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Bonn, Germany AP - Police spread a dragnet Wednesday for Gerhard Boehm, an obscure Defense Department clerk whose disappearance and possible suicide sharpened a security scandal emerging from the recent mysterious deaths of four high West German officials.

Newspapers denounced the government's handling of the apparent suicides of three senior military officers and an Economic Ministry official. One accused officials of "incredible carelessness." There were indications that some of Germany's allies feared North Atlantic Treaty Organization-NATO-secrets had been compromised.

Boehm, 61, vanished Monday leaving suicide notes with his office and his family. 21 OCT.

Police said his briefcase containing personal items had been found under a Bonn railroad bridge.

A Defense Department spokesman said Boehm, who was due for retirement, had had no access to secret defense papers "apart from carrying documents from room to room in sealed containers."

Defense officials said he had been suffering acute depression and the case normally would be no cause for alarm.

But in the last 10 days Rear Adm. Hermann Luedke, Maj. Gen. Horst Wendtland, Lt. Col. Johannes Grimm and Hans-Heinrich Schenk, economic ministry assistant, apparently took their own lives. Federal Prosecutor Ludwig Martin said Luedke might have worked for a foreign intelligence agency.

Luedke, 57, just retired from a senior NATO post, was found dead in a forest with a gaping gun wound Oct. 8.

Wendtland, 56, deputy head of the federal intelligence service, was reported to have fired a pistol bullet into his head in his office near Munich the same day.

Grimm, 57, security officer and member of the "Alert and Mobilization" section of the Bonn Defense Ministry was said to have shot himself in the head in his office Oct. 18.

Schenk, 40, apparently hanged himself in his Cologne home Oct. 15. His death was announced Tuesday.

Defense, intelligence and justice officials have said they are satisfied Wendtland, Grimm and Schenk took own lives in states of mental depression.

Luedke's case was different.

Nine microfilm shots of secret NATO documents turned in to police by a Bonn photo store were traced to Luedke. He pleaded ignorance when confronted with them by the military counterintelligence service. Prosecutor Martin said police and security officials took too long to inform him of the find.

The photographs were developed Sept. 23, but it was not until on Sept. 27 that the federal prosecutor took over the case and clamped a tight security lid over details.

Luedke was free to go hunting in southern Germany, return home, and leave unchecked for the hunting trip that ended in his death, informed sources said.

The sources said several NATO countries, particularly Britain, were deeply concerned about the Luedke affair and might be considering a review of logistic planning.

Martin, in close contact with NATO headquarters at Casteau, Belgium, near Brussels, told a news conference Tuesday he had uncovered no links between the deaths of Luedke and the others.

The events pointed up West Germany's long-standing description as a "playground for secret agents. Latest Interior Ministry estimates put the number of Communist agents active in the country at about 16,000, many of whom are thought to operate in and around Bonn.

The Frankfurt newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau criticized Wednesday the official attitude to the four deaths. It said:

"According to our authorities, this is all neither particularly exciting nor sensational."

Bonn's General Anzeiger: "A high measure of official slovenliness has emerged in handling of the Luedke affair." It demanded a probe of the methods of all departments concerned.

"Because investigations before and after his death were conducted with incredible carelessness, not even the cause of his death has been established beyond doubt", the newspaper said.

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