M's Cover Is Blown; Spy Chief Resigning

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LONDON, Feb. 8—M's cover has been blown.

Britain's spy master turns out to be Sir John Ogilvy Rennie, a handsome, 59-year-old Foreign Office official.

His exposure is the result of a personal tragedy. Sir John's son, Charles, 25, and daughter-in-law Christine, 23, were arrested last month and charged with possessing heroin.

Sir John's name and role as head of M.I. 6 were well known to Fleet Street defense and police reporters. But, under a uniquely British system, their newspapers voluntarily refrained from publishing it.

The papers, however, had briefly reported the arrest of an unnamed young couple on the drugs charge and had identified the man simply as the son of the M.I.6 chief. Stern, the German weekly magazine, followed up this clue and disclosed Sir John's name in its issue distributed on Wednesday.

That released the British press from its obligation and the story was reported in this morning's London newspapers.

Sir John is either about to or already has resigned from his post, which is officially described as "deputy under secretary of state."

Some newspapers here have suggested that Sir John has spent most of his professional life as a dry-as-dust commercial diplomat and was lately brought into M.I.6 because of his administrative skills. Knowing per-

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was convicted of possession of marijuana and fined $60, but his father's career was not affected by that incident.

Sir John's exposure and departure is not expected to have any major repercussions on M I.6. Sir John, was too far up in the hierarchy, too remote from actual operations, to compromise any British spies in the field.

Sir John will or already has been replaced by another Foreign Office official whose different personality could affect the tone, but not the essential nature of the intelligence gathering machine. Characteristically, it works from a nondescript office building not far from the U.S. embassy.

The fact that M.I.6 is under the Foreign Office and is not a separate bureaucracy is another major difference from American practice. The British believe that keeping their spies under Foreign Office control helps prevent them from straying off on courses of their own and embarrassing the professional diplomats.

The reaction in the intelligence community to Sir John's downfall was summed up this way, "Hard luck on the poor bastard — what a twit of a son — I'd like to kick him in the crotch."

Sir John belongs to the right club. He has been awarded the right decorations.

From his picture published in the Manchester Guardisn, he appears typecast for his role. He has a distinguished, oval face, strong chin, aquiline nose and stares out from under slightly hooded brows.

The surfacing of Sir John's name illustrates the curious and peculiarly British system of D (for Defense) notices. Essentially, this is a voluntary agreement between media and government that tries to prevent the disclosure of material seen as harmful to national security.

Its key figure is a retired rear admiral, Kenneth Farnhill, secretary of the Defense, Press and Broadcasting Committee. Newspapers fearful of breaching security call Farnhill, who makes himself available around the clock, for an opinion. The media need not follow his advice. But, in an interview, he said they have without fail during at least his three months in the job and the nearly two years of his predecessor.

His committee consists of four high-ranking civil servants and media representatives—editors from national and provincial newspapers, television executives and representatives of news agencies.

After a D-notice flap two years ago, this group codified 12 guidelines covering weapons, military plans, intelligence and other sensitive subjects. These guidelines, are bound in a 25-page green book marked "confidential" and 900 copies are in the media's hands.

Why does Britain make a mystery of the head of M.I. 6 as well as its counter-intelligence counterpart, M.I. 5?

Adm. Farnhill, himself a former high-ranking intelligence official in the Defense Ministry, readily acknowledged that the spy chiefs' names are well known in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

But their anonymity is preserved for two reasons, he said: to enable them to live as normal and private a life as possible, sparing them bodyguards, cranks and other occupational hazards of an identified spy chief.

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sons scoff at this. Indeed. the bare facts of his life available in the British "Who's Who" suggest a background and series of cover posts to delight Ian Fleming, Graham Greene and Compton MacKenzie.

Sir John, an only son, attended Wellington College, a "public" —that is private — school in Berkshire. He studied at Balliol College, Oxford, and then worked for four years in New York until 1939 at an advertising agency. The next year, he was a British vice consul in Baltimore. He then moved back to New York and the British information services during the war.

His official list of posts brings him back to London for an undisclosed Foreign Office job from 1946 to 1949: then "first secretary (commercial)" at the British embassy in Washington.

His sole posting in Eastern Europe was from 1951 to 1953, when he was first secretary at the embassy in Warsaw. This was followed by "counsellor, Foreign Office" and "head of information, research department, Foreign Office." From 1960 to 1963, his biography simply says "Washington." In 1964, and was "on loan to Civil Services Commission during 1966." The biography does not disclose when he became deputy undersecretary and boss of M.I. 6, allthough the Daily Express said he tool over as "M" four years ago.

Sir John, who lives in the fashionable Belgravia section of London, apparently was a painter of promise in his youth. He exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1930 and 1931 and the Paris Salon in 1932. He still lists painting as a hobby — along with "electronics," a nice suggestion of British irony.

Official sources tried to discourage the drawing of any connection between the arrest of Charles and Sir John's resignation, stressing that the spy chief is only 11 months away from the normal retirement age of 60.

However, persons thoroughly familiar with intelligence procedures here said that the arrest of his son on so serious a charge made it impossible for Sir John to continue. "There is a Caesar's wife doctrine, you know, one knowledgable man said.

Four years ago, Charles