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SENIOR K.G.B. MAN DEFECTING AGAIN, BACK TO MOSCOW

BLOW TO U.S. INTELLIGENCE

He Holds a News Conference, Charging He Was Drugged and Tortured by C.I.A.

By STEPHEN ENGELBERG
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 4 — Vitaly Yurchenko, a K.G.B. officer described as one of the most senior Russian officials ever to defect to the West, announced today that he was returning to the Soviet Union.

The State Department said Mr. Yurchenko would not be allowed to leave the United States until American authorities had met with him "in an environment free of Soviet coercion to satisfy ourselves about his real intentions."

Mr. Yurchenko appeared late this afternoon at a news conference at the Soviet Embassy.

Surrounded by smiling Soviet diplomats, Mr. Yurchenko told reporters he had been kidnapped in Rome last summer by American authorities, drugged and transported to the United States, where he was held prisoner by the Central Intelligence Agency.

American officials have said that Mr. Yurchenko defected to the West in Italy three months ago and that he has been giving them information since then at an undisclosed location in the United States.

'A Lie,' Senator Says

A source familiar with the Yurchenko case said the C.I.A. did not know whether the Russian was a double agent from the time he said he was defecting to the West, or a defector who later decided to redefect and fabricated the story he told today as a ploy to ingratiate himself with Soviet authorities.

Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said he did not believe the C.I.A. had been lax in the Yurchenko case. He said Mr. Yurchenko had been free to come and go as he pleased. Mr. Durenberger and other members of Congress said Mr. Yurchenko had not been kidnapped, drugged or mistreated.

"Everything Yurchenko said today is a lie," Mr. Durenberger said after the news conference.

Requested Asylum, C.I.A. Says

At the moment the Yurchenko news conference began, the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Oleg M. Sokolov, was delivering an official protest to the State Department, charging that Mr. Yurchenko had been abducted and mistreated, and saying he wished to return to the Soviet Union.

In a statement issued after the news conference the State Department described Mr. Yurchenko's charges as "completely false." The department said he had defected "of his own volition" and "requested asylum in the United States and signed a statement to that effect." The statement said Mr. Yurchenko had "willingly cooperated" with both the C.I.A. and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Last week, according to the source familiar with the case, Mr. Yurchenko went to dinner at a restaurant in Washington with two American agents. He excused himself and told them he would return in 15 minutes.

He never came back, but instead walked over to the Soviet Embassy on 16th Street N.W. The Administration said it knew nothing further until today, when the Soviet Embassy announced the press conference. The C.I.A. did not inform either the Congressional intelligence committees or other law enforcement or security agencies of Mr. Yurchenko's disappearance, according to Admninistration officials.

The apparent defection of Mr. Yurchenko was clearly a blow to Western intelligence services. American officials have said that he was one of several high-ranking Russian intelligence officers who have defected this year.

Mr. Yurchenko would not describe his escape from what he said was a C.I.A. safe house outside Fredericksburg, Va., saying that other defectors may want to use his techniques.

At the press conference, Mr. Yurchenko, a balding heavy-set man, spoke in both English and in Russian through a translator. He described what he said was "torture" at the hands of the C.I.A., but also bantered with reporters, describing a dinner with William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, former vice chairman of the Senate committee, said tonight that he believed Mr. Yurchenko had not learned much of value about American intelligence methods but that the Russian had been "a very considerable asset" for three months.

Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, said tonight that some members of the intelligence committee had been skeptical about Mr. Yurchenko from the beginning, saying they felt the timing of his defection was too opportune. According to American officials, Mr. Yurchenko ascribed his defection to disgust with the Soviet system.

At the news conference today, Mr. Yurchenko seemed eager to tell his story. Even after Soviet officials declared the session over, he continued to give answers.

The State Department has said that Mr. Yurchenko worked in the Soviet Embassy here from 1975 to 1980, and some officials have said he directed K.G.B. operations in North America. Today, he said he would "not make comments on spying business."

He did say, however, that his time with the C.I.A. had proved educational. "I know your side," he said. "It's better than reading a thousand books."

Administration officials said today that Mr. Yurchenko had been angered by the intense press coverage of what he has been telling American officials.

One official said the Russian had been promised that his disclosures would not be made public when he fled to the West.

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