not arresting Martins the planted information stood the best chance of reaching the right quarter.

With blazing eyes Bill demanded to know why Howard had not taken him into his confidence. The major switched on a tape recorder which he had secreted in Rolande's room, and outraged Bill heard a recording of a tender conversation which had taken place between them.

"I think she's a German agent," Howard told Bill levelly, and added that although he knew that Bill was very attached to her, he believed Rolande was making up to him for what useful information she might learn. "Jan didn't contact any of the underground groups . . ." the major reminded the American, and he pointed out that the new radio operator had arrived the same day that Jan had left.

It was not much to go on, but Bill realised there was cause for suspicion.

"I don't believe it," he flung at the major with despairing defiance as the sinister doubt gnawed at his heart. There was one way to get proof. Strategic German defences in Holland had been bombed the previous night, and as precise information on the results was needed, it was decided to send Piet to get it and not to keep his mission a secret from the group.

Piet listened to his instructions with boyish eagerness, and Howard timed each step of the way.

"You'll make contact with us . . . at the latest at sixteen hundred hours," he told the boy.

Piet nodded with confidence.

"It's all very clear," he said, ". . . I've never been on one of these missions before. Will I be provided with something I could take, in case I'm caught . . . I've heard talk about cyanide pills . . . or is it just talk?" he asked seriously.

Howard's eyes avoided Piet's. If the boy were caught and if he were broken and gave the information that the Allies intended to invade at Oostvorne, one purpose would be served.

"It's . . . just talk," he muttered.

Piet looked at Bill for confirmation, but he, too, avoided Piet's eyes, and in the searing silence which followed Piet left them.

"We'll hear from him," Bill said finally.

Howard's face showed the tremendous strain of the past minutes. "See he gets off all right," he ordered Bill curtly.

SOME hours after the estimated time of Piet's arrival in Holland had passed, an unbroken silence confirmed Howard's fears that the Gestapo had got him.

"I guess I know it, too," Bill admitted with pain in his voice and a bitter twist of his lips.

"You'll have to go on seeing her, Bill," Howard said with genuine compassion. "She mustn't know we're on to her."

Bill swallowed the drink he had poured out for himself with a gulp. "I know," he answered savagely.

That morning news came through the usual channels that the Germans were moving troops into Holland, and the report was given to Rolande to take to the major

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Faber made for the room where he kept his secret files, and emptied them on to the floor and set them alight. But Howard's men were too quick for him to destroy much and, bursting open the door, one stamped out the flames while Faber was taken back to Howard.

"Where is Rolande?" Howard demanded.

"I do not know," Faber answered steadily, and casually lifted his hand to his mouth.

Howard jumped forward and gripped Faber's wrist, but it was too late. Five seconds later the "count five and die" capsule had done its work.

Upstairs Dr. Mulder had found Willem and as he carried him down in his arms, tears of relieved joy filled his old eyes.

Telling Bill to search the place, Howard ordered Faber's body to be removed and withdrew the men. Rolande and Martins had both to be found and time was the precious factor.

Following a lead on the radio cabinet Bill found it divided. One half of the cable led towards the door. He followed it, and, finding it took him down to the furnace room, he slipped his gun out of his pocket. Easing the door open he made his way stealthily down a flight of wooden steps and saw Rolande by the light of the torch beside her, sitting by a transmitter. Groping for the light, he switched it on.

"Don't try anything Rolande," he warned.

"You're too late, Bill," Rolande said quietly. "I've sent my message. They know it's all a bluff about Holland."

Ordering her to turn round and place her hands on the top of her head, Bill patted her pockets to see if she were armed.

"All right. Lower your hands and turn round . . . you played it just the way we wanted," he taunted her, although it wrung his heart. "The invasion *is* going through Holland," he went on. "This has been a double-bluff, sweetheart," he added with sudden decision.

"I don't believe you," she gasped.

"It doesn't matter much what you believe now, does it?" Bill commented, glancing significantly at the gun in his hand. "Let's go," he added curtly.

As he turned, Rolande seized the gun which, unnoticed by Bill, was lying on the slag heap. Bill's back was towards her and threatened by Rolande he had to drop his own gun.

"Why did you have to come down here . . . Why did it have to be you?" Rolande asked brokenly as he turned and faced her.

Bill did not reply but, lunging forward, he tried to take her gun. Rolande fired and Bill fell almost at her feet.

With tears streaming down her face Rolande looked down at the dying man and, crying helplessly, she ran to the transmitter. Blinded by tears her hand tapped out the message on the Morse key, then, forcing herself to be calm, she hurried up the wooden stairway and out into the street.

Bill staggered to his feet and up the stairs to the telephone but as he took off the receiver he heard a shot.

Martins had escaped from Faber's house during the raid but he was not far away. Only Rolande, Faber and himself knew that Willem was in the dentist's house, and he had shot Rolande for her betrayal.

Gasping for breath Bill reeled to where Rolande lay as if asleep. With Faber removed she had been able to warn the High Command of the trap being laid for them. But Bill's cool assertion of a double-bluff had proved Faber right, but the peaceful expression on her face showed none of this conflict.

Slowly and painfully Bill groped his way towards death, scarcely aware that he had tricked Rolande into sending another message. But when the Allied Armies landed on the beaches of Normandy on June 6th, 1944, ten German divisions were waiting in Holland for an invasion which never came.