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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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SUBJECT Vitaly Yurchenko

DAN RATHER: Just as U.S. officials were trying [technical difficulties] for the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in 15 days, a U.S.-Soviet spy drama show-stopper. A top-ranking Soviet KGB man who supposedly defected to the U.S. this summer, Vitaly Yurchenko, tonight has apparently turned again, redefected, and is heading home to Russia. Yurchenko now says that he was drugged and detained against his will.

Bob Schieffer has the latest from Yurchenko's bizarre bolt-from-the-blue news conference at the Soviet Embassy in Washington tonight.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yurchenko's allegations came during an extraordinary news conference at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, where he first claimed relief at being out of the hands of U.S. authorities.

VITALY YURCHENKO: And today, for the first time, I didn't feel practically any headache in the working when I wake up.

SCHIEFFER: Then he read a statement in Russian claiming he had been kidnapped in Rome, was brought to this country unconscious and against his will, and was kept at an estate near Fredericksburg, Virginia. On Saturday, he said, he escaped U.S. hands and, as he put it, was able to break to freedom and then to the Soviet Embassy.

TRANSLATOR: At the moment, my only wish is to return as soon as possible to my country, to my family, kin and friends.

SCHIEFFER: Yurchenko claimed that he was tortured and

2

drugged, but he said he gave no information to U.S. agents while he was awake.

TRANSLATOR: In the period when I was conscious and controlled my behavior, I did not pass any secret information.

SCHIEFFER: The United States had said earlier that Yurchenko defected in August while visiting Rome. He told friends he was going to the Vatican Museum, and never returned. In mid-October the State Department announced he had defected, saying he was specifically responsible for direction of Soviet intelligence operations in the United States and Canada.

It was apparently the information from Yurchenko that led to the pinpointing of former CIA employee Edward Howard as a suspected Soviet spy. Howard, who was living at this home in New Mexico, has vanished, and some officials believe he's now in the Soviet Union. It was from Yurchenko that authorities say they learned Howard had been selling secret to the Soviets.

David Durenberger, the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said tonight that despite today's bizarre developments, he felt valuable information had been received from Yurchenko.

SENATOR DAVID DURENBERGER: Enough information that we were able to corroborate, in one way or another, to demonstrate that it had value to have the number five person in the KGB.

SCHIEFFER: Durenberger added that -- and here we quote -- everything Yurchenko said today is a lie.

One Justice Department official said tonight that officials there were not told until today by the Central Intelligence Agency that Yurchenko had left U.S. control. The official said, "Apparently, we have been had. It may be all of this was a setup to embarrass the United States on the eve of the summit with the Soviets."

RATHER: Bob, you've been talking to sources over the last few minutes about the story. What do they make of this?

SCHIEFFER: Dan, this town is absolutely dumbfounded. Nobody expected anything about this. People at the Justice Department did not even know that this man was out of United States hands until newsmen began calling and asking about the news conference that the Soviets had announced.