

The People of the CIA ... Ames Mole Hunt Team

Jeanne Vertefeuille is a quiet, gray-haired woman. She is a far cry from the spy hunters portrayed in movies. But appearances can be deceiving. Vertefeuille was part of the small team who toiled for eight years to reveal Aldrich Ames for what he truly was: a spy for Moscow.

The Birth of a Spy

Ames started at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1962 in a low-level position. By 1969, he was promoted to case officer and began work on his first assignment in Ankara, Turkey. Although Ames worked many interesting cases in the years that followed, his personal life was going downhill. The financial stress of an upcoming divorce and his girlfriend Rosario's luxurious standard of living forced Ames to consider a way to supplement his Agency income.

On April 16, 1985, Ames walked into the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., and offered secrets to the KGB for money. At the time, Ames was working in the CIA's Soviet/East Europe Division. He was extremely knowledgeable about the Soviet intelligence services and had access to all cases of—and plans for—CIA penetration of the KGB and Soviet military intelligence.

Beginning in the summer of 1985, Ames met regularly with a Soviet diplomat who acted as the go-between for Ames and the KGB. Ames first met the diplomat through the Agency's operationally sanctioned attempts to recruit him as an intelligence source. In this manner, Ames provided the KGB with all he knew about Agency plans involving the Soviet Union. The information he gave the KGB compromised at least 100 operations and endangered the lives of dozens of Soviet agents.

During this same time period, CIA spies targeted against the Soviet Union began disappearing at an alarming rate. The CIA realized it had a problem. In 1986, the Agency launched an investigation into the cause of the disappearances.

Call for Duty

In September 1986, Vertefeuille was overseas on assignment when she received a cryptic cable from her boss, the chief of the Counterintelligence (CI) staff. He wanted her to come back to Washington to work on an important CI case. A special team was being assembled to find out why the CIA was losing its best Soviet assets.



At the time, Vertefeuille had been with the Agency for more than 30 years. During her years working in the CI component of the Soviet division, she became an expert on the workings of the Soviet intelligence services.

The Hunt Begins

So, Vertefeuille—with her many years of knowledge—and her small team set to work. Vertefeuille and her team also received guidance and encouragement from Paul Redmond, the deputy chief of the Counterintelligence Center. The team examined the three most likely reasons for the compromised operations:

- The KGB infiltrated the Agency's communications and read the traffic;
- The KGB in Moscow obtained access to CIA documents regarding the compromised cases or placed a bug; or
- There was a mole within the Agency.

In November 1989, a long-awaited lead came to light that brought Ames to the consideration of Vertefeuille and the team. Diana Worthen, a colleague and friend of Ames and his new wife Rosario, noticed that he seemed to have more money than his salary should provide. Although Worthen's reporting attracted the team's

attention, it did not substantially divert them from other ongoing investigations because it was believed that Rosario came from a wealthy Colombian family.

The Cause of the Leak

In 1991, with the assistance of two FBI agents who worked with the CIA mole hunt team, it was jointly decided to focus on the presence of a mole within the Agency, excluding the other possibilities. First, the team made a list of about 190 CIA officers who had access to much of the information on the compromised cases. The people on this list were the most likely to be the mole.

“We knew which people had the best access,” Vertefeuille said. “So, we were able to weed down the list by the level of access the person had in addition to other considerations.”

The list was eventually narrowed down to 28 people. Next, the team took a vote to decide where to start investigating.

“Everybody involved with the investigation was allowed to vote for six people and the votes were weighted,” Vertefeuille said. “The person who caused you the greatest amount of unease would be No. 1 on your list. Lo and behold, Rick Ames comes out at the top of the combined and weighted list.”

The Mole is Revealed

Dan Payne, the financial expert on the team, pulled all of Ames’ financial records and began to analyze them. He then passed his findings to Sandy Grimes, another expert in Soviet intelligence services. Grimes was working on a chronology of Ames’ activities since 1985. In 1992, Grimes’s chronology led to a break in the case. She discovered a correlation between Ames’ meetings with the Soviet diplomat and large deposits into his checking account.

“When she realized this, she ran to the front office to tell Paul Redmond that Rick Ames was the spy,” Vertefeuille said.

Closing In

In the spring of 1993, the FBI took over the case because CIA does not have the authority to make arrests. The FBI then gathered the evidence needed to arrest Ames, including notes about clandestine meetings and intelligence operations found in his residential trash.

In February 1994, Ames was preparing for a trip overseas to Moscow. The FBI was worried that if they let Ames go on this trip, they would never see him again. They decided to make the arrest before he left.

The FBI asked Ames’ boss to call him and tell him to come in to discuss some new developments related to his trip overseas. Ames left his house, drove around the corner and straight into the arms of the FBI.

“We felt great relief when we heard he had been caught,” Vertefeuille said. “We were always worried that he was going to get away with it.”

The Last Laugh

After Ames’ arrest, Vertefeuille participated in his debriefing. During the debriefing, Ames revealed that he had given the KGB Vertefeuille’s name as one of three CIA officers who could be framed for his acts of espionage.

“I had the same accesses that Ames had,” Vertefeuille said. “I’m so lucky that the KGB didn’t send an anonymous letter to the FBI saying that I was a spy.”

Vertefeuille's initial reaction of rage upon learning about Ames' attempts to cover his tracks at her expense quickly gave way to humor.

"At first, I wanted to jump across the table and strangle him, but then I started laughing," Vertefeuille said. "It really was funny because he was the one in shackles, not me."

Behind Bars

During his nine years of spying, Ames received payments from the Soviet KGB that totaled \$2.5 million. The KGB kept another \$2.1 million earmarked for Ames in a Moscow bank. Ames is the highest paid spy in American history.

Ames was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. He is serving his sentence at the maximum security prison in Allenwood, Pennsylvania.

Ames' wife Rosario received a five-year prison sentence for conspiracy to commit espionage and tax evasion. When Rosario was released from prison, she immediately went home to South America.

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