

**Book review of Fran Borjan
Tel Slutet: En Spions
Memoarer by Stig
Wennerstrom**

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FRÅN BÖRJAN TIL SLUTET: EN SPIONS MEMOARER. By *Stig Wennerström*. (Bonniers, Stockholm, 1972)

Stig Wennerström notes in his memoirs (From Beginning to End) that as a boy he aspired to be a dentist. However, he relates, his fingers were too short and his hands too clumsy; family tradition prevailed and like his father, an uncle, and a grandfather, he became a military officer. In mid-career his fingers became among the stickiest in the annals of espionage; his hands smoothly passed many a roll of film in supposedly innocuous handshakes.

When arrested in Stockholm in June 1963, Wennerström, then 57, had been an agent of the GRU for almost fifteen years. Successive assignments in Moscow and Washington as Swedish air attaché, and in Stockholm as a staff officer at Defense Headquarters and as disarmament consultant to the Swedish Foreign Ministry gave him broad access to sensitive information. Energetically and imaginatively, he used that access to conduct military, scientific, and technical espionage against the United States, and to betray to the Soviets details of the Swedish air and other defense systems which had just been upgraded at high cost.

Charged with "gross espionage," Colonel Wennerstrom was sentenced in June 1964 to life imprisonment and a heavy fine. During his pre-trial interrogations he became voluble and cooperative intermittently before ceasing to talk (too soon to permit a separation of all fact from fancy or to get all the facts). As the story unfolded, supplemented by investigations on both sides of the Atlantic, the quantity and quality of the intelligence he had acquired for the Soviets, especially on advanced weapons systems and military research and development, became evident. Equally apparent was the professional skill of the GRU in assessing, recruiting, manipulating, and handling Wennerstrom.

Wennerström was a somewhat stiff, gentlemanly individual, a devoted family man without apparent vices, correct in behavior, conscious of rank and status, who had studied Russian in Riga in 1933 as a young officer and had served in 1940-41 as air attaché in Moscow. The accreditation lasted long enough thereafter to place him in official and social contact with the Soviet representation in Stockholm, so that the

Soviets had had a good look at him by the time he arrived in Moscow in 1949 for his second posting there. What they had found was a man deficient in loyalties, whose pride and vanity had been wounded when he was informed in 1948 that his performance as a pilot and in command had not been sufficiently promising to warrant future promotion to higher command. Moreover, he liked and excelled in languages, clearly savored the taste he had had of international and diplomatic life, considered Sweden and the Swedish defense and intelligence establishment to be small potatoes, and had had sufficient brushes with the intelligence business to develop an overweening fascination with it. He arrived in Moscow having already accepted from the Soviet attaché in Stockholm a contact plan and 5,000 crowns for having placed a pencilled dot on a map to denote the location of a Swedish military airfield. The full recruitment which followed shortly after his arrival on post was neither surprising nor difficult. Wennerström initially rationalized his ready agreement to cooperate with the Soviets as a clever move to penetrate Soviet intelligence; the only trouble was that he never told anyone on the Swedish side about it.

Through flattering use of rank (his recruiter was a general and his primary handler throughout the years was always "the General"; Wennerström himself was "promoted" to major general in the GRU), decorations, judicious praise (title of "top agent", codename EAGLE), authority to draw funds on his own judgment as wanted and needed without receipt, the conveyance to him of the belief that he was playing a key role in restoring a balance of power on the world scene, the GRU kept Wennerström hard at work for them with his loyalty developed and focused on the GRU. His admiration for the organization and "the General" at the "Center" who guided him knew no bounds and survived his arrest. Through sound tradecraft, use of natural cover, and Wennerström's own sage, successful resistance to a brief GRU effort to convert him from a singleton "agent in place" to a recruiter and principal agent, he worked undetected for the Soviets and was esteemed by his Swedish superiors for his reporting activities on their behalf. As the representative of a friendly neutral and armed with the additional title of chief of "The Purchasing Commission of the Swedish Air Force in the United States", Wennerström found American military-industrial security to resemble a sieve. Eager, if unwitting, American help abounded in supplying him with information.

Wennerström's mistake, he claims, lay in returning to Stockholm in 1957 after five years in Washington. He wished to provide some Swedish

education for his two daughters and prepare for his retirement years. He refused the offer of the post of air attaché in London in favor of a staff position at Defense Headquarters in Stockholm. Back in Sweden, an uncharacteristic outburst by Wennerström against a colleague concerning arrangements for the visit of a Soviet delegation resurrected a long-dormant suspicion in the mind of Otto Danielsson, a veteran counter-intelligence officer in the Swedish Security Police (SAPO). Danielsson recalled a report Wennerström had prepared about 1948 on Soviet intelligence. It had struck him at the time as being a bit too well informed. In 1959 Danielsson began to look anew at Wennerström. Intuition, perception and, especially, patience and persistence for four years in the face of much doubt, albeit a fair degree of cooperation, by key Swedish officials finally struck real paydirt when Wennerström's maid was approached and was found to have solidly-based suspicions. The arrest followed quickly, just as Wennerström, disturbed by an apparent change in attitude toward him by a Swedish general and by the loss of two rolls of exposed film he had hidden (they had been taken by the maid to SAPO), had started thinking of a rapid getaway. If returning to Sweden had been a mistake, the tendency, through arrogance, carelessness, or class prejudice to view the household help as little more than part of the furniture had certainly been a costly error.

The Wennerström case is instructive, warranting study by operations officers and counter-intelligence specialists alike. The memoirs are disappointing, however. Published in Swedish and German (*Mein Verrat: Erinnerungen eines Spions*. F. A. Herbig, Munich, 1973), they add very little to the accounts, based largely on the police interrogations of Wennerström in 1963 and 1964, by the Swedish journalist Hans K. Ronblom (*The Spy Without a Country*. New York, Coward-McCann, New York, 1965) and by Thomas Whiteside (*An Agent in Place*. Viking Press, New York, 1966). Of these two, the Whiteside book, originally serialized in *The New Yorker*, is the best. Wennerström's memoirs are especially repetitive of the detailed, lengthy excerpts from the Swedish police interrogations published in 1964 as a document of the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate.* The recruitment story and the tradecraft practices are all there. The memoirs include a few anecdotes of little consequence as entertainment or instruction. In them Wennerström remains the uncritical admirer of the GRU and "the General" whose identification by "the Americans" as Pyotr Pavlovich Melkisev he contests vigorously on the basis of description of the man. (Wennerström claims to have known

his case officer throughout all the years only as Pyotr Pavlovich, in keeping with normal GRU security practice as it had been explained to him.)

The main claim to distinction of the memoirs was a publisher's ploy. In a prepublication scheme to insure wide sale of the book, Wennerström and his Swedish publisher decided to attach the manuscript as a supporting document to Wennerström's legal brief filed in 1972 requesting commutation of sentence, knowing that this would result in its automatic classification. The publisher then planned to sue for declassification arguing abridgement of press freedom and gaining considerable favorable publicity for the work. The Swedish government, however, quickly declassified the entire brief. As public property, it was cited freely by the newspapers. Sales of the book were not impressive; the scheme gone awry took the headlines.

Wennerström's prison regimen had been progressively relaxed from the early years of his incarceration, and in 1972 his sentence was reduced to 20 years. In September 1974 he applied for further commutation of sentence. The Swedish government reduced it to the ten years already served, thus freeing him. The chances that Wennerström will shed more light on the case than he already has done appear slight. Those with professional interest in the case and its lessons must hope that an account written by Otto Danielsson, long since retired from SAPO, now will be cleared by the Swedish authorities for publication.

Footnotes

*The Wennerstroem Case: How it touched the United States and NATO; excerpts from the testimony of Stig Eric Constans Wennerstroem, a noted Soviet agent. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

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