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CIA's pink slips a bonus to Reds

The spies who are being kicked out in the cold

By SMITH HEMPSTONE

WASHINGTON — CIA Director Stansfield Turner has accomplished in less than a year what the Kremlin has been unable to achieve in 30 years of Cold War: the shattering of the morale of his own agency's top-secret Directorate of Operations.

In his memo DDO-77-8855, dated Oct. 7, CIA Deputy Director for Operations William W. Wells informed the 4,500 officers of the agency's clandestine services, which handle covert operations such as espionage, counterespionage and political and paramilitary operations, that they faced a two-stage purge that will reduce their ranks by nearly 20 per cent within the next 15 months.

In his memo, Wells admitted that "there is no easy way to accomplish this reduction of personnel," and conceded that among the spies to be kicked out into the cold were "a number of individuals" who have made "a valuable contribution" to the agency and the security of the United States.

According to the Wells memo, those to be forced out of the CIA were to be selected on the basis of their past seven years' standing rated by yearly evaluation boards conducted by the agency's Career Management Staff

(CMS). These boards are composed of officers two grades senior to those being rated.

Under a curious point system developed by the CMS, a senior CIA agent who has reached supergrade rank and lived up to his potential has almost no way of avoiding vulnerability to the purge: the only three ways an officer can accumulate positive points to wipe out any negative ones is by having been promoted in fiscal years 1976 or 1977, or being evaluated as having "highest potential" or "may develop high potential," all of which are unlikely for any officer much over 50.

The first 198 CIA agents got their pink slips in the unpublicized Halloween Massacre of Oct. 31, and will leave the agency by March 1 (two of them are threatening class-action suits). Another 622 clandestine operatives will get their walking papers by June 1, and be out by the end of next year. And in DDO-77-8855, Wells warns that if the normal attrition rate factored into Turner's planning should lag, "additional employees" of the Operations Directorate will be fired in 1978.

Wells, a career CIA officer, is not the villain in this weakening of our country's security. Architect of the cuts was Robert D. ("Rusty") Williams, a management consul-

tant, longtime friend and special assistant to the 53-year-old Turner. Williams and Turner reportedly were urged on by David Aaron of the National Security Council, a former Mondale aide and staff member of the Church Committee that cut up the CIA in 1975.

There is, of course, something to be said for thinning out the senior ranks of any organization to avoid hardening of the bureaucratic arteries and to make room at the top for younger men. That officers of the Directorate of Operations since 1964 have been able to retire at 70 per cent of their pay at age 50 after five years of hazardous service would seem to indicate that many "burned-out cases" were anticipated.

Yet according to at least one CIA source who is not being dismissed, some agents who are virtually irreplaceable are being forced out of the agency. If so, the Halloween Massacre and next year's purge of the Directorate of Operations could well cause the collapse of some vital U.S. spy networks in Europe and the Middle East.

In fairness to the Queeg-like Turner, it has to be said that his two immediate predecessors, William Colby and George Bush, also were committed to deemphasizing the clandestine services in favor of technological intelligence-gathering devices such as satellites and electronic intercepts.

In part, this was no more than recognition of the advances made by science in this area. But it was also linked to a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate revulsion for covert operations such as the "destabilization" of the Allende regime in Chile.

But if the "cowboys" who graduated from General "Wild Bill" Donovan's wartime Office of Strategic Services into the CIA had their faults of excess, technology also has its limits. A satellite can tell much about an enemy's capabilities, but it can say nothing about his intentions. And the Kremlin's testing of hunter-killer satellites indicates the vulnerability of

In short, what the U.S. needs is a balanced intelligence capability. It needs satellites and electronic intercepts, historians and physicists, psychologists and soil experts.

But the U.S. also needs tough, dedicated clandestine operatives willing and able to go out into the backalleys of the world to play the dangerous and sometimes dirty game forced on us by our enemies.

Admiral Turner and his coterie of black-shoe Navy men may be right in what they're trying to do. But they're certainly wrong in the way they're going about it.

If a cut-back is desirable, it ought to be phased over a longer period. And men who have given years of brave and honorable service to this country deserve something more than a two-sentence pink slip telling them their careers are at an end.