

Agent Zigzag

Ben Macintyre

Published by Bloomsbury

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Lov**er**reading.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

CONTENTS

<i>Author's Note</i>	vii
<i>Map</i>	x
Prologue	1
1. The Hotel de la Plage	3
2. Jersey Gaol	12
3. Island at War	23
4. Romainville	31
5. Villa la Bretonnière	41
6. Dr Graumann	51
7. Codebreakers	65
8. The Mosquito	76
9. Under Unseen Eyes	86
10. The Drop	95
11. Martha's Exciting Night	105
12. Camp 020	113
13. 35, Crespigny Road	125
14. What a Way Out	139

15.	Freda and Diane	149
16.	Abracadabra	163
17.	The Greater the Adventure	175
18.	Stowaway Spy	190
19.	Joli Albert	198
20.	Damp Squib	212
21.	The Ice Front	224
22.	The Girl at the Ritz	235
23.	Sabotage Consultant	248
24.	Lunch at the Lutétia	257
25.	The Prodigal Crook	268
26.	Doodlebugs	278
27.	Going to the Dogs	288
28.	Case Dismissed	298
	Aftermath	309
	<i>Paperback Postscript</i>	321
	<i>Appendix</i>	329
	<i>Notes</i>	331
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	353
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	355
	<i>Picture Credits</i>	359
	<i>Index</i>	361

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The true story that follows is based on official papers, letters, diaries, newspaper reports, contemporary accounts and memoirs.

I was first alerted to the existence of the Englishman Eddie Chapman by his obituary in *The Times*. Among the lives of the great and good, here was a character who had achieved a certain greatness, but in ways that were far from conventionally good. The obituary was intriguing as much for what it did not say – and could not know – about Chapman's exploits in the Second World War, since those details remained under seal in MI5's secret archives. At that time, it seemed the full story of Eddie Chapman would never be told.

But then, under a new policy of openness, MI5 began the selective release of hitherto classified information that could not embarrass the living or damage national security. The first 'Zigzag files' were released to the National Archives in 2001. These declassified archives contain more than 1,700 pages of documents relating to Chapman's case: transcripts of interrogations, detailed wireless intercepts, reports, descriptions, diagrams, internal memos, minutes, letters and photographs. The files are extraordinarily detailed, describing not only events and people but also the minutiae of a spy's life, his changing moods and feelings, his hopes, fears and contradictions. Chapman's diligent case officers set out to paint a complete picture of the man, with a meticulous (sometimes hour-by-hour) account of his actions. I am particularly grateful to MI5 for agreeing to my request to declassify additional files relating to the case, and to Howard Davies of the National Archives for helping to facilitate those supplementary releases.

Eddie Chapman's memoirs were published after the war, but the Official Secrets Act prevented him from describing his exploits as a double agent, and his own version of events was often more entertaining than reliable. As his handlers noted, he had no sense of chronology whatsoever. All quotations are cited in the endnotes, but for clarity I have standardised spelling and have selectively used reported speech as direct speech. Chapman's story has also emerged from the memories of the living, people touched, directly or indirectly, by the individuals and events described, and I am grateful to the dozens of interviewees in Britain, France, Germany and Norway – including Betty Chapman – who were willing to talk to me for so many hours, recalling a past now more than half a century old. For obvious reasons, some of those involved in the more clandestine areas of Chapman's life have requested anonymity.

Just weeks before this book was due to go to press, MI5 discovered an entire secret file, overlooked in previous transfers to the public archives, and generously provided me with full access to its contents. That file (which will now become available at the National Archives) gives extraordinary psychological insights into Chapman's character, as seen by his case officers. It is, perhaps, the last missing piece in the Zigzag puzzle.

Zigzag. *n, adj, adv and vb:* ‘. . . a pattern made up of many small corners at an acute angle, tracing a path between two parallel lines; it can be described as both jagged and fairly regular’.

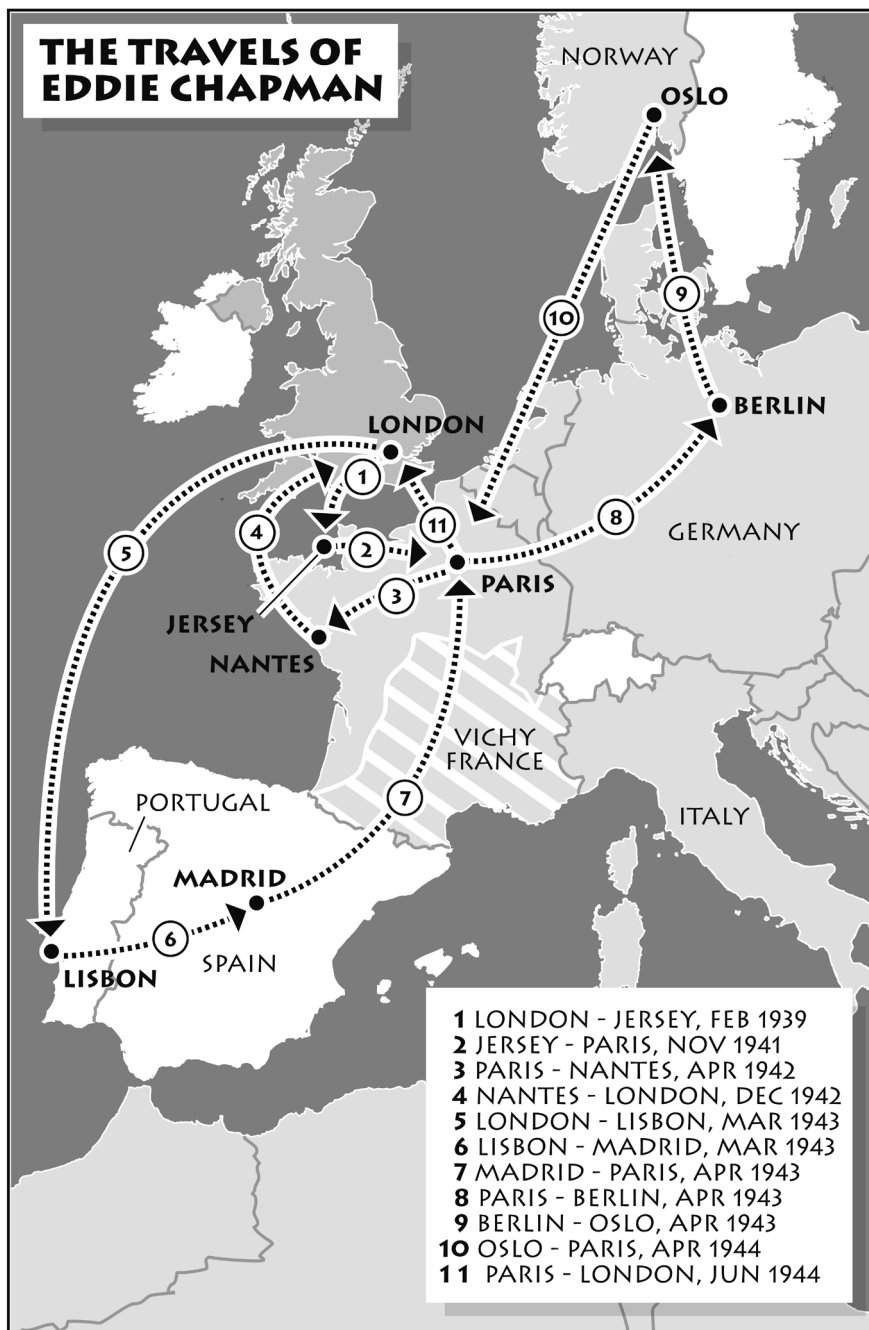
‘It is essential to seek out enemy agents who have come to conduct espionage against you and to bribe them to serve you. Give them instructions and care for them. Thus double agents are recruited and used.’

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

‘War makes thieves and peace hangs them.’

George Herbert

THE TRAVELS OF EDDIE CHAPMAN



Prologue

2.13 a.m., 16 December 1942

A German spy drops from a black Focke-Wulf reconnaissance plane over Cambridgeshire. His silk parachute opens with a rustle, and for twelve minutes he floats silently down. The stars are out, but the land beneath his feet, swaddled in wartime blackout, is utterly dark. His nose bleeds copiously.

The spy is well equipped. He wears British-issue army landing boots and helmet. In his pocket is a wallet taken from a British soldier killed at Dieppe four months earlier: inside are two identity cards, which are fake, and a letter from his girlfriend Betty, which is genuine. His pack contains matches impregnated with quinine for ‘secret writing’, a wireless receiver, a military map, £990 in used notes of various denominations, a Colt revolver, an entrenching tool, and some plain-glass spectacles for disguise. Four of his teeth are made from new gold, paid for by Hitler’s Third Reich. Beneath his flying overalls he wears a civilian suit that was once of fashionable cut but is now somewhat worn. In the turn-up of the right trouser leg has been sewn a small cellophane package containing a single suicide pill of potassium cyanide.

The name of the spy is Edward Arnold Chapman. The British police also know him as Edward Edwards, Edward Simpson and Arnold Thompson. His German spymasters have given him the codename of ‘Fritz’ or, affectionately, ‘Fritzchen’ – Little Fritz.

The British secret services, as yet, have no name for him. That evening the Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire, after an urgent call from a gentleman in Whitehall, has instructed all his officers to be on the lookout for an individual referred to only as 'Agent X'.

Eddie Chapman lands in a freshly ploughed field at 2.25 a.m., and immediately falls face-first into the sodden soil. Dazed, he releases his parachute, then climbs out of his blood-spattered flying suit and buries the bundle. He shoves the revolver into a pocket and digs into the pack for a map and torch. The map has gone. He must have dropped it in the dark. On hands and knees he searches. He curses and sits on the cold earth, in the deep darkness, and wonders where he is, who he is, and whose side he is on.

The Hotel de la Plage

Spring came early to the island of Jersey in 1939, and the sun that poured through the dining-room window of the Hotel de la Plage formed a dazzling halo around the man sitting opposite Betty Farmer with his back to the sea, laughing as he tucked into the six-shilling Sunday Roast Special ‘with all the trimmings’. Betty, eighteen, a farm girl newly escaped from the Shropshire countryside, knew this man was quite unlike any she had met before.

Beyond that, her knowledge of Eddie Chapman was somewhat limited. She knew that he was twenty-four years old, tall and handsome, with a thin moustache – just like Errol Flynn in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* – and deep hazel eyes. His voice was strong but high-pitched with a hint of a north-eastern accent. He was ‘bubbly’, full of laughter and mischief. She knew he must be rich because he was ‘in the film business’ and drove a Bentley. He wore expensive suits, a gold ring and a cashmere overcoat with mink collar. Today he wore a natty yellow spotted tie and a sleeveless pullover. They had met at a club in Kensington Church Street, and although at first she had declined his invitation to dance, she soon relented. Eddie had become her first lover, but then he vanished, saying he had urgent business in Scotland. ‘I shall go,’ he told her. ‘But I shall always come back.’

Good as his word, Eddie had suddenly reappeared at the door of her lodgings, grinning and breathless. ‘How would you like to

go to Jersey, then possibly to the south of France?’ he asked. Betty had rushed off to pack.

It was a surprise to discover they would be travelling with company. In the front seat of the waiting Bentley sat two men: the driver a huge, ugly brute with a crumpled face; the other small, thin and dark. The pair did not seem ideal companions for a romantic holiday. The driver gunned the engine and they set off at thrilling speed through the London streets, screeching into Croydon airport, parking behind the hangar, just in time to catch the Jersey Airways plane.

That evening they had checked into the seafront hotel. Eddie told the receptionist they were in Jersey to make a film. They had signed the register as Mr and Mrs Farmer of Torquay. After dinner they moved on to West Park Pavilion, a nightclub on the pier, where they danced, played roulette, and drank some more. For Betty, it had been a day of unprecedented glamour and decadence.

War was coming, everyone said so, but the dining room of the Hotel de la Plage was a place of pure peace that sunny Sunday. Beyond the golden beach, the waves flickered among a scatter of tiny islands, as Eddie and Betty ate trifle off plates with smart blue crests. Eddie was half way through telling another funny story, when he froze. A group of men in overcoats and brown hats had entered the restaurant and one was now in urgent conversation with the head waiter. Before Betty could speak, Eddie stood up, bent down to kiss her once, and then jumped through the window, which was closed. There was a storm of broken glass, tumbling crockery, screaming women and shouting waiters: Betty Farmer caught a last glimpse of Eddie Chapman sprinting off down the beach with two overcoated men in pursuit.

Here are just some of the things Betty did not know about Eddie Chapman: he was married; another woman was pregnant with his child; and he was a crook. Not some halfpenny bag-snatcher, but a dedicated professional criminal, a ‘prince of the underworld’, in his own estimation.

For Chapman, breaking the law was a vocation. In later years, when some sort of motive for his choice of career seemed to be called for, he claimed that the early death of his mother, in the TB ward of a pauper's hospital, had sent him 'off the rails' and turned him against society. Sometimes he blamed the grinding poverty and unemployment in northern England during the Depression for forcing him into a life of crime. But in truth, crime came naturally to him.

Edward Chapman was born in Burnopfield, a tiny village in the Durham coalfields, on 16 November 1914, a few months into the First World War. His father, a marine engineer and too old to fight, had ended up running The Clippership, a dingy pub in Roker, and drinking a large portion of the stock. For Eddie, the eldest of three children, there was no money, not much love, little in the way of guidance and only a cursory education. He soon developed a talent for misbehaviour, and a distaste of authority. Intelligent but lazy, insolent and easily bored, the young Chapman skipped school often, preferring to scour the beach for lemonade bottles, redeemable at a penny a piece, and then while away afternoons at the cinema in Sunderland: *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and the Alfred Hitchcock films *Blackmail* and spy drama *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

At the age of seventeen, after a brief and unsatisfactory stint as an unpaid apprentice at a Sunderland engineering firm, Chapman joined the army, although underage, and enlisted in the Second Battalion of the Coldstream Guards. Early in his training at Caterham he slipped while playing handball and badly gashed his knee: the resulting scar would provide police with a useful distinguishing feature. The bearskin hat and smart red uniform made the girls gawp and giggle, but he found sentry duty outside the Tower of London tedious, and the city beyond beckoned.

Chapman had worn the guardsman's uniform for nine months when he was granted six days' leave. He told the sergeant major that he was going home. Instead, in the company of an older guardsman, he wandered around Soho and the West End,

hungrily eyeing the elegant women draped over the arms of men in sharp suits. In a café in Marble Arch he noticed a pretty, dark-haired girl, and she spotted him. They danced at Smokey Joe's in Soho. That night he lost his virginity. She persuaded him to stay another night: he stayed for two months, until they had spent all his pay. Chapman may have forgotten about the army, but the army had not forgotten about him. He was sure the dark-haired girl told the police. Chapman was arrested for going absent without leave, placed in the military prison in Aldershot – the 'glasshouse' – and made to scrub out bedpans for eighty-four days. Release and a dishonourable discharge brought to an end his first prison sentence, and his last regular job. Chapman took a bus to London with £3 in his pocket, a fraying suit and a 'jail-crop haircut', and headed straight for Soho.

Soho in the 1930s was a den of notorious vice, and spectacular fun. This was the crossroads of London society where the rich and feckless met the criminal and reckless, a place of seamy, raucous glamour. Chapman found work as a barman, then as a film extra, earning £3 for 'three days doing crowd work'; he worked as a masseur, a dancer, and eventually as an amateur boxer and wrestler. He was a fine wrestler, physically strong, and lithe as a cat, with a 'wire and whipcord body'. This was a world of pimps and racecourse touts, pickpockets and con artists; late nights at Smokey Joe's and early champagne breakfasts at Quaglino's. 'I mixed with all types of tricky people,' Chapman wrote later. 'Racecourse crooks, thieves, prostitutes, and the flotsam of the night-life of a great city.' For the young Chapman, life in this seething, seedy enclave was thrilling. But it was also expensive. He acquired a taste for cognac and the gaming tables and was soon penniless.

The thievery started in a small way: a forged cheque here, a snatched suitcase there, a little light burglary. His early crimes were unremarkable, the first faltering steps of an apprentice.

In January 1935, he was caught in the back garden of a house in Mayfair, and fined £10. A month later he was found guilty of

stealing a cheque and obtaining credit by fraud. This time the court was less lenient, and Chapman was given two months' hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs. A few weeks after his release, he was back inside, this time in Wandsworth Prison on a three-month sentence for trespassing and attempted housebreaking.

Chapman branched out into crimes of a more lurid nature. Early in 1936 he was found guilty of 'behaving in a manner likely to offend the public' in Hyde Park. Exactly how he was likely to have offended the public was not specified, but he was almost certainly discovered in flagrante delicto with a prostitute. He was fined £4 and made to pay a fee of 15 shillings 9d to the doctor who examined him for venereal disease. Two weeks later he was charged with fraud after he tried to evade payment of a hotel bill.

One contemporary remembers a young man 'with good looks, a quick brain, high spirits and something desperate in him which made him attractive to men and dangerous to women'. Desperation may have led him to use the attraction of men for profit, for he once hinted at an early homosexual encounter. Women seemed to find him irresistible. According to one account, he made money by seducing 'women on the fringes of society', blackmailing them with compromising photographs taken by an accomplice and then threatening to show their husbands. It was even said that having 'infected a girl of 18 with VD, he blackmailed her by threatening to tell her parents that she had given it to him'.

Chapman was on a predictable downward spiral of petty crime, prostitution, blackmail and lengthening prison terms – punctuated by episodes of wild extravagance in Soho – when a scientific breakthrough in the criminal world abruptly altered his fortunes.

In the early 1930s British crooks discovered gelignite. At about the same time, during one of his stints inside, Chapman discovered James Wells Hunt – the 'best cracksman in London' – a 'cool, self-possessed, determined character' who had perfected a technique for taking apart safes by drilling a hole in the lock and

inserting a 'French letter' stuffed with gelignite and water. Jimmy Hunt and Chapman went into partnership and were soon joined by Antony Latt, alias Darrington, alias 'Darry', a nerveless half-Burmese burglar whose father, he claimed, had been a native judge. A young felon named Hugh Anson was recruited to drive their getaway car.

The newly formed 'Jelly Gang' selected, as its first target, Isobel's, a chic furrier in Harrogate. Hunt and Darry broke in and stole five minks, two fox-fur capes and £200 from the safe. Chapman remained in the car 'shivering with fear and unable to help'. The next was a pawnbroker's in Grimsby. While Anson revved the Bentley outside to cover the sound of the explosions, Chapman and Hunt broke into an empty house next door, cut their way through the wall, and then blew open four safes. The proceeds, sold through a fence in the West End, netted £15,000. This was followed by a break-in at the Swiss Cottage Odeon cinema using an iron bar, a hit on Express Dairies, and a smash-and-grab raid on a shop in Oxford Street. Escaping from the latter scene, Anson drove the stolen getaway car into a lamppost. As the gang fled, a crowd of onlookers gathered around the smoking vehicle; one, who happened to be a small-time thief, made the mistake of putting his hand on the bonnet. When his fingerprints were matched with Scotland Yard records, he was sentenced to four years in prison. The Jelly Gang found this most amusing.

Chapman was no longer a reckless petty pilferer, but a criminal of means, spending money as fast as he could steal it, mixing with the underworld aristocracy, the gambling playboys, roué actors, alcoholic journalists, insomniac writers and dodgy politicians drawn to the demimonde. He became friendly with Noel Coward, Ivor Novello, Marlene Dietrich and the young filmmaker Terence Young (who would go on to direct the first James Bond film). Young was a suave figure who prided himself on his elegant clothes, his knowledge of fine wine and his reputation as a Lothario. Perhaps in imitation of his new friend,

Chapman also began buying suits in Savile Row, and driving a fast car. He kept a table reserved at The Nest in Kingly Street, where he held court, surrounded by bottles and girls. Young remarked: 'He was able to talk on almost any subject. Most of us knew that he was a crook, but nevertheless we liked him for his manner and personality.'

Young found Chapman intriguing: he made no secret of his trade, yet there was an upright side to his character that the filmmaker found curious. 'He is a crook and will always be one,' Young observed to a lawyer friend. 'But he probably has more principles and honesty of character than either of us.' Chapman would steal the money from your pocket, even as he bought you a drink, but he never deserted a friend, nor hurt a soul. In a brutal business, he was a pacifist. 'I don't go along with the use of violence,' he declared many years later. 'I always made more than a good living out of crime without it.'

Chapman – careless, guiltless and Godless – revelled in his underworld notoriety. He pasted press clippings describing his crimes into a scrapbook. He was particularly delighted when it was reported that police suspected American gangs were behind the recent spate of safe-cracking because chewing gum had been found at the crime scenes (the Jelly Gang had merely used chewing gum to stick the gelignite to the safes). By the summer of 1935, they had stolen so much money that Chapman and Darry decided to rent a house in Bridport on the Dorset coast for an extended holiday; but after six weeks they grew bored and 'went back to "work"'. Chapman disguised himself as an inspector from the Metropolitan Water Board, gained access to a house in the Edgware Road, smashed a hole through the wall into the shop next door and extracted the safe. This was carried out of the front door, loaded into the Bentley and taken to Hunt's garage at 39, St Luke's Mews, Notting Hill, where the safe door was blown off.

Mixing with authors and actors, Chapman became conscious of his lack of education. He announced that he intended to

become a writer, and began reading widely, plundering English literature in search of knowledge and direction. When asked what he did for a living, Chapman would reply, with a wink, that he was a 'professional dancer'. He danced from club to club, from job to job, from book to book, and from woman to woman. Late in 1935, he announced he was getting married, to Vera Freidberg, an exotic young woman with a Russian mother and a German-Jewish father. From her, Chapman picked up a grounding in the German language. But within a few months he had moved into a boarding house in Shepherd's Bush with another woman, Freda Stevenson, a stage dancer from Southend who was five years his junior. He loved Freda, she was vivacious and sassy; yet when he met Betty Farmer – his 'Shropshire Lass' – in the Nite Lite Club, he loved her too.

The Jelly Gang might mock the dozy coppers studying their abandoned chewing gum for clues, but Scotland Yard was beginning to take a keen interest in the activities of Edward Chapman. A 'gelignite' squad was formed. In 1938, the *Police Gazette* published Chapman's mugshot, along with those of Hunt and Darry, as suspects in a recent spate of cinema safe-breaks. Aware that the police were closing in, early in 1939 the gang loaded several golf bags packed with gelignite into the boot of the Bentley, and headed north. Having checked into an expensive hotel, they broke into the offices of the Edinburgh Co-operative Society, and emptied the safe. As Chapman was climbing out through a skylight, he smashed a pane of glass. A passing policeman heard it, and blew his whistle. The thieves fled over the back wall, and onto a railway line; one of the gang slipped, breaking an ankle, and was left behind. The others met up with car and driver and immediately headed south, but were intercepted by a police car, siren screaming. Chapman fled over a wall, but was caught. The four burglars were thrown into Edinburgh prison, but then, for reasons no-one can explain, Chapman was granted fourteen days bail at £150.

When Case Number Seventeen came before the Edinburgh

High Court, it was found that Chapman and his accomplices had absconded. A general bulletin was issued, photographs were distributed, and every police force in Britain was told to be on the lookout for Eddie Chapman – crook, jailbird, adulterer, blackmailer, safe-cracker, Soho denizen and now among Britain's most wanted men. On 4 February 1939, the gang extracted £476 and 3 shillings from a Co-op store in Bournemouth. Darry had sent a letter to his girlfriend hinting that the gang was heading for Jersey; police intercepted it and a warning went out that the suspects might make for the Channel Islands, and then the Continent: 'Be prepared for trouble as one at least of the men might be armed and all are prepared to put up a fight to resist arrest.'

Which is how Eddie Chapman came to be pounding down a Jersey beach leaving in his wake two plain-clothes policemen, a distraught young woman, and half a sherry trifle.