Vienna, August 1, 1934.

Dear Mr. Phillips:

In my despatches Nos. 65, 66 and 70, which go forward by the same pouch as this letter, I have endeavored to give a chronological and as exact a picture of the events of July 25 and the days following as the circumstances up to now permit. If you can find the time to read these, I think they will give you an idea of what actually happened. It is still too early to send much interpretative background, but I have given in my No. 70 some which will be of interest. I shall endeavor in this letter to confine myself to some comment which seems to be justified by developments to this date.

Just a brief statement of the initial happenings. At about noon, six motor-trucks stopped in front of a building in the city and unloaded some bundles. These contained army and police uniforms and arms, and the some 150 men who had gathered in the building changed into these uniforms quickly, mounted into the trucks, and five of the cars drove rapidly to the Ballhausplatz, where is situated the building occupied by the Foreign Office and where the Chancellor had his office. The sixth truck went to the nearby building of the Vienna radio station, overpowered the personnel and compelled the announcer to make the statement that the Dollfuss Government had resigned and that Dr. Rintelen was forming a new ministry.

At half past twelve Major Fey, who is a member of the Cabinet, got word from one of his agents that something was in the air, and he immediately went to the Foreign Office, where there was a cabinet meeting,

The Honorable
William Phillips,
Under Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.
at which all except he and Prince Starhemberg were present, Starhemberg being in Italy on holiday. He told the Chancellor that something was about to happen, and the cabinet meeting was immediately broken up, to resume at four o'clock. All the ministers, except the Chancellor and Fey and Under Secretaries Tauschitz, Karwinsky and General Zehner, returned to their respective ministries. While Chancellor Dollfuss was discussing with them the protective measures to be taken, the five trucks drove into the courtyard of the Foreign Office, and the men immediately scattered through the entire building, rounding people up and stating they were arrested in the name of the President and of the new Government. The Chancellor, while passing from one room into another, was shot and died several hours afterwards, as no physician was brought.

The entire personnel of the Foreign Office was huddled together in the courtyard, while about twelve of the principal officials were put under guard in a room, and they were informed that if there was any attack on the building, they would all be shot. I cannot go into the further details in this letter, as they would unduly increase its length, and the details of sufficient importance are set out at some length in my despatches above mentioned.

The important fact to record is that the expected revolt of the population, for which the false announcement over the radio was the signal, did not materialize, either in the city or throughout Austria, for naturally the false announcement over the Vienna station was heard all over the country. Instead, within a very short time the radio station was cleaned out by the police and an announcement sent out that the previous one has been a false one, and police, Troops and Heimwehr massed in front of the Foreign Office on the Ballhausplatz, and the Nazis in the building found themselves in turn prisoners. When this situation arose, they began to treat, first by telephone with the ministers at liberty, who were meeting with Dr. Schuschnigg in the Defense Ministry, and later directly in person through the intermediary of Minister Neustädter-Stürmer. As the besieged Nazis threatened
to kill all in the Foreign Office if they were not
given safe conduct to the German frontier, the Govern-
ment was under the necessity of treating with them
and agreed to this condition, if none of the officials
and personnel last their lives. When this agreement
had been reached between Minister Reustädter-Stürmer
and the pseudo-officer in command of the besieged
Nazis, they feared that the Government would not keep
its word, and so insisted that the German Minister be
called to be a witness to the understanding. Dr.
Rieth, the German Minister, appeared on the scene
and was a witness to the agreement, after conferring
at some length with a group of the besieged Nazis.
The council of ministers made this agreement with
the knowledge that the Chancellor was wounded, but
they were under the impression, not gravely so. The
besieged Nazis, numbering 144, then surrendered and
were taken to the police prison in Vienna.

In spite of the reports which, I am sorry to say,
reached the outside world, the remainder of the city
remained entirely quiet, and there has been no inci-
dent in the city up to this time other than what I
have described. Four persons lost their life when
the radio station was cleaned out, and in the Foreign
Office the Chancellor's supreme sacrifice was the
only one.

In the rest of the country Nazi groups did not
begin to make trouble until the afternoon of the fol-
lowing day, and on July 27 there was a real conflict
between Nazis and local Heimwehr, which in some places
had to be reinforced by troops. The only spot, how-
ever, where real fighting developed was at Leoben,
where the Alpine Montangessellschaft, which is really
a German company, has its works and where the action
assumed the proportions of a small battle. By the
evening of the 27th the country was quiet, and has
remained so.

The foregoing is only the most sketchy recital.
According to the official statement, the Government
forces, including police, Heimwehr and troops, lost
78 killed and 166 wounded throughout the country.
The losses of the Nazis must have been considerably
greater, but no definite figures have as yet been
published.
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To endeavor to give complete background is almost impossible in the scope of any letter which I can impose on you and get ready for the pouch about to leave, in view of the many things pressing on me for attention. I will, however, endeavor to give some of the most essential facts.

According to the information which has now developed and of which a good part, I am sure, has reached you from Berlin, Rome, London and Paris, it seems definitely established that this putsch was not only made with the knowledge of the German Government, but engineered by it. On June 29 Goebbels told Cherruti, the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, that there would be a Nazi Government in Vienna within a month. On the evening of July 24, a pamphlet appeared on the streets of Berlin, of which the Berlin Embassy has copies, from which it was obvious that there was full knowledge of what was planned in Vienna. An attempt was made to suppress it, and its contents got into only a few of the German papers on July 25, but the articles which did appear in the German papers of the day of the putsch showed that they had information as to the time it was to take place. I am informed by my English colleague here that London is convinced that Hitler had knowledge of the putsch planned and was entirely in accord with the action, but on the 23rd he is supposed to have called it off, fearing the time not propitious. The reports of the Consul at Munich written on the days just before the 25th show that he had knowledge of activity in the Austrian Legion and of movements which indicated impending action. If Hitler did try to call it off, what happened shows what I have always contended, that the secondary leaders have been and are in definite control in Germany. There seems to be no question that the Austrian Legion in Bavaria was to cross the frontier on the signal from the Vienna radio station, and I think the evidence is already accumulating in definite form that the movement was stopped when it was found the circumstances were not propitious.

Dr. Fintelen, the Austrian Minister in Rome, was in Vienna for no reason whatever, and the evidence already accumulated indicates that he was here to be
on the spot to form a new government. The key to Rintelen's character is his ambition, which was to be Chancellor, and he really had grown to hate Dollfuss, whom he felt was the only real obstacle in his way. Rintelen was taken to the Defense Ministry on the evening of July 25, and that night attempted to commit suicide. The reports which have been sent out that he was shot by the police officials who went to the Defense Ministry to take him to the police Präs idium are, I believe, without foundation. I think he tried to commit suicide when they came to the Defense Ministry to really arrest him, as he knew the game was up and feared a public trial and execution. I will not go into details here about this, for I have given some in my despatches, but I think there is no question that Rintelen was in the plot and was the willing tool of the Nazis in Germany and in Austria, as their plans paralleled his ambitions. Twice since his attempted suicide he has been given blood transfusions, and he is now said to be recovering and has already been submitted to a preliminary examination by the judicial authorities in the hospital. It was in Styria and Carinthia, where Rintelen had his stronghold and where he is known as "King Anton" that there was the only real Nazi uprising on July 26 and 27.

The intervention of Rieth was one of the most extraordinary things I have ever heard of. When I first heard of it, I felt it was a mistake and did not telegraph it to the Department until I had confirmed it from official and other sources. In spite of the statements which he has made since he returned to Germany and in spite of the official German disclaimers, I find no one here who has any doubt but what he knew all about it. Rieth's statement and that of the German Government that it was at the request of the Austrian Government that he acted as a witness does not give the real picture. The fact is that when the besieged found their position hopeless and made the agreement for safe transport under the protection of the military to the German frontier, they insisted that Rieth must be a witness to it. It was only when the besieged Nazis insisted, that Major Fey telephoned to Rieth and gave him the message.
Fey says that he transmitted it merely as the message of the besieged, and I think he is telling the truth. All the circumstances point to that. Rieth came, and after talking to Minister Neustädter-Stürmer, had a long conference with the leaders of the besieged Nazis. I admit that he was in an impossible position, but it was only a guilty conscience and the full knowledge of the circumstances which could have enabled him to take the action which he did.

On the morning of the 26th Rieth was recalled and his act disavowed by the German Government, and Hitler's letter to Papen, with which you are familiar, was published on the morning of the 27th. On the evening of the 27th the German Charge, as Rieth had already left for Germany, called at the Foreign Office and insisted that the agreement for Papen be given at once. This the Austrian Government refused to do, for various reasons, but I am sure that one of the controlling reasons was that they were of the opinion that if they granted it, Hitler would order Papen to go by plane immediately to Vienna, so as to be present for the funeral of the Chancellor on the afternoon of July 28. The Austrian Government felt that they had enough trouble on their hands not to have to guard Papen on that day, and they did not wish anything to mar the funeral of the Chancellor.

The Austrian Government is in a difficult position. It does not want to refuse the agreement, but at the same time it feels that Papen's mission has sinister aspects. While agreement has been asked for in the usual way, Hitler's letter to Papen indicates that he is directly responsible to him, and the Austrians feel that this is practically sending a Stadthalter to a subject province. They are thoroughly familiar with Papen, and while they recognize that he has done much to rehabilitate himself during the last few months, they know that it was his palace intrigue which brought in the Nazi Government in Germany. They know that for his ambition he sold that fine old figure Hindenburg, who treated Papen as a son. They fear, knowing that type of German as they do, that Papen would not be above using his position here to endeavor to bring Austria into the lap of Germany as a satisfaction of his personal ambition. My own feeling is that they have a good deal of reason for these fears.
I have been informed, however, that the agreement will be granted in a few days, but that Papen will be treated with a good deal of coldness and reserve, and that they have nothing to negotiate with him. They want to be friendly with Germany, but they feel that all the action must come from the German side in the form of unequivocal statements with respect to their recognition of Austrian independence and real acts to show that they will not interfere further in Austrian internal affairs. There is no question but that the Austrians are being asked to receive a Minister from a supposedly friendly power, when his immediate predecessor had knowledge of and probably figured in a plot to overthrow their government, and when that plot undoubtedly had as one of its primary objects the murder of their Chancellor. They feel that they are being asked to receive as a Minister the representative of a country which maintains within its borders and within striking distance of theirs an armed legion, whose arms come from the German Government, which has for its sole object the overthrow of the Austrian Government. They feel that if Hitler really means what he says in his letter to Papen, his first step would naturally be to dissolve the Austrian Legion in Bavaria.

They know that no faith can be put in his words, for they know that when Hitler refers to Papen as one of his most intimate and trusted co-workers, as he does in the letter of appointment, he is undoubtedly insincere. They know that the Austrian Legion, according to the German press, was supposed to have been removed from the Austrian frontier to eastern North Prussia, but they know now that in the days preceding the fateful 25th of July, the Legion was where it has always been. I think even the most objective observer must appreciate that their fears are not without foundation and that their lack of faith is more than justified by the facts.

When the news of the attack on the Foreign Office reached Rome, Mussolini, as you know, took prompt and decisive action in ordering the two Italian army corps held on the Austro-Italian frontier to be ready to move. This action and Mussolini's telegram to Stahremberg undoubtedly did more to have Hitler take energetic
action to stop any invasion by the Austrian Legion than the fear of a triple demarche, of which the papers were so full. It now appears there is some reason to believe that Hitler had already taken action before the 25th to stop participation by the Austrian Legion, but if he had not taken this action before, it is clear that it was taken on the afternoon of the 25th, after the determined attitude of Italy. I hold no brief for Mussolini, but I am confident that had he not taken the decisive action which he did, at least a part of the Austrian Legion would have got into Austria, and the fat would have been in the fire. In that case the Italian army would have moved across the Brenner Pass into Austria, and that would have meant, without any question, mobilization in Yugoslavia, which is so suspicious of Italy that it believes as little in any good intentions on the part of Italy as some of us have confidence in the promises of the present German régime. Such mobilization by Yugoslavia, with the state of mind that they are in, would have been extremely dangerous, and that it would have taken place I am quite confident, from what their Minister here tells me. It would have meant also mobilization by Czechoslovakia, but for other reasons, which in spite of their being more benevolent, would have been not much less dangerous.

Naturally it is the situation in Austria which must continue to give us the greatest concern. The Government from the outset of the trouble was in full control of the situation. It was at no time really threatened by the Nazi action, and it has been shown how much weaker the movement here was than even some of us assumed, and I was one of those who felt it much smaller than most foreign observers here. I was early able to telegraph the Department as to who the new Chancellor would be, for Tauschitz, whom Dollfuss brought here as Under Secretary of State, is very friendly, and told me he wanted me to know that the President had decided this, but that he would not be able to tell any of my colleagues. I felt a good deal relieved, because, naturally, poor President Miklas had very little to say about it, except to register the will of the major people in the Government, although, obviously he would want
Sohuschnigg to succeed Dollfuss. Starhemberg and Fey would both have liked to be Chancellor, but just because both of them wanted it, it was obviously impossible for either of them to have it. Besides, Sohuschnigg was the logical candidate, for undoubtedly Dollfuss had always indicated that in case anything happened to him, he wanted Sohuschnigg to be Chancellor. Whenever I talked with Dollfuss about important matters, he always asked me whether I had already mentioned the matter to Sohuschnigg, and if I said "no" he would ask me to do so. Sohuschnigg is the best man in the Government and, I believe, is a man of sound judgment and will prove to be a much better man than has been generally supposed. The reports which the newspapers sent out about trouble between Starhemberg and Fey and that the Heimwehr was insisting on Starhemberg as Chancellor, are without real foundation. Both of them knew that this was no time to press their own ambitions. Both of them knew that their own eventual careers will be best served by not being Chancellor now. Both of them knew that absolute unity in the Government was essential in order to maintain its position at home and internationally. I do not wish to appear to be ascribing to them too great qualities of restraint and of judgment, for I do not consider either of them as particularly possessing either of these qualities, but it would have taken a much poorer man than they under the existing circumstances to press personal ambitions.

By this I did not mean to say that the position of the Government is strong. With the passing of Dollfuss Austria has lost her really great bulwark against internal difficulties. There are all sorts of political passions and resentments and difficulties in this little country, which are a result of all sorts of conditions which have prevailed here since the war, and some of which have their roots in the economic situation. Dollfuss never aroused great enthusiasm, but he was respected by all of his opponents, except the Nazis. He was on the point of making political peace with the Socialists, which would probably have materialized within the next few weeks. He had some of the qualities of a statesman and many of those of an agile politician. He was a realist and a good man,
whose religion was something very real in his everyday life. He was a reasonable man, and who could discuss with friend and enemy. These qualities made him respected, if not generally beloved. His death has increased his stature and has created a tradition under which the present Government will, I think, hold together for some time. Those who wish Austria well and who have the peace of Europe at heart will hope that this Government can hold out until there is another government in Germany, whose pretensions against Austria have definitely been discarded. Austria can have no political disturbances internally. Hitler has always been insisting that there must be elections here, when he has none in his own country. He has wanted elections, not because he believed a Nazi majority existed in Austria, but because he knew that elections would give rise to expression of internal political differences here, which would lead to such confusion that the Nazis, although in small minority, could seize the Government.

The Government has since the death of the Chancellor made definite and unequivocal statements of its attitude, which is that it will continue the Dollfuss policy, which, as it has stated, is well known. As a primary element of this policy, the President and all of the members of the Government on various occasions since the death of the Chancellor have stated the absolute insistence on Austrian independence and no toleration of interference in her internal affairs. As I said in my telegram No. 87 to the Department, these are fair and brave words, which they mean, but Austria is incapable of solving her own problems.

She has been put into a house and told to live in it, and it is a house with which she had no choosing of the architect and could not pass on the plans. The powers that put her into this house will have to see for the time being that she is able to maintain it. Her material position is a good deal better, and will get better if she is allowed to have some political peace. If it had not been for what we now know to be the definitely German-inspired bombing outrages and terrorist acts, the tourist business in Austria would have been better this year, as it is in some
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of her neighbors, and this money would have been sufficient to put her budget in balance and to help those districts where the economic distress is the greatest. As it is, it is too late to correct this situation this year, so in this respect the German policy has succeeded. I am only mentioning this, because it seems so extraordinary that in this day and generation one country, supposedly at peace with another, can deliberately send provocative agents, money and explosives into the other, to cause terroristic acts there, in order to keep the tourist away and by accentuating the economic situation, bring it into the National Socialist fold.

These things are so difficult to understand that they are hard to believe, but, as you know, I have been under no illusions. I had too intimate contact with the real people who conduct Nazi policy to have any illusions. I know what blood they had on their hands, what sinister motives they nourished, and what execrable acts they were capable of. National Socialism is a disease which attacks many worthy people and has some strange results. It is a disease which has to be eradicated if Germany and Europe are to be saved. For the moment, the pressure is being exerted on this little country, and what I wish to emphasize is that these good people here, with the best will in the world and with the firmest intentions to maintain their traditions and their independence, are helpless without the support of England, France and Italy.

The help of Italy so far has been all-powerful and certainly most effective. Paris is delighted, for it saves the situation in the Balkans for them as well as helping to aggravate the situation in Berlin. London is not unhappy, but wishes to take no commitments. My British colleague here is convinced that concerted action is necessary to save Austria. I think all that he says in London is to that effect. He says that this Government may not be strong, or as strong as one would wish it to be, but it is the best that can be had, and that it must be given the support which it now needs until the dangers to Austrian independence are gone and all forms of interference from Germany stop, and Austria can have normal commercial relations with Germany, which are absolutely essential to her.
He feels that his country may be making the same mistake with respect to Germany that has been made before. He, I think, is insisting very strongly that his Government go as far as it can in giving support to triple action which will bring about unequivocal declarations and action at Berlin. He feels that this is the time to do it and that if it is done now, it will save the possibilities of catastrophe. He is very frank with me, which I appreciate.

I realize thoroughly that this problem is not primarily one of ours, and I am acting accordingly, but I do believe that while we should abstain from interference in this or in any European problem, we should have a sympathetic attitude towards any efforts made by these three powers to bring moral pressure to bear on Berlin which will settle this intolerable situation. This present German régime is on its last legs, but it can last for some months longer, and in that time all sorts of things are possible, such as the events of the 30th of June in Germany and the 25th of July in Vienna have shown. Both outbreaks are symptoms of the same disease. This last time the prompt action of Italy saved complications, which might have had far-reaching consequences. A concerted action now would, I am sure, have the result of unequivocal declarations being secured from Berlin with regard to Austria, and while that is only part of the European problem, it would at least be the beginning of the healing of what is perhaps the sorest spot on this side the water.

Cordially yours,

George S. Messersmith

P. S. I have just been able to read the foregoing and find there is a little time before the pouch leaves to give you a further word about two points which may be the subject of discussion.

GSM/LGW

The first is the German insistence that it was the Austrian Government who called in Rieth. This, I believe, is entirely unjustified by the facts, as I have already pointed out in this letter and in my despatches. As early as the evening of July 25, when
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I talked with the Burgomaster of Vienna, who was for the time being the liaison between the Government and the diplomatic officers here, I had to draw out of him the story of Rieth's intervention and action, and it was patent that it was not because the Austrian Government had anything to hide, but because Rieth's action had been so extraordinary that they knew it would cause complications and had not yet had time to consult how much they should say about it. The Burgomaster, however, then already, before there had been any opportunity to fix up a story, told me that it was on the insistence of the besieged Nazis to have Rieth as a witness to the agreement that Fey had called Rieth on the telephone.

Later in the evening, about eleven o'clock, when Schuschnigg spoke to the chiefs of the foreign missions here, he and Fey showed the same reserve, and it was not until Rieth's intervention was brought out by questions that they gave information about it in that meeting. Again Schuschnigg and Fey, obviously without having had any opportunity to consult with each other, told exactly the same story. Fey was still laboring under the effects of the strenuous day and the treatment to which he had been subjected by being driven from pillar to post the whole afternoon with a gun in his back, and all of us who were at the meeting, and I think some of them not too sympathetically inclined towards him, were convinced of his complete sincerity. I think we can take it as a fact that it had not occurred in any way to any member of the Government, either among those at liberty or among those imprisoned in the Foreign Office, to consult with the German Minister. Just as the besieged Nazis were expecting Rintelen to appear at the Foreign Office every minute in the early afternoon, with the members of his new cabinet and government, and had his name constantly on their lips, so it was to Rieth whom they turned when they wanted a witness to their agreement for safe conduct when they found the coup had failed.

Rieth never spoke bitterly to me about Dollfuss, but several of my colleagues, and I am speaking of those in whom I can have the most confidence, spoke
spoke to me before and after July 25 of his bitter references to the Chancellor as the man who made it impossible for Germany and Austria to settle what was an "internal" problem. I have told you, and had mentioned in my despatches, that Krieth had always spoken to me of Austro-German relations as an "internal" problem. Krieth is a man of great wealth and of overpowering ambition, and he had sold himself body and soul to the present régime in Germany, which at heart I am confident he abhorred. In these problems over here we have to reckon with these ambitions, which to us are inexplicable when their attainment involves the commission of such iniquities.

While I am on this point, I want to tell you that this question of personal ambitions has really played a tremendous part in this whole matter. I have already pointed out that Rintelen was in it almost entirely because of his ambitions rather than of his convictions, the former paralleling the Nazi plans. The people who were to form the Rintelen Cabinet and who were in this plot, and many of whom have been arrested, were officials, lawyers, or professional people, who hoped through this movement to get positions which they would otherwise never arrive at. When the whole story is told, this will be found to have been the principal prop to Nazi ambitions, again another symptom of that dread disease which is attacking Europe. National Socialism, if it is a political philosophy, is in its last analysis merely an appeal to the most brutal and to the most sordid sentiments which we may have.

The second point which I wish to emphasize and on which there may be difference, is the action of the Austrian Government in trying and executing some of these 144 prisoners taken in the Ballhausplatz. There are those who say that because safe conduct to the frontier was assured these people, none of them should be tried, and certainly none executed. There are others who say that the Government was aware that Dollfuss was dead when it gave the assurance of safe conduct.

I was in as close touch with the situation that fateful afternoon as any of the diplomatic representa-
tives and had constant touch with our newspaper men and with the officials themselves who were at liberty. Until well in the evening there were higher officials of the Government who did not know that Dollfuss was dead. There is no question but that when the agreement was made by the Cabinet in the afternoon, that they would give safe conduct to the frontier, if all the members of the Government and the imprisoned personnel were delivered alive, that they knew that the Chancellor had been wounded. This they knew, because Fey had sent a note over to the cabinet council in the Defense Ministry, in which he said that he had seen Dollfuss and that he was wounded. That is why the Cabinet made this decision about safe conduct on the basis that the imprisoned should be delivered "alive".

During the court proceedings yesterday and day before and the trial of the two already executed yesterday, the court brought out that the question of such an agreement was irrelevant, on the ground that it was made under duress and all contracts in civil procedure made under duress were invalid. Further than this, it is clear from the facts that the Government condition that the imprisoned officials be delivered alive was not met by the besieged and that the besieged were not acting in good faith, for the leaders knew at the time the agreement was concluded that the Chancellor was dead. I do not think, therefore, that the Austrian Government can properly be held as having broken its faith if it proceeds with the punishment of at least the principal leaders of this lawless act and of those whom it is established had a direct hand in the murder of the Chancellor. To give them free conduct to the frontier of any country that would be willing to receive them, or to leave the principal ones unpunished would be to create a situation in this country which would be intolerable. No government which failed to give adequate punishment could hope to live, for the popular feeling over the murder of the Chancellor is real.

The correspondents who have been present at the trial so far have agreed unanimously that it is being conducted in an extraordinarily fair and proper way.
The Government showed extraordinary restraint in delaying the trials until after the funeral of the Chancellor. It was an indication of more strength than many people thought it had, and it was certainly a fine indication of restraint.

The leader of the movement and the man who fired the shots which killed the Chancellor were condemned to death yesterday and hanged. The country at this writing is entirely quiet, and I expect it to remain so unless there is action from Germany.

I shall keep the Department informed currently with regard to developments, and I hope by the next safe opportunity to supplement this personal letter with further background which may be of interest.