Spy Chief Complains

'Red Orchestra' Head Raps TV Serial

By Jonathan C. Randal
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PARIS, Oct. 23—World War II master spy Leopold Trepper last night denounced a television serial based on his espionage network's activities. But the bitter televised debate did little to clear up the confusion surrounding the controversial episode of the Nazi occupation era.

Trepper—survivor of British, French, Nazi and Stalinist jails and a lifelong Communist—said the six-part television serial was filled with "lies" that bring "shame on France."

The series, co-produced by West German and French state television, dealt with the exploits of the "Red Orchestra," the spy network headed by Trepper which Nazi intelligence credited with having cost the lives of 20,000 German soldiers.

Using clandestine radio transmitters, spies in France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands sent intelligence information to Soviet authorities. Nazi monitoring stations nicknamed this network of transmitters the "Red Orchestra."

Only the more relaxed style of President Valery Giscard d'Estaing allowed a longstanding ban on Trepper to be lifted for a few days to allow him to take part in the debate. Trepper, 71, is now a citizen of Israel after finally being allowed to leave Poland last year.

About the only thing Trepper and most of the other dozen participants in the debate could agree on was denunciation of the serial, which was described as "odious," "infamous," "attempted rehabilitation of the Third Reich," and "offensive to the Resistance."

The representative of the West German company that produced the serial with the state-run French television monopoly protested. He agreed his critics were probably right in condemning the Nazis as vile torturers rather than cops doing their jobs, as the serial portrayed them. But, he said, it had to be understood that West Germany banned showing of violence on television.

LEOPOLD TREPPER
. . . back in France

Such remarks passed all but unnoticed in the attacks that two anti-Communist Resistance leaders—Marie-Madeleine Fourcade and Jean Teyssandier—repeatedly made against Trepper. The criticism strengthened many people's suspicions that the wartime resistance was so rivalry-ridden as to be largely ineffective.

Their bitter accusations that only the captain survived the sinking ship—an allusion to the violent deaths other "Red Orchestra" members suffered at Gestapo hands—triggered telephone calls to the television studio demanding to know why Trepper was being subjected to such a vendetta.

The anti-Communist tinge to the attacks was such that the debate was described by Gilles Perrault, author of the Bestselling book on the spy-network, as a deliberate attempt to win on appeal the libel case lost in 1972 by the head of DST, the French equivalent of the FBI.

Like Jean Rocheton, then head of DST, the critics suggested that Trepper had betrayed other "Red Orchestra" members to the Gestapo after he was arrested in November, 1942. They also accused him of having spied on France for the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the unresolved charge on which France apparently bases its ban on Trepper's right to visit the country.

Trepper stoutly defended himself. He charged the serial bore as "little relation to truth as pornographic film does to love" and was "false from beginning to end."

As for his alleged collaboration with his captors—before he escaped in September 1943—Trepper maintained that he had been able to warn his Moscow headquarters that the Germans were using his arrested ring to propagate phony information.

Trepper's most telling defense came not from the confused debate, but from historian Jacques Delarue. Writing in the newspaper Le Figaro, he said the destruction of the "Red Orchestra" was not due to treachery, but rather should be blamed on the incredible demands of the Red Army.

intelligence service which insisted that Trepper's men broadcast so much that finally the Germans were able to detect the transmitters.

And after Trepper's escape, Delarue noted, the Paris Gestapo unit charged with tracking down the "Red Orchestra" never dared inform its boss in Berlin, Heinrich Himmler, "an inexplicable act, if Trepper had really been a traitor."

But there were other participants in the debate who showed doubt. Marcel Paul, a former Communist minister and deportee, lavished prise on fallen Resistance heros, but managed never to mention Trepper's name.

And a German wartime intelligence officer politely declined to comment when asked if he thought Trepper had betrayed his own people.

A French intelligence officer who was caught and sent to a Nazi concentration camp wondered out loud whether any spy was right in taking enormous chances since rarely was the information believed or acted upon by headquarters.

Trepper spent 10 years in Moscow's Lubianka jail as Stalin's reward for running the "Red Orchestra."