

Paris Okhrana 1885-1905

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

22 SEPT 93

CONFIDENTIAL

The larva and pupa stages, as it were, of the Tsarist political police's main center for anti-revolutionary work abroad.

Rita T. Kronenbitter

The numerical strength of the Okhrana at home and abroad has been subject to much exaggeration. According to some Communist versions published both before and after the revolution, tens of thousands of Okhrana officials and agents in mufti were placed in every province of the Empire to prey upon the peaceful people and brutalize them. The agency is pictured as running a police state within the autocracy, subject to no authority and exerting its power on all, from the Tsar and his court down to the remotest muzhiks. The Okhrana's own documents show that this picture is largely propaganda.

In consideration of the size and population of the Empire and the tasks that faced the Okhrana, it seems about the smallest government agency in Russia, in most of the gubernias quite insignificant. According to Aleksei Vassiliev, the last director of police under the Tsar, it never had in all of Russia more than a thousand men.² Headquarters in Petrograd had fewer than 200 employees in all sections; Moscow's office was much smaller; and the branches at the seats of gubernias and volosts normally had two or three employees each.

The Okhrana abroad was likewise surprisingly small, and its requirements for headquarters support engaged less manpower than one would expect of a fairly modern and very active system. Agents under the Paris center employed in penetration operations had to be

backstopped by headquarters or branch offices within the Empire with legends, documents, money, and whatever else was required to make their positions safe and tenable among the revolutionaries. It seems clear that headquarters and Paris must both have been practical, imaginative, and expeditious to meet such exacting demands with an extremely small number of personnel.

Cumulatively, the total number employed by the Paris center from its beginnings under Rachkovsky in 1885 to March 1917 when the revolution terminated it was almost one thousand. This includes everyone who received remuneration for services rendered in any capacity during the 32 years—chiefs, assistants, office administrators, staff agents under deep cover for penetration operations, Russian penetration agents and correspondents, non-Russian principal agents supervising investigation and surveillance networks, the hired detectives under their supervision or working independently, informers and police officials paid for their cooperation.

The operations were in perpetual flux. Many officers and agents served for long periods, but their duties were subject to constant change. Only the chief and his office staff, seldom numbering more than eight people, were a stable group. Some two hundred internal (penetration) and external (detective) agents operating at the height of the center's activities were subject to the most diverse movements and assignments. The networks formed and reformed for tasks in Germany, France, Italy, and elsewhere.

The Paris center had a somewhat different character under each of its four successive chiefs. While the paramount task of each was the same—collecting intelligence on revolutionary movements—it happened that each was confronted with a new situation requiring revision of plans and concentration of effort in new directions. Each also had his own style of operation. Not counting an abortive effort begun by Korvin-Krukovskoi in June 1883 which ended in January 1885 with his dismissal, the successive administrations were as follows:

Peter Ivanovich Rachkovsky—March 1885 to November 1902

Leonid Aleksandrovich Rataev—November 1902 to August 1905

Arkady Mikhailovich Harting—August 1905 to January 1909

Acting: Captain Andreev and Captain Dolgov—February to

November 1909

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Krassilnikov—November 1909 to
March 1919

This article will examine the first two of them.

Rachkovsky: Office and External Nets

Arriving in Paris in March 1885, Rachkovsky found no records covering Korvin-Krukovskoi's nearly two years of service; there was not even an office for him to take over. The only organized remnant was a group of detectives under an ex-Sûreté agent named Barlet. Krukovskoi had been paying this "Barlet Brigade" mostly for reports copied down in the French police and security offices; its members did not conduct any surveillance and investigations for themselves. At best the Brigade amounted to a liaison arrangement exploiting personal connections in various French offices.

Rachkovsky was given two rooms in a side wing of the Imperial Embassy at 97 rue de Grenelle, with a separate entrance from the courtyard. He installed an additional door with a lock in the hall and heavy bars in the windows. His T/O called for three assistants, to be selected from among MVD personnel already in France and Switzerland. He chose Leonty Golshman, a long-time MVD correspondent, and for clerical and code work Nikolai Chashnikov, an embassy employee fluent in French. Throughout his tenure, until 1902, these two remained his only permanent office staff.

Okhrana chief Semiakin, in his earlier capacity as a sort of inspector general, had found the Barlet Brigade the one thing he could praise in Krukovskoi's operation; but Rachkovsky was never quite happy with it. On headquarters' insistence he renewed the contract and increased the number of agents to six. But he soon realized that he could not buy their primary loyalty away from their former employer, the Sûreté. He needed completely independent investigators to go beyond what Brigade members could get from the daily transcripts in police and security offices; the host services would make available only what it was in their interest to pass on to the Russians. He was anxious also to learn as

much as possible about the French services themselves, especially about their principal leaders. Before terminating the contract with Barlet in 1887, therefore, he cultivated agent Riant, one of the Brigade, to the point that he supplied information on the Sûreté and its leaders.

Under the terms of the contract Barlet maintained a private office to which the members of the Brigade brought their reports for transmission to Rachkovsky. Safe quarters were used for all communication, and the usual contact was Rachkovsky's assistant Golshman. None of the Brigade had access to the offices at 97 rue de Grenelle. When the contract was terminated, Rachkovsky assigned a formerly independent MVD agent, Wladislaw Milewski, to serve as case officer for all external, non-Russian agents. Milewski rented a new safe house, got in touch with former Brigade members Riant and Bint, and rehired them and two new men, Douget and Dove. An experienced anti-revolutionary operator in Paris and London, he trained the four in surveillance to supplement the liaison work with the French services.

As soon as his safe house was ready for business and the new team was reporting, to it, Milewski made a trip to London and hired two external agents there. One was a certain Murphy, a long-time acquaintance of his in Scotland Yard; the other he called "John." He gave both them instructions to report directly to his address in Paris on the activities of Russian revolutionaries in England. The information was to be obtained from contacts in Scotland Yard and from their own observation. This was an informal beginning of the London outpost of Paris Okhrana.

Penetration Agents

Some half dozen agents sent abroad by the MVD were already in circulation in France and Switzerland, reporting directly to headquarters by personal correspondence or through consular channels. But none was fulfilling the requirement for inside information on revolutionary activities, and it was Rachkovsky's principal mission to organize penetrations of the adversary. Impatient for the formation of at least a small group of internal agents for such penetrations, headquarters sent to France and Switzerland an MVD counsellor, S. Zvoliansky, to smooth

the way for the Paris center and to spot recruits. After reviewing Rachkovsky's initial efforts, Zvoliansky now urged headquarters not to pester him for immediate reports but to give him time to organize the internal service. He asked also that Rachkovsky be sent to Switzerland to study the targets there and locate possible recruits.

The first such recruit was found in Zurich. He was studying at the Polytechnical College under the name Landesén, in hiding from the revolutionaries. Under his true name, Abraham Hackelman, he had been exposed as a police agent working among students belonging to the terrorist Narodnaia Volia at Petersburg and Riga. But headquarters' evaluation of him was most complimentary and he was recommended for rehiring. Rachkovsky agreed to pay him a monthly salary of 300 rubles plus travel expenses. His targets would be the Narodnaia Volia exiles and newly formed groups of the Socialist Revolutionaries.

Other recruitments followed slowly. By the end of 1885, Rachkovsky had three penetration agents—Landesén among the Narodnaia Volia terrorists in Paris and Switzerland, Ignaty Kornfeld among the Anarcho-Communists, and Prodeus, a much traveled and well-known revolutionary, reporting on various revolutionary centers. Rachkovsky clearly recognized that his main task was to penetrate the conspiratorial groups, but he proceeded with extreme caution in building up the organization to do the job. Incoming dispatches brought many nominations from headquarters, but he ruled most of them out for lack of access to target groups or other reasons.

It was probably because of this cautious pace in Paris that Okhrana headquarters and the branches in Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, and elsewhere sent other agents abroad on penetration assignment with instructions to report directly home. The practice led to much confusion. The Paris office did not know when Odessa, Kiev, or Moscow had an agent in France, Switzerland, or England. Moreover, Okhrana headquarters itself was not always informed when a local branch sent an agent abroad. Despite much correspondence in the matter, it was only Rachkovsky's successors that succeeded in getting agent operations abroad coordinated. As the system worked during his term in Paris, he had no knowledge of such agents as the famous Evno Azev working under headquarters control in Germany and Switzerland.

During the Rachkovsky period the Paris internal service came to include the following major penetration agents:

Ilya Drezhner among the Social Democrats in Germany, Switzerland, and France;
Boleslaw Malankiewicz among the Polish anarchists and terrorists in London;
Casimir Pilenas, a spotter for Scotland Yard recruited to work among the Latvian terrorists;
Zinaida Zhuchenko among the Socialist Revolutionaries and their terrorist Fighting Unit ;³
Aleksandr Evalenko, assigned by headquarters to New York city for work among the Jewish Bundists and terrorists, but under Paris control.

Modus Operandi

No system of case officers or intermediaries between the Paris chief and the penetration agents was really established under Rachkovsky or his immediate successor, Rataev. When in Paris, these agents would report directly to Rachkovsky or sometimes to his case officer for the external service, Milewski. From elsewhere they reported either by mail or through confidants in the Russian consulates, as Evalenko did from New York.

The Paris office enjoyed an ambiguous relationship with autonomous agenturas in Berlin and Sofia. Rachkovsky had founded the one in Berlin, but a headquarters memorandum of 9 December 1900 gave it an independent chief, Arkady Harting, who was the same Abraham Hackelman that Rachkovsky had recruited under the name Landesens as his first penetration agent fifteen years before. Berlin like Paris had an internal and an external service, each set of agents reporting to a different case officer in a safe house. The case officer for the external agents, principal among them Carl Woltz and Henry Neuhaus, was Michael Barkov. For the internal agents Harting himself, like Rachkovsky, often had to serve as case officer; headquarters was still reluctant to assign permanent staff personnel to such duties. In 1902 Harting acquired the important penetration agent Dr. Jacob Zhitomirsky, who worked among the Social Democrats in close association with Lenin and

Litvinov.

The Balkan agentura came under Rachkovsky's control by default. A service had operated there since the early 1880's as an outpost of the Odessa Branch. It followed the activities of subversives in Rumania and along the Bessarabian border. Because of inadequate headquarters control of this—as of other operations abroad—the expanding efforts required in the Balkan countries were integrated under general supervision from Paris. A Colonel Trzhestyak headed this Sofia service, with case officer Ivan Osadchuck handling the agents.

Under Rachkovsky's direction the Okhrana abroad was thus not a well constituted and integrated intelligence service. Shortage of personnel made necessary a constant shifting of agents in order to obtain some coverage of the multiplying centers of Russian subversives in Western Europe. There was no adequate control of operations through experienced case officers; agents had to be left to their own devices to run themselves.

Rachkovsky as Diplomat

By personally winning the good will and cooperation of the services of host countries, however, Rachkovsky indirectly assisted his agents and crowned their efforts. For instance, when a penetration agent in Geneva had supplied the essential information about a gathering of terrorists there and external agents had located by surveillance their clandestine printshop and weapons store, Rachkovsky could call on Swiss security units to help destroy the underground and arrest the ringleaders. This happened in 1887; it was repeated in 1888, then again and again in other countries. His powers of persuasion were sufficient to convert Lev Tikhomirov, one of the leading terrorists, when he had been softened by contrived exposure, and get him to write an anti-revolutionary book.

Rachkovsky's political action operations, often highly successful, were exclusively his personal effort. He devised some plans for using others, but in every major instance he was the sole operator. He befriended a Danish journalist, Jules Hansen, during his first visit to Paris in 1884. Besides being one of the bright lights of his profession, Hansen was a counsellor in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a friend of

Minister Delcassé. He became the principal channel for promoting a friendly press for Russia in western Europe, and he made contacts for Rachkovsky with leading ministers and politicians, including even President Loubet. On the other hand, Rachkovsky also cultivated important personages in the imperial government and at court. In these activities he was, as revolutionary writers accused him of being, a manipulator behind the scenes preparing the ground for acceptance, both in Paris and at Petersburg, of the Franco-Russian alliance signed in 1893.

Rachkovsky devised and developed access to several other governments beside the French. The files contain copies of dispatches about an audience he had with Pope Leo XIII and a proposed exchange of diplomats between Russia and the Vatican with particular view to the unrest in Catholic Poland. Advisers to the Tsar in Petersburg turned down the proposal, but the idea of combatting the insurrectional campaign in Poland by using religious interests clearly illustrates Rachkovsky's high-level concept of political action.

Rachkovsky's major provocation operation—his were probably the only specifically planned instances of this formally banned practice in the annals of Okhrana—was primarily in support of political action. In 1890 agent Landesén, having promoted among the revolutionaries in Paris an elaborate plot to kill the Tsar, arranged that after one underground meeting a large number of the terrorists would each have on their persons their weapons and written notes on the parts they were to play. The French police, tipped off through cutouts by Rachkovsky, arrested the entire group, and that summer they were tried and sentenced, Landesén in absentia. Rachkovsky thus scored a victory not only over the enemies of the state but against those in Petersburg who had opposed the Franco-Russian alliance on the grounds that France was too soft on subversives. The stern police and court action proved to Petersburg that France too had a strong government capable of dealing with internal enemies.

Despite his many successes in this formative age of Paris Okhrana, Rachkovsky was dismissed in 1902, principally because he dared expose in an intelligence report a charlatan and hypnotist named Philippe who told fortunes for the imperial household. His enemies at headquarters used this report to turn Tsar Nicolas against him. In 1905, however, after martial law was introduced at Petersburg, he was brought back to head the entire Okhrana, first as MVD Special Commissioner and then as

Deputy Director of Police.

Rataev: Decline

In 1902 the annual authorized expenditures of Paris Okhrana were about 267,000 francs. This amount did not include the cost of agents sent from headquarters and provincial branches to operate abroad independently of the Paris office, and it did not cover the funding of the Balkan and Berlin agenturas. It covered the costs of the Paris office and safe houses, the salaries of external and internal agents and their case officers, and the needs of outposts in Switzerland, England, and Galicia.

Director of Police Lopukhin, who had never been friendly toward Rachkovsky, favored the selection of Leonid Rataev for the Paris post and increased the personal allowance for it with his appointment. But he also instructed the new chief to cut off the salaries of all agents not reporting directly to him. Rataev was apparently ill qualified for the Paris post, as he had been for his prior job as personnel chief of the Petersburg Okhrana. He had been in police service for some twenty years, but both of his bosses, the Director of Police and the MVD Minister, considered him a weak administrator, little more than a socialite figurehead, and regarded his appointment to Paris as a way to get rid of an incompetent at headquarters. At the same time they anticipated that he would be easier to handle there from headquarters than the vigorous, independent, and scheming Rachkovsky.

Rataev proved to be as ineffective a manager as they expected. Although the number of penetration agents under him increased, none of these were his recruits. They were sent abroad by headquarters and such branches as Moscow, Kiev, and Warsaw; after reporting at first to their original offices, they were transferred to Paris for administrative and operational handling. Rataev did nothing, either, to develop professional case officers but let his office staff manage all agent personnel.

A contraction of Rataev's mission began to be noticeable soon after his arrival. His budget total was lowered step by step until it was halved at 135,000 francs. The Galicia outpost was taken away from Paris control, first being made an autonomous unit and then put under Warsaw

Branch. Harting in the Berlin agentura, a friend of Rachkovsky, was *ergo* an enemy of Rataev, and Berlin very soon began to encroach on areas in the Paris domain—Switzerland, Austria, the Low Countries. Rataev protested, but to no apparent effect.

Penetrations

What made Rataev as successful as he was in collecting intelligence and disarming the revolutionaries was a small group of the Okhrana's ace agents assigned to the Paris center. These men and women came fully briefed from headquarters, impressively backstopped in Russia, and with their operational targets fully spelled out. Rataev's office was thus little more than a support facility for them, paying salaries and expenses and handling communications. Agents' reports, to be sure, were prepared as outgoing dispatches by Golshman, who had become an excellent editor, but Rataev contributed very little to mounting operations and handling the agents.

The first team of three agents assigned to Paris by headquarters was headed by Leo Beitner; the other two members were his wife and his unmarried sister Maria. They were to operate in Paris, Geneva, and Brussels. In Paris, Leo's target was the home of Vladimir Burtzev, which served as a revolutionary publishing office and headquarters for a newly emerging revolutionary counterintelligence bureau; in Geneva, the target was the center of the Socialist Revolutionaries, assigned at first to Maria; and at Brussels, Leo and his wife were to trace how the revolutionaries smuggled arms to Russia. The Beitner team's work was a success under Rataev and under his successors an outstanding Okhrana achievement against revolutionary smugglers and counterfeiters.⁴

The second team was a married couple named Zagorski. The man reported to headquarters as agent-at-large, traveling almost constantly, while his wife concentrated on the Fighting Unit of the Socialist Revolutionaries in Paris and Germany, reporting through Rataev's office only.⁵

At about the same time the later famous Evno Azev was given to Rataev.

He had served in Germany for several years and then been ordered dismissed by Rachkovsky as unreliable, but he was rehired by headquarters when he gained entry to the central committee of the Socialist Revolutionaries and their Fighting Unit of assassins and "expropriators."

The names of some other important penetration agents sent from Russia were Aleksandrov, Chizhikov, Borovskaia, Brodski, Fudim, and Gramm. In addition, Rataev retained all the agents he inherited from Rachkovsky. The only deep-cover agent he himself hired was a Frenchman, August Doré, for a counterespionage assignment in Vienna. This man, however, landed in jail soon after arriving in Austria in 1905 and later caused much trouble by demanding compensation for his six months in prison.

Rataev seldom acted as case officer for the penetration agents. For the most part, they had had years of experience in intelligence operations in Russia, several of them under the personal direction of Zubatov, chief of the Moscow Branch and a master mind in penetration work. Whatever operational guidance they needed in the field was given in headquarters communications. As a rule, however, Rataev would be informed of the identity of the agent and his background, the briefing he had received, the target assigned him, his approximate date of arrival, his pseudonym, and often the recognition passwords to be used.

Overt Staff

Rataev increased his office staff to four men, retaining Chashnikov and Golshman (until the latter's retirement during this period) and adding Ivan Molchanov and Ilin in 1904-1905. They acted as reports officers and also as case officers to the extent of meeting and taking care of new arrivals from Russia.

The external service during this period acquired only a few new agents but was better systematized by the use of principal agents to lead the networks of non-Russian investigators. Henri Bint, who had served since the days of Korvin-Krukovskoi, became the principal agent in Paris. He maintained constant personal contact with the Surete offices and was in charge of surveillance men in France, Switzerland, and the French

and Italian Rivas. ⁶ Bint's home was also his office for meeting agents and receiving mailed reports. To get his own instructions and pass on information he normally met Chasnikov or Molchanov, never Rataev. Bint's more important detectives of the period were Eugene Invernizzi, first hired in 1899 for investigations in Italy; Albert Sambain and Eugene Leveque in Paris; and Boquet, Rigault, Depassel, and Deleamon in Geneva and other cities of Switzerland.

The most permanent liaison agent in Paris was a man named Fehrenbach whose more than 5,000 identity reports during this period were all copies of Surete records on Russian emigres in France. Their volume indicates that Fehrenbach must have spent most of his working time in the Surete offices. The arrangements for this liaison assignment had been made by Rachkovsky, but the bulk of production from it came during Rataev's tenure.

Fringe Operations

The outpost in London, referred to as an agentura in Rataev's dispatches, acquired agents Powells and Michael Thorpe. Powells was a retired Scotland Yard detective recommended to the Okhrana by Thorpe, his former boss and a younger man with similar background. Both had previous experience in operating against Russian revolutionaries in London. The organization of the Berlin agentura remained the same as it had been, with Michael Barkov as case officer for German investigators and Harting handling the Russian penetration agents and high-level liaison with the Prussian Sicherheit Dienst.

Rataev was not at all a political activist like his predecessor. An important political action operation did develop during his term in Paris, but he was at most only a channel for funds, the principal operator receiving all instructions directly from headquarters. This was Ivan F. Manasevich-Manuilov, a nobleman, roving diplomat, and high-level contact man, who as a spotter for the MVD back in the 1890's had had occasional encounters with Rachkovsky. The Okhrana sent him to Paris in 1903 under Ministry of Foreign Affairs cover to resume work started two years previously with an organization called the "Circle of French Journalists." How Manasevich-Manuilov operated with this and another

organization, the "League for Saving the Russian Fatherland," is not recorded in Rataev's dispatches. The only references to his activities are the gross amounts of expenditure. These, which reached thousands of rubles monthly, do reveal that newspapers like Figaro, Echo de Paris, and Gaulois were recipients of subsidies from the operation.

Succession

After mid-1905 the Paris station was to experience a great revival under Arkady Harting. But his is a story that should stand alone.

Bibliography

1 Based chiefly on its files in the collection Zagranichnaya Okhrana recently opened to the public at the Hoover Institution. For earlier articles from this source see "The Okhrana's Female Agents," Parts I and II, in Studies IX 2, p. 25 ff and IX 3, p. 59 ff, and "Okhrana Agent Dolin, " Studies X 2, p. 57 ff.

2 A. T. Vassiliev, *The Okhrana* (London), p. 38.

3 For her story see the "Francesco" case in Studies IX 2, p. 28 ff.

4 See the "Julietta" case summarized in Studies IX 2, p. 26.

5 See the "Sharzh" case in Studies IX 2, p. 38 ff.

6 Some of his later operations are described in Studies IX 3, p. 60 ff.

CONFIDENTIAL

Posted: May 08, 2007 08:07 AM