

Comment

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An Incredible Mole Who Would Be Tsar

Several weeks ago the world was stunned to learn that a former head of British intelligence was officially suspected of being a Soviet agent. The suspect, now deceased, was Sir Roger Hollis, who as head of MI-5 from 1958 to 1966 was roughly the British equivalent of J. Edgar Hoover.

During this period, other officers in the British intelligence service had been identified as "moles," but if the actual head of the British service turned out to be a mole, the entire secret world of intelligence during this period would have to be agonizingly reappraised. After this charge was made, Prime Minister Thatcher told Parliament that two secret investigations of Sir Roger had failed to produce any credible evidence that he had worked for Soviet intelligence; yet, the swirl of suspicions and allegations continued.

During this entire controversy, one of the few men who could cast some light on Sir Roger's bona fides sat quietly in his small apartment in Kew Gardens, in Queens, N.Y., shunned by all the intelligence services in the Western world.

A pale man in his early 70s, with a distinctive walrus mustache, this man is perhaps the only important CIA mole to have successfully penetrated the secret world of Soviet intelligence and survived to tell his tale in the West. (The CIA's other top moles — Oleg Penkovsky and Peter Popov — were both captured by the KGB and executed). He now is an American citizen living under the name Aleksei Romanoff, who ekes out a living editing a small newsletter.

Twenty-three years ago, however, he turned the entire universe of intelligence inside out when he revealed the existence of KGB agents who had risen to the top echelons of British, German, French and American intelligence. These KGB penetration agents, or "moles," had been actively undermining and betraying the secret activities of Western intelligence.



ALEKSEI ROMANOFF

He could only deduce that the KGB had a mole of its own in the CIA, with access to what he was supplying.

This incredible "mole" case began nearly a quarter of a century ago. Romanoff, who then went by the name of Michael Goleniewski, was the vice chairman of military intelligence in Poland. Since he had a special responsibility for counter-intelligence — or catching enemy spies — he worked closely with representatives of Soviet and East German intelligence.

Occasionally, his KGB liaison officer, a clever but boastful Russian named Col. Ivan Andreievich Raina, would allude to very sensitive sources that the KGB had established inside the CIA and other Western intelligence services. He provided only hints — but no names.

Edward J. Epstein is the author of a number of books, including "Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald" (Readers Digest Press). Copyright © 1981 Independent News Alliance.

On one occasion, for example, Col. Raina warned that the CIA would attempt to recruit a Polish diplomat in Switzerland. He gave the approximate time and place that the CIA approach would be made.

How did Raina know the CIA plans? Romanoff deduced from such tidbits of information that the KGB had indeed succeeded in placing one or more "moles" in the CIA.

Then, through a series of accidents, he was called upon by the Russians to open the safe of a Soviet intelligence officer in Poland who had committed suicide. The contents of the safe provided more pieces in the jigsaw, and led Romanoff to conclude that the KGB had "moles" operating in West German, British and French intelligence. Then, in 1958, he decided to defect to the United States - and provide this valuable information to Western intelligence.

In April 1958, Romanoff crossed the border into West Berlin, and posted a letter addressed to Henry J. Taylor, the U.S. ambassador to Switzerland. In this letter, he gave neither his name nor his nationality. He explained to Ambassador Taylor that the KGB had penetrated Western intelligence, and if he identified himself, his identity would soon be known to the KGB.

Instead, he proposed to help the United States ferret out these moles by supplying information that could be traced to them. He suggested that the FBI should set up a "mail drop" for him, and inform him of the address through a classified ad in a West German newspaper. He preferred, the FBI - since he believed

the CIA was penetrated by KGB moles. He signed the letter "Heckenschultze."

Despite this advice, Ambassador Taylor turned the case over to the CIA, which by law was the proper channel. In a matter of weeks, the CIA advertised an address for the anonymous mole in a Frankfurt newspaper. It then began to receive incredibly detailed reports from "Heckenschultze."

These reports quickly identified no fewer than seven spies. These included a British admiralty aide named Harry Houghton, who had furnished the Soviets with secret information about U.S. nuclear submarines; Col. Israel Beer, an Israeli military historian who had gained the confidence of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion; and Col. Stig Wennesstrom, the Swedish air attache in Washington, D.C.

While the CIA was still hotly debating the bona fides of this mystery agent, a document arrived at the mail drop that caused considerable consternation. It was a list of 26 Polish officials that had been compiled by the British Secret Service as potential targets for recruitment.

Such a list should have been kept in the most protected vault of British intelligence, and known only to a few top British intelligence officials. The CIA therefore wondered how their mystery agent had obtained a copy.

In his next report, "Heckenschultze" explained that he had gotten this British secret list from the KGB. The implication was clear: The KGB had one or more moles deep within British intelligence who had stolen the list for the KGB.

Allen Dulles, then director of the CIA, personally brought the matter to the attention of British Intelligence. Among the top British officials queried about this list was Sir Roger Hollis, who then, in 1960, headed MI-6. The CIA wanted to know if the list was genuine; and if so, who was in a position to leak it to the KGB.

Several weeks later, British intelligence reported back to the CIA that, after a thorough investigation of the matter, it was determined that the list was nothing more than a clumsy fabrication. It suggested that the names could have been taken out of the Warsaw phone book.

The British denials were so convincing that even James Jesus Angleton, the legendary head of CIA counterintelligence, was prepared to believe that the mystery mole was a fake. Indeed, it was suggested that "Heckenschultze" might itself be a KGB disinformation operation designed to sow discord between the CIA and the British Secret Service.

Then, to the CIA's astonishment, a researcher in the CIA's East European division discovered an exact copy of the list of Polish nationals in the archives. It had been sent more than one year earlier to Washington by the British Secret Service

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as possible candidates for compromise and recruitment. It now became absolutely clear to all concerned that the list had not been lifted from a Warsaw phone directory, as the British had suggested, but it came from the secret files of either British intelligence or the CIA.

It has never been determined whether the British denials represented honest oversight or deliberate lying to the CIA. And if the British were lying, was it for protective security reasons or for more nefarious purposes?

Confronted with this new evidence, the British accepted the possibility that there might be a high-level leak. An investigation was immediately begun as to who had access to the list, and then narrowed down to a Dutch-born career officer in MI-6 named George Blake.

Catching George Blake

Blake, it turned out, had rapidly advanced his career through a remarkable string of successful recruitments of communist diplomats and military officers serving in Germany. It now appeared that a number of these "successes" had been purposely provided Blake by the KGB so that he would rise in the ranks of British intelligence.

Placed under surveillance, Blake was caught in the act of stealing a document, and then he confessed to having turned over to the KGB every important document in the files of the British Secret Service that he had access to.

"Heckenschultze" next turned his attention to piecing together the KGB spy network in West German intelligence. He had been told by his KGB liaison, Col. Raina, that two of a group of six West German intelligence officers who visited CIA headquarters in Washington in 1956 were KGB moles. Raina even bragged that these agents personally met with CIA Director Dulles.

The CIA checked through its records and it found that a delegation of six West German intelligence officers had indeed met with Dulles in 1956, and promptly began investigating the group to see who among them might be double agents. In short order, the lead focused suspicion on Heinz Felfe, who was then deputy chief of West German Intelligence; and then, through surveillance of Felfe, to the head of his own surveillance unit in Bonn. Both men eventually were convicted of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, in Warsaw, the KGB became increasingly concerned about the source of the leak that had exposed their most valuable agents in England and Germany. Col. Raina brought the matter to the attention of Col. Goleniewski - not knowing that he was in reality the mystery

mole "Heckenschultze." He asked Goleniewski to help in the investigation, and then he explained that he knew of various documents that the traitor had leaked to the CIA.

Mole in the CIA

Goleniewski was stunned — though he managed to conceal his reaction. He, in effect, was being asked by the KGB to investigate himself. He knew that he himself had



sent the documents in question to the mail drop in Germany, and thus into the hands of the CIA.

But how did Col. Raina find out about them? He could only deduce that the KGB had a mole of its own in the CIA, and this KGB mole now had access to the "take" he was secretly supplying. It was therefore only a matter of time before his identity would be revealed. He realized now that he had no alternative but to escape.

In the next few weeks, Goleniewski decided on a final coup before his departure from Warsaw. He photographed thousands of Polish Intelligence and KGB documents in his office files, and then secreted the cache of microfilm in a tree trunk in Warsaw. During Christmas of 1960, he traveled to East Berlin where he met his fiancée, Irma, and then they crossed into West Berlin, and went directly to the U.S. Military Mission there.

According to plan, he met the CIA case officers who for two years had been receiving his mysterious reports. It was a highly charged meeting: the Americans found out that their anonymous mole was the vice chairman of military intelligence, and that thousands of documents were hidden in a tree trunk in Warsaw.

While Goleniewski and his fiancée were being flown to the United States, a CIA operative in Warsaw went to the tree trunk, recovered the microfilm, and left it at the American Embassy. Then, it was sent in the diplomatic pouch to Washington.

Clues for Years of Work

When the CIA analyzed these documents, it found that they contained a surprising number of U.S. military secrets that could have only come from high-level sources in NATO or the U.S. Defense Department. For years to come, these documents would provide clues for tracking down Soviet moles and other penetrations in the Western defense establishment.

After Goleniewski was relocated in a safe house in Alexandria, Va., a team of CIA interrogators began the arduous task of debriefing him. There were a number of surprises to come — not all of them pleasant — for the CIA.

The information he provided in the case of one Col. Bryn was particularly shocking. Bryn had been a member of Polish military intelligence assigned to the Polish Embassy in Japan, and who in 1958 defected to the United States. American counterintelligence, however, did not accept him as a bona fide defector and after internment him in a prison in the Philippines and questioning him, the CIA decided that he was providing misleading information and was ordered by the KGB to defect as part of a grander deception. Subsequently Bryn was released in Paris and, in a state of despair and confusion, returned to Poland.

Now, Goleniewski added some very unsettling facts to the case. He stated that Bryn was not only a legitimate defector but had had access to crucially important information about KGB espionage operations all over Europe. His defection, according to Goleniewski, had raised fears in the KGB that these clandestine networks would soon be blown. Goleniewski was therefore amazed to find out, when he was vice chairman of Polish Intelligence, that the Americans had released Bryn and allowed him to return to Poland.

Bryn claimed that the CIA had administered drugs to him and tortured him while he was in the Philippines. Goleniewski concluded by saying that Bryn was immediately arrested in Warsaw, interrogated

and sentenced to death for attempted defection.

If the CIA accepted Goleniewski's inside account, it meant that they had made a tragic error in judging Bryn a fake defector. In a sense, the CIA officers involved had signed his death warrant by allowing him to return to Poland. Moreover, they had lost forever valuable information about the KGB underground in Europe.

Whom to Believe?

But was this self-appointed mole to be fully believed? James Angleton, the CIA's counterintelligence chief, later told me, "The Goleniewski case was the most complicated defection we had ever dealt with in the CIA... no one knew what to believe." It was especially difficult to believe that such a gross error had been made in the Bryn case, because the CIA had received information from a very important source suggesting that Bryn was a fake. Was this source now to be discredited?

Goleniewski's credentials were intensively re-examined. He later recalled that he was mistreated and found himself progressively isolated from his case officer. He claimed that at one point, he was drugged into unconsciousness. He recalls being in a state of "full narcosis."

The next shock came when he informed his CIA interrogators that Michael Goleniewski was not his real name. He now identified himself as Aleksei Nicholaevitch Romanoff, the son of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and the heir to the tsarist throne. The CIA was of course incredulous of this claim: the tsar and his entire family had been killed at Ekaterinburg in Russia in 1918.

Romanoff, as he now called himself, disputed the historical evidence. He said that all members of the imperial family escaped execution due to a prior secret agreement with the Bolsheviks, and were smuggled out of Russia into Poland. Having assumed the name of Goleniewski to conceal his royal identity, he rose through the ranks after World War II to the position of vice chairman of Polish Intelligence. He further claimed that dental and hand prints would verify his identity.

sure of gold and platinum worth \$38 billion, which the tsar had been transporting from Vladivostok to the United States for safekeeping. As heir to the tsar, Romanoff believed he was entitled to a share of his father's treasure. The Soviet Union, meantime, is insisting that it is the sole rightful owner of this Russian ship and all its glittering cargo.

I ended our lunch by asking Romanoff about Sir Roger Hollis, who had been head of British MI-5 at the time of his defection. Did he think Sir Roger might be a KGB mole?

"I don't think it would have been possible," he said. He then ticked off very precisely all the Soviet agents whom MI-5 had captured due to the information he personally provided. "If the KGB had had a mole at the head of MI-5, you can be sure all these men would somehow have escaped," he said.

He suggested that the report that Sir Roger was a mole was more likely a piece of disinformation being circulated by the KGB now in order to discredit British intelligence.

(At least one CIA official whom I spoke with, the late Herman E. Kimsley of the CIA's office of security, after leaving the CIA said that various physical tests proved to his satisfaction that Romanoff was indeed the tsarevich.)

The point at which Goleniewski identified himself as Romanoff is bitterly disputed. He told me that he had identified himself in 1961 to the CIA, immediately after defecting. The CIA officially claims that he did not raise the Romanoff issue until the summer of 1963 when he applied for U.S. citizenship, in a letter to Rep. Michael A. Feighan. But the FBI liaison with the CIA recalled to me that she had heard the Romanoff claim in 1962.

In any case it became a matter of extreme embarrassment to the CIA, especially after Goleniewski-Romanoff attempted to assert publicly his claim to the Russian throne in 1963.

Pensioned Off

Goleniewski had been the most productive agent in the entire history of the CIA, revealing more than a dozen Soviet moles. The CIA, however, could not be put in the position of supporting his incredible claim to the tsar's fortune. In March 1962, he and Irma, who had now become his wife, were moved from Alexandria to an apartment in the Times Square area of New York. The CIA subsequently arranged for him and his wife to have a more comfortable apartment in Queens. Soon afterwards the CIA abruptly severed its relations with him, "leaving him with a small pension in return for his services as a mole."

Seeks Tsar's Gold

Recently I had lunch with him at Harry's Bar in New York City. He seemed spry, alert, and in good spirits. He explained that he was in the process of instituting a suit against the Japanese company that is salvaging a tsarist ship sunk in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. The Japanese salvage company had claimed a trea-



Peggy Gage