

ROGERS REPORTS:

Spy Story: Our Man in the Kremlin

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By WARREN ROGERS

WASHINGTON: From time to time we learn that no matter how fouled up things are on our side, it is just as bad, if not worse, on the other side. One of the latest reminders is the case of Oleg Penkovsky, currently being highly publicized.

Penkovsky was a Soviet colonel, a much-decorated war hero, a high-ranking intelligence officer, an insider in Russia's missile program, an intimate of generals and marshals—in short, seemingly an unmitigated success in the Soviet Union's hierarchy. He even married the boss's daughter—that is, the daughter of a general—and thereafter quickly became, in his own words, "one of the privileged."

But in 1963 he was arrested, tried, convicted and executed as a spy for the United States and Britain. By his own admission, in a remarkable autobiography which he somehow managed to write, he was the West's man in the Kremlin—"Henceforth I am your soldier, pledged to carry out everything which is entrusted to me."

The revelations in his "The Penkovsky Papers," being published this month in the United States, sent tremors through the intelligence community here and in the two other capitals directly affected. Publicly, there will be no comment, as is traditional with operators in the never-never land of espionage. But privately, the sources involved here concede authenticity, in so far as the data lent itself to checking.



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Penkovsky represents himself as shocked and disgusted with the Soviet system and with its politics. On our side, this is the kind of talk we are used to hearing from Americans who take to the streets with banners protesting in favor of civil equality or against policies in Viet Nam. Yet it is astonishing when a man of such stature goes round the bend and into the chasm of treason. Perhaps this says something for our tolerance of these irksome demonstrations as a safety valve.

From the West's point of view, his timing was just about perfect. His informing came during 16 months of 1961 and 1962, perhaps the worst years of the cold war. That was when Khrushchev built the Berlin Wall, resumed nuclear testing and threatened the world with nuclear war by sending missiles into Cuba. There was no more fortuitous time for the United States and Britain to have a pipeline into the Kremlin, providing up-to-the-minute data on Soviet troop dispositions, nuclear capability and missile strength.

We know now why Secretary of Defense McNamara was able to talk so knowledgeably about such matters. He had it cold, straight from Penkovsky.

In great measure, this takes much of the sting out of the atomic "leaks," typified by the celebrated Nunn-May and Fuchs defections, which have so embittered the West. On the surface at least, it would seem we got the best of the nasty bargain. Ever since, the Soviets have been revising, reshuffling, hiring and hiring throughout their intelligence organization.

Beyond that, the incident demonstrates once more how heavily the unscheduled and unexpected figure in the deadly game of intelligence. Both the United States and the Soviet Union, as the leaders of two systems in conflict, spend billions of dollars and risk untold lives trying to ferret out the other's secrets. In the end, one individual with his nose out of joint, for reasons of his own, hands them over on a platter.

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