Subject: Chancellor Dollfuss -- his assassination.

I shall always be glad that I had the opportunity of knowing Chancellor Dollfuss. He was short in stature, only about five feet, and there was nothing striking about his appearance or personality. One had to know him only a few hours to realize that he was a great man. He was one of those men who rose from the most humble of origins and with very inadequate opportunities who became a really great man. His mother was a peasant woman. His father, I understand, he never knew. I can almost say that our friendship began the day that we met immediately after my arrival in Vienna as Minister in 1934. As I have elsewhere said, we saw each other almost every day from then on until the day of his assassination. Although his opportunities for education and travel had been exceedingly limited and I do not know much about his reading habits, and in spite of the fact that his opportunities for association with men of broad knowledge were relatively limited, I have known few men who had a keener perception and a broader immediate understanding of important problems. He had a quality of mind which I find it difficult to describe. It was more than intuition. It was more than keen perception. It was more than an unusual judgment with regard to the relative value of factors which entered into a problem.

Perhaps I can best endeavor to define the man through the following. From the first conversation we had it was clear that he had good sources of information of what was happening in Germany and of the designs of the Nazi government on Austria. It may be from the same sources he knew that I had contact continuously with important persons in Germany. In any event, from the outset of our association he was interested in knowing everything that I knew from day to day about developments in practically every aspect, economic, political and financial, of the German situation. He may have wished merely to check with me through what I said on his own sources of information. It may be that he thought I knew things which he did not know. I am inclined to think it was a little of both. Perhaps I
may have been inclined to underestimate him a little at the outset. In any event, I often found it necessary when referring to certain developments in Germany or in England or in my own country to refer to certain background which I felt was necessary to a complete understanding of what I was going to say. After the first few conversations I could note a certain impatience but always a polite tolerance when I felt it necessary to give certain background. As the conversations went on I realized that this background was not necessary in most cases. He seemed intuitively, instinctively or in some way appreciate the factors behind the fact. As time went on and as our conversations became more intimate and some of the amenities observed between a chancellor and the ambassador of a friendly country disappeared, and I would give him some background about an important matter in which I knew he was interested and concerning which he had asked me specific questions, he would say, "Don't bother about that", and then put to me a question which showed that however in the world he had the background or at least that basis for judgment which grows out of background, he knew it.

I usually saw him at his office in the Ballhausplatz. Very often he would send word to ask me to come to his apartment. He lived in a modest quarter of town in a very small apartment, exceedingly simply furnished. I would sometimes have to wait for him a few minutes in the small living room of the apartment and Mrs. Dollfuss would come and talk with me until he arrived. She was a small little lady whose simplicity and frankness added a good deal to her charm. After the first six months or so of my stay in Vienna I began to note a great sadness pervading her. She seemed to be living under some kind of fear -- a fear that never left her. It was not necessary for our few common friends to tell me what was the cause of this sadness. She seemed intuitively to be aware of the fact that her husband's life was in danger.

To those of us who knew the practices of the Nazi regime and to those of us who knew a certain fanaticism which was being stirred up among a small group of
people in Austria by Nazi agents, who were making all sorts of promises as to what would be given to these people when they assumed control of the country, and realizing that Dollfuss was in the mind of people like Hitler and Goering and Goebbels, the one real stumbling block that they had in making progress in the nazification of Austria, it was quite obvious that not only was the life of Dollfuss in danger, but in grave danger. Dollfuss of course himself realized this. He never spoke of it to me. Some precautions were taken for his protection, but they were of a relatively mild character. We began to learn through the sources available to us that these small Nazi groups in Vienna which were meeting underground with German agents were considering ways and means to eliminate Dollfuss. The Vienna police at the time was one of the most efficient police organizations in Europe, and it was undoubtedly through the police and agencies connected with it and the government that Dollfuss was able to keep informed as to what was going on in these small, secret group meetings of Nazis in Vienna. He could, therefore, not have been unaware that the plans to get rid of him were gradually and definitely becoming more concrete.

The only outward sign, however, of this awareness was the greater vigilance exercised in the Ballhausplatz where he had his offices and where he spent most of his time. Squads of specially selected men were given this duty. I frequently saw this change of the guard taking place when I made calls at the Foreign Office.

It was this one definite means of giving protection to the Chancellor which the German Nazi agents and their Austrian accomplices seized upon to accomplish their ends. Uniforms used by this guard were secretly and carefully prepared. A selected group of German and Austrian Nazi plotters was carefully trained in the procedure of the arrival at the Ballhausplatz of a relief squad, the way it took over, the way it disposed of themselves in the building, all this of course was not difficult to do. The plan as finally evolved and carried through did not include only the assassination of the Chancellor, but also that this squad should be the
one to take over at a time when a Cabinet meeting was in progress. The whole Cabinet therefore would be imprisoned in the Ballhausplatz. At the same time the principal radio station was to be occupied by another squad and the announcement made to the people of Vienna and of Austria that a new government was in control and working from the Ballhausplatz.

I do not have access at this writing to my papers and to reports which I wrote fully covering in detail all the events of this great tragedy, but as I recall the Austrian government and my colleagues in Vienna who were so much interested in this matter, as I was, had no knowledge of any specific timing being planned for this taking over of the government and the assassination of the Chancellor. I was working in my office in the chancery on the day of this tragic event when I heard some scattered shots, to which I gave no particular significance. Very shortly thereafter Alfred Kliefoth, who was the Counselor of the Legation, came in to say to me that an announcement had just been made over the government radio that the Chancellor had been shot and killed in the Ballhausplatz, that the Cabinet was detained in the building, that a new government had been set up.

I immediately asked our people to get about the city. Every few minutes one of them would come back and the information was generally to the effect that the city seemed to be entirely quiet except that an area around the Ballhausplatz had already been cut off by the army, which was surrounding the Ballhausplatz. As the reports came through and continued through the late afternoon and evening, it became clear that the army had remained completely loyal. As soon as the announcement came over the radio the army began to surround the Ballhausplatz and took precautionary and preventive measures in other parts of the city and of the country. In the early evening we learned that the situation was completely under control and that those who had gained access to the Ballhausplatz, assassinated Dollfuss and made the Cabinet prisoners were completely isolated and were talking with the army
officer in command of the troops around the Ballhausplatz. We learned that von Rieth, the German Minister in Vienna, was at the Ballhausplatz and acting as an intermediary and endeavoring to be a negotiator between the army and the government and these Nazis who were in control of the interior of the building.

I was in touch with my colleagues but I found that they did not know any more of developments than we did. In fact, we seemed to know a little bit more than they. By 9 o’clock in the evening it was clear that this attempt to take over the government had failed completely. Whatever may have been planned in other parts of the country outside of Vienna was completely abortive -- at least it ceased when any such plotters heard over the government radio, which had made the announcement of the assassination of Dollfuss and the change in government, that the army and the government were in complete control.

I cannot recall a more painful and distressing hours than those through which my associates and I passed that day. It was obvious that Germany had shown its hand. They would disclaim having had anything to do with it whatever. They would take the position that it was Austrians who were concerned and Austrians only. It was clear that even though the government was again in control of the situation that a major objective of the Nazi government had been achieved, and that was the elimination of Dollfuss. We all realized that with him out of the way it was difficult to find someone who would adequately replace him. It was I believe around 9 o’clock in the evening when the chiefs of missions of most of the governments represented in Vienna were informed that the new Chancellor, Dr. Schuschnigg, would meet the chiefs of mission that evening, either at 11 o’clock or 12 o’clock, in a building very close to the Ballhausplatz. We were all there on the minute. Chancellor Schuschnigg with the members of the Cabinet received us. Seated at a table in a quiet, calm, dispassionate way he outlined to us in detail the events of the day. During my long service with our government I do not recall having passed through a similar and more moving experience. The new Chancellor confined
himself to a factual but rather detailed statement. He ended by making it clear that the perpetrators of this attempt to overthrow the government and the assassination of the Chancellor would be duly tried and punished in accord with the law.

It was a mournful group of chiefs of mission who left this memorable meeting. Most of us were so depressed and so unhappy because we had had genuine affection for Chancellor Dollfuss that we had little to say to each other. What little was said was all to one effect -- they had been impressed by the manner in which Dr. Schuschnigg had handled himself and felt that it gave promise for the days to come.

Early the following morning all the chiefs of mission were informed that a book was ready in the Foreign Office where during the course of the morning the chiefs of mission could make their official call to express condolence and to sign their name. They were informed that the arrangements for the funeral of the Chancellor would be made known very shortly to the chiefs of mission. I went to the Foreign Office and found a number of my colleagues there who had just signed, or were about to sign the book. We had again little to say to each other. One had the feeling all over the city that some great tragedy had taken place. I was about to leave the Foreign Office after having performed this simple act when one of the high officials of the Foreign Office led me aside and said he wished to talk to me in an adjoining room. He led me into an adjoining room and he said that the body of the Chancellor had been prepared, that a catafalque was being put up in one of the principal rooms of the building and that the chiefs of mission would later have the opportunity, together with the public, of passing through this room. He said that in view of the great friendship which had existed between the Chancellor and myself, he had been instructed to take me into this room so that I could look at my friend. He told me briefly how the day before, when these men masquerading as the new guard, immediately took over possession of the building, confined the various Cabinet members and officials working in the building to their rooms and how Dollfuss was shot. He had asked for a doctor and it had been
denied. He had asked for a priest and it had been denied. His assassins permitted him to lie there and bleed slowly to death. He had lived for some three hours after being shot. I told my friend that I really could not go to look at the Chancellor. I said that I had few idiosyncrasies, but whenever I could avoid it I did not look at a friend after he had passed away. I said I was not a particularly impressionable person, but that if I saw my friend after he had passed away it was that image which remained with me instead of the pleasant memories which I liked to cherish. I saw that he could not understand this. I realized that it would not be understood if I did not go into the next room. If I am not mistaken the room in which the catafalque had been erected was the one/which the principal meetings of the Congress of Vienna had been held in 1915. There was no one else in the room. The work had just been completed. I walked up and looked at my friend. Aside from the usual pallor it was quite obvious that he had bled to death. I had seen many victims of Nazi terror in Germany. I am one of those who knows righteous anger, but I cannot begin to describe the feelings which I had in the few minutes that I was in this room with the man whom I had admired as a patriot and courageous defender of the liberties of his country, and as one with whom I had passed so many hours.

I pass over, as they are a matter of history, the details of the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss. It was at the funeral that I for the first time saw his mother. She was a small woman whose hands were gnarled as are those of the peasants whom I had seen in so many countries of Europe living so close to the soil and practically a part of it. A few of us had the opportunity to see her after the funeral, but she was completely dazed and I am sure that our words did not penetrate her numbed mind.

Should there be any doubt at all in the mind of anyone that the assassination of Dollfuss was deliberately planned and carried through by the high authorities of the Nazi government in Germany, these should be dispelled by the fact
that the German Minister in Vienna, von Rieith, was immediately on the scene and set himself up as the negotiator between those who had possessed themselves of the Ballhausplatz and killed the Chancellor. He was setting himself up as the negotiator between Austrian traitors and assassins and the lawful authorities of the government of Austria. The only thing that one can give von Rieith credit for in this performance is that those of us who knew him and of him and of his past career have much reason to believe that he would not have taken this action which he did unless it were under instructions from the highest authorities of his government in Berlin. There is one thing that we cannot permit the years to erase from our memory, and that is that men like von Rieith with a long career of useful service in the German career diplomatic service not only continued to serve the Nazi regime when he knew that his government was plotting the destruction of the country to which he was accredited, but also played this dastardly role after the assassination of the Chancellor. It is also well to bear in mind that Franz von Papen, who had a good name, a long tradition, who prided himself on his religion, who after some opposition to the Nazi regime was marked for elimination on the 30th of June 1934 and escaped only through high friends in the army who gave him protection until the storm had passed, succeeded von Rieith as German Minister to Vienna. I will in these notes record the conversation which I had with him in his own office in the German Legation in Vienna after he had taken possession of his post, in which he told me in the clearest and baldest manner of how he was going to destroy the Austrian government. That men through opportunism and ambition can so forget all dignity and self respect and all elemental decency is something that those of us and all of us who have any realization of the times that we are passing through cannot forget.