

Soviet Expert Thinks 'Penkovsky Papers' Are a Forgery

First of Two Articles

By Victor Zorza
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LONDON—"Their authenticity," says the introduction of the Penkovsky Papers, the memoirs of the Anglo-American spy in Russia, "is beyond question." It is not.

Indeed, the book itself contains the evidence showing certain parts of it to be a forgery, even though other sections of the book are evidently made up of intelligence information provided by Penkovsky before his arrest.



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But the book does not, in fact, claim to be made up of Penkovsky's intelligence reports to the West. On the contrary, it is said to be quite distinct from them, and to consist of "notes, sketches and comments" accumulated by him during his spying career in 1961-62 and "smuggled out of the Soviet Union" only in the autumn of 1962, at the time of his arrest. It is said that Penkovsky hoped

that they might eventually be published "to clarify his motives and to clear his name beyond question." It is curious that a work with so noble a purpose should include so much purely military and political intelligence.

The 'Low-down'

Much of the book seems calculated to show the Soviet system in the worst possible light, but this would be consistent with Penkovsky's attempt to justify his defection. It is even possible to stretch this interpretation to explain the "low-down"—and it really is low—on the sexual mores, the drunkenness and cupidity of some of the people he knew in the higher ranks of the political, military and intelligence quarters. "I have absolutely no intention of defaming the marshals and generals," says, after giving some particularly choice details.

He adds that he had "intentionally omitted the subject of moral degradation and drunkenness"—which he had not. "I know one thing for sure, though: all our generals have mistresses, and some

have two or more." All? For sure?

It is conceivable that western intelligence organizations might have been interested in the peccadilloes of members of the Soviet General Staff, just as Soviet intelligence would be interested in their western opposite numbers, and that Penkovsky thought it right to supply this information. But he would hardly write it all down for posterity.

"Intelligence Feat"

The introduction says that the extent and ingenuity of Penkovsky's work add up perhaps to the most extraordinary intelligence feat of this century. If there is no Soviet spy now working at an even higher level in the West, then this claim may well be valid. Much of the intelligence information reproduced in the book is obviously genuine.

Western government experts revealed their knowledge of it some time ago in the course of discussion about Soviet affairs. Penkovsky's information about the ignominious failure of Khrushchev's "secret weapon," which blew up on the launching pad, en-

abled the western leaders to treat Soviet threats and boasts with composure. Penkovsky's information about Khrush-

chev's plans during the German crisis of 1961 enabled the West to make the dispositions which warded off the Soviet threat to Berlin.

Penkovsky sent reports on the bickering over the building up of the Soviet missile force, favored by Khrushchev, and the maintenance of adequate conventional forces, favored by the marshals.

Dispute in Kremlin

This gave western intelligence analysts the clues that helped them to study between the lines of the Soviet press the most important political dispute that raged in the Soviet leadership in recent years—on the allocation of resources between civilian and military needs, within the military field itself.

This contributed greatly to the western governments' understanding of the factors that caused the fall of Khrushchev, even though this occurred some two years after Penkovsky's arrest.

For some months before the Cuban missile crisis, Penkovsky and his western masters knew that he was being watched by Soviet counter-intelligence. He could therefore neither acquire nor send any intelligence on what was to prove the most fateful confrontation between East and West, and suggestions that he was asked to report on Soviet operations in Cuba just before the crisis would appear to be without foundation. Yet, paradoxically, his contribution was probably decisive.

He had sent out, earlier, details of the term of Soviet missiles. This enabled U.S. air reconnaissance experts to identify the missile sites at an early stage of construction. The early warning made it possible for President Kennedy to make in secret the preparations that played so major a part in his later management of the crisis, and in compelling Khrushchev to withdraw.

Lack of Time

The most important part of the information he sent out consisted of some 5000 photographs of documents, sketches, etc., taken with a miniature camera. Yet we are asked to believe that this highly professional and valuable spy added to the great risks he was already running by keeping a detailed account of his activities and views, virtually every page of which contained enough secret information to send him straight to the firing squad.

In the foreword we are told that "throughout the period during which Penkovsky was turning over information to the West, he sat up night after night composing a journal." Yet in a passage that has the ring of truth Penkovsky himself makes it clear that this is just what he could not do. He has to write hurriedly, he says, "for the simple lack of time and space."

When he writes at night in his two-room flat he disturbs his family's sleep: "Typing is very noisy." During the day he is "always busy," "running like a madman," in a typically Russian phrase, between the offices of his two employers, the Committee for the Coordination of Scientific Research, and the Military Intelligence Headquarters. His evenings are generally occupied, nor can he write while visiting his friends in the country—"Someone may always ask what I am doing." At home, at least, "I have a hiding place in my desk." On his own showing, he is hardly likely to have produced in these circumstances the manuscript of what is now a sizeable book.

Autobiography Questioned

The description of his domestic circumstances comes from Penkovsky's autobiographical outline, of a kind that any intelligence service would require from a prospective spy, so that it could check his credentials before employing him.

Penkovsky passed a paper of this kind to an American Embassy official in Moscow, together with an offer of his services, but this was not taken up because it was thought that he had been put up to it by Soviet counter-intelligence. Only six months later, when he made another approach to the British, was his offer accepted.

But even the autobiography is not wholly genuine. The description of Penkovsky's own war service is woven into a three-page potted history of the war in Russia. A man of Penkovsky's intelligence would not have thought it necessary to waste his time on supplying this kind of "background."

A western compiler of the Penkovsky papers, on the other hand, might have thought it useful to provide the wide readership of the book with a historical sketch that would have made Penkovsky's war career more meaningful.

Khrushchev in Ukraine

However, it is not safe to sketch in the background without being familiar with the details of which it is composed. Penkovsky spent the last two years before the war in a military school and then in an artillery unit in the Ukraine, to which he was posted as a political officer.

On one occasion the unit was visited by a number of Soviet military leaders, whom Penkovsky recognized, but there was one person "whom I had never seen before." He was told later that this was "a certain N. S. Khrushchev." Yet for the past two years Khrushchev had been the first secretary of the Ukrainian Party, carrying out a ruthless and bloody purge, feared and hated by all—the virtual master of the Ukraine, the "Little Stalin," with his picture frequently displayed in public places and in the newspapers which would have been obligatory reading for an aspiring political officer.

No doubt the account of the incident was inserted into the "papers" to make them appear more authentic, but the result, as happens so often when enthusiasm outruns good judgment, is the opposite of what was intended.

There is much tedious repetition which is hardly accounted for by the explanation that the papers are arranged "with little attempt at

order and none at literary style." That this is so is painfully obvious, but it still does not explain why the book should contain several accounts of Khrushchev's in-

tended strategy for the Berlin confrontation, all more or less the same, and two of them separated by only one page—a curious waste of time and space by one so short of both.

Nor can these be the written reports sent out by Penkovsky at the time, re-edited, and put together in a book. He was clearly much too intelligent and efficient a spy to waste his efforts on writing down laboriously, in minute detail, and repetitively, the views, impressions and facts which would have sufficed in much shorter outline.

Yet sometimes the book arouses the reader's curiosity, only to frustrate it with lack of detail. The introduction makes for Penkovsky the claim that among the "thousands of pieces of information" swept up by him was "the exact planned dimensions of the Berlin Wall."

Response to Wall

If true this is very important, for it may cause trouble between Washington and London on the one hand, and Berlin on the other—something that the compilers of the book can hardly have intended.

It has always been assumed that the slow and fumbling nature of the western response to the wall was due in large measure to the lack of any warning. Even so, the West German government has not wholly forgiven its allies for the "decision" they displayed at that time.

But had Penkovsky told them? In the text he is made to say that "I learned about the Berlin Wall four days before the Soviet government actually closed it off." Yet the account of his travels given in the book, and the record of his trial, makes it clear that "four days before" that date Penkovsky was still in London, on one of those extended duty trips on which he took time off from shepherding Soviet delegations—the official reasons for his visits to the West—to spend long hours with the special Anglo-American team of four intelligence officers who used every avail-

able minute to milk him of any information he might have.

Unlikely Answers

In the extremely unlikely event that he had learned about the Berlin Wall while still in London, would he have gone back to Moscow and reported later to his masters that he had known about the Wall four days in advance? Why would he do that—to show them after the event how well-informed he was?

Or, if the book is a genuine collection of notes he kept in Moscow, would he simply have made a bald statement of fact like that, almost conversationally, and then gone on with his discussion of Khrushchev's tactics on Berlin? Neither explanation seems credible, and no other offers itself. The only logical answer is that the words attributed to Penkovsky were written by someone else—unless this was a remark he made in one of his subsequent conversations with a member of the Anglo-American team, who took it down, filed it, and it was then seen and used by the compiler of the "Papers."

Indeed, the style of the memoirs is often discursive, verbose, almost conversational—the very opposite of what one would expect from a man writing in Penkovsky's difficult circumstances. At one point, when discussing Soviet military maneuvers, he is made to ask, "What is the point of these exercises"—and then proceeds to give a detailed reply.

Would he really write like that, whether in an intelligence report or in his memoirs? Or was it perhaps, a question put to Penkovsky by one of his interrogators, and then, inadvertently, allowed to remain in the edited transcript of the conversation that might have formed the basis of this passage in the book?

The "conversational" origin of a number of passages is betrayed in similar ways, thus giving the lie to the claim that the book is made up of Penkovsky's written "notes." This, however, does not mean that the book as a whole may be regarded as a genuine edited transcript of Penkovsky's conversations with western intelligence officers. There are many other passages, and sometimes whole sections, which betray the alien hand—or tongue.