Interpol: Less Mystery

By John Vinocur
Associated Press

SAINT CLOUD, France—"Results of our gidad made erkek Ying Ling show a deportee from Brazil where girof sent us re your odnub Nr. 2401 of March 27 has revealed oblov: . . . "

It sound mysterious, but not really. In fact, not much more mysterious than the organization that transmitted the coded message—Interpol, the international police service, that sits out here on a bluff overlooking Paris, looking like a well-scrubbed soap factory.

Somehow, for all its lack of opaque or circuitous activities, Interpol has a reputation as a supranational police force with a staff of James Bonds and Hercule Poirots. It is not. Its basic job is transmitting messages and keeping archives for 114 countries, the kind of work that catches criminals but would put Agatha Christie to sleep.

The message above translates out as, "Results of our investigation made on subject named Ying Ling show him to be a deportee from Brazil from where information sent us in reference to you telegram No. 2401 of March 27 has revealed the fillowing:"

Words like gidad, erkek and girof are used mainly to speed transmission by substituting two-syllable code words for multisyllabic words or phrases.

The fact is, no one is likely to be listening on the transmissions because bribing a cop would come cheaper for organize crime than setting up an elaborate station to monitor Interpol.

The Interpol transmission room looks a bit like a 1920s railroad dispatching center minus the eyeshades and galluses: Men in earphones alternately tapping at Morse keys and writing out Morse messages for retransmission.

The staff handles 400 to 450 messages a day.

"It sounds a little corny, I know," one of the operators said, "but you get a kick when, say, Argentina reports back they've been able to make an arrest on a message you've handled from Belgium."

Most of the remainder of the staff of 120—which includes policemen on loan

Than Meets the Eye

from Britain, the United States, Canada, Austria, West Germany, Ceylon and Chile—are divided into operational groups, specializing in an area of crime like narcotics or counterfeiting.

The narcotics group is headed by Raymond Kendall, a chief inspector from Scotland Yard. Its main job is culling the enormous Interpol files for information, pasting together bits and pieces of a criminal's activity in many countries for a line on whom he might be linked with and what his methods of operation are.

Regular reports and "green sheets"—recommendations for surveillance—go out on the basis of this research.

The archives take up a whole floor, half made up of alphabetical listings and the other half of phonetic files, where people are registered on the way someone heard a name pronounced.

The archives are actually the best place to go for reassurance about your privacy. Take a certain Mrs. V: She died in a plane crash. No criminal, but there was an insurance envestigation on the crash and her name was filed away. Interpol's version of immortality.

Jean Nepote, a Frenchman who is Interpol's general, spends a good deal of his time on paradiplomatic missions: coaxing less than fully cooperative memebers to pull their weight, reminding them about arrears, and suggesting that Interpol needs money to grow in order to keep up with the expansion of crime.

"We're always a little unhappy because we think we're a little behind on our growth," he says. "We need more people and greater means."

Nepote is long past the phase when he could be angry at a headline writer like the one in London who wrote something like "Interpol Breaks Up Gold. Racket."

"I learned long ago," Nepote said, "that when you protest about that kind of thing it goes on page 25 and nobody ever reads it. But there's always a little bit of truth in those stories, you know. Interpol did help. It's just there wasn't anybody there with an Interpol badge."