

STATINTL

STATINTL

His Greatest Service

Penkovsky Unmasked 3 Soviet Spies in West

By Don Cook
Los Angeles Times

PARIS, Nov. 17—Whatever the value of the spy papers of Col. Oleg Penkovsky, or even their validity, which is being questioned by some experts on Soviet affairs, his greatest service to the West was the unmasking of key Russian agents in Paris, London and Stockholm.

The three most important espionage cases in the West in the last five years were all broken by counterintelligence services on the basis of information passed to Britain and the United States by Penkovsky. The cases involved:

Georges Paques, a senior French civil servant who spied for the Russians in the Ministry of National Defense and later in NATO headquarters in Paris. He was caught and sentenced to life imprisonment in July of 1964.

Col. Stig Wennerstrom of the Swedish army, who spied for the Russians in the Swedish Defense Ministry and also while serving as Swedish military attache in Washington. He was caught and sentenced to life imprisonment in July, 1963, at about the same time that Penkovsky went on trial in Moscow with his British contact, Greville Wynne.

William J. C. Vassall, a senior clerk in the British Admiralty, who had been recruited by the Russians through homosexual blackmail during a tour of duty in Moscow. He was apprehended and sentenced to eighteen years in prison in September, 1962.

Penkovsky did not "finger"

these Russian agents directly. But he did pass to the British and American intelligence services information that enabled them to trap the three spies.

A Penkovsky speciality was sending the identity numbers on Western documents that were reaching the Russians. The identity numbers were sufficient to start the counterintelligence search for the spies in the West who were passing the documents to Soviet intelligence.

In the case of the British Admiralty documents and the Swedish Defense Ministry documents, the work of isolating Vassall and Wennerstrom went fairly rapidly. But the apprehension of Georges Paques was more complicated and took more time.

Partly this was because many hundreds of documents had to be sifted and checked. Partly it was because the French counterintelligence services, which are highly effective, do not as a rule respond very swiftly to information provided from American or British sources.

In the end, the break in the Paques case came as a result

of the assiduous espionage the Frenchman had done. Paques served from 1958 to 1962 in the private office of French Defense Minister Pierre Messmer. He later became chief press officer at NATO with a "cosmic top secret" clearance, NATO's highest security classification.

Among the document identity numbers Penkovsky sent to the West was one with a very unusual and limited classification. It was a French NATO standing group document—in other words, a French position paper prepared for the NATO military standing group in Washington. When the French checked on the document, they discovered that it was the draft of a French position that eventually was altered and re-numbered before it was actually submitted to the standing group.

The document, therefore, had received very limited circulation. It had been prepared in Washington by the French element on the standing group and sent to Paris for clearance at the Ministry of Defense. Only six persons signed for it at the Ministry when it was discussed, altered and sent back to Washington. One of these was Georges Paques.

Had Paques limited his activities to general Ministry of

Defense documents or NATO documents, with much wider circulation, it might have taken months to narrow the search. But in the brief period of approximately thirty-six hours in which that particular French standing group document was in Paris for clearance, he took it home, photographed it and returned it to its proper place next day.

When the French identified the document on the basis of the number transmitted from Moscow to the British and Americans by Penkovsky, they immediately put a 24-hour tail on each of the six who had signed for it—including the Minister of Defense. In about ten days, Paques was seen in contact with a member of the Soviet Embassy staff in Paris whom the French knew to be a KGB agent.

His arrest followed swiftly, and he confessed promptly. At his trial, he testified in words reminiscent of some of the Penkovsky papers that he spied for Russia because he felt that it would help preserve peace if the Russians were fully informed of NATO plans.