

# The Practice of a Prophet

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*Achievements and undoing of a man of high, mistaken principle and unflagging, misspent energy.*

The public examination last year of the Lonsdale-Kroger-Houghton-Gee case of Soviet espionage in England <sup>1</sup> and its parallels with the Abel-Hayhanen case in the United States <sup>2</sup> bring to mind an earlier rather full public exposure of postwar Soviet espionage that was given a great deal of attention in the target country but is little remembered here--that of Ernst Hilding Andersson, whose skill, ingenuity, and devoted diligence gave the USSR a series of prize reports on Swedish naval defenses from 1949 to 1951.<sup>3</sup> This was not a KGB deep-cover operation like the other two, but run from official cover by one of the Soviet military intelligence services without any of the elaborate technical devices Abel and Lonsdale had at their disposal. It is notable, among other features, for the way Andersson's security practices, at first exceedingly loose, were gradually tightened up until, although they never approached the scrupulous care exercised by Colonel Abel, they were about on the level of Lonsdale's. But while the Russian handler Lonsdale was blown by the indiscretion of his agent Houghton, security-conscious agent Andersson was caught through the ineptitude of an ill-trained young case officer sent out from Moscow.

## The Prophet Molded

Ernst Hilding was one of eight Andersson children supported on the proceeds of a too small truck garden at Strängnäs, not so far from the prosperity of metropolitan Stockholm as to be spared rude contrasts with their own poverty. Moreover, his father was crippled early on by rheumatism, so that the boy had to leave school when he was eleven and go to work in the neighboring farmers' fields. He did heavier work for longer hours than he had the strength for. He was an intelligent, oversensitive, and therefore lonely lad, something of an outsider even with his own family. His mother, who it was gossiped had Communist leanings, took in sewing to help ends meet. One of his sisters contracted tuberculosis. Another fell prey to some disease, probably syphilis, that incapacitated her mentally.

When Ernst was seventeen he went to Stockholm and got a job as delivery boy, living with a sister. As soon as he turned eighteen he joined the Navy--on impulse, he said, but knowing that he would not only be better off financially but have a chance to broaden his intellectual horizons. He began to study voraciously. For five and a half years he took night courses in technical subjects, specializing in electrical engineering. Still all his energies were not engaged, and when he found some fellow-sailors whose economic and social philosophy seemed to fall in with his own emergent ideas and these introduced him to others of their persuasion in the city, he joined them in the Swedish section of the Communist Youth International, his first taste of real comradeship. For two years, until sea duty took him away, he helped prepare and propagate their illegal newspaper *Torpeden*.

In 1933, at 24, he married a domestic maid. His wife appreciated his kindness and admired his industry and intellect, but she did not understand his ideas or share his interests. They came to live amicably but distantly together. Nevertheless, sixteen years later when she could afford to quit work, they had a son.

In 1934 Andersson was graduated as a chief machinist. Still he studied, especially electrical engineering but also a variety of unrelated subjects from artillery fire control to foreign languages. In 1950, 41 years old, he was certified as an electrical engineer. He was now what we would call a warrant officer. He had found life in the service satisfying--good treatment, plenty of opportunities, a promising future. Although he had no money to throw away, he was better off than most enlisted men. He had no gripes against any of his associates or any group of people. It

pleased him to do a good job, and he did it earnestly.

But as the Soviet-American cold war came to constitute the mainspring of world affairs he was convinced that the future welfare of the Swedish people--and the rest of mankind--lay in "learning from the Russians" and that the main threat to Sweden came from the United States. He believed it inevitable that the Americans would sooner or later try to take over Swedish bases for an attack on the USSR, setting off World War III, and this thought horrified him; when it came to that he would much rather have the Russians occupy them as a preventive measure. He made no particular secret of these ideas, which, along with his passion for study, earned him among his fellows the nickname of "The Prophet." In these circles he was also sometimes branded Communist; but there was little informal contact, as in most navies, between NCO and officer ranks, and his officers thought highly of his abilities and his devotion to duty. He could be trusted in whatever work you gave him.

## **The Spy Matriculates**

In the fall of 1946 Andersson was stationed, as he had been during most of his service, at the Skeppsholmen naval base, an island in the channel that cuts Stockholm in two. One evening at the home of his friend Sixten Rogeby, one of the men who had introduced him to Communism eighteen years before, he met Konstantin Vinogradov, then First Secretary of the Soviet embassy in Stockholm, who honored him by asking him to dinner at his home. At Vinogradov's there were just a few other guests, but food, drink, and hospitality such as only a Russian can lay on. Amid the general conversation there were enough references to Andersson's job and to the quality of the Swedish fleet that he knew to what proposal he was being led. He had his answer ready now, two years before the question was to be asked.

Andersson accepted a second invitation to dine with Vinogradov one evening before Christmas, but it turned out he couldn't make it. No matter; on New Year's Eve the diplomat showed up unannounced at the sailor's west side apartment near the Traneberg bridge, bearing a gift of several bottles in honor of the occasion, and they made another dinner date for January. This time Vinogradov, introducing the only other guest,

Tass representative Viktor Anissimov, announced that he was leaving the Stockholm post; and to complete the unacknowledged handing-over ceremony Anissimov invited Andersson to dinner at his apartment.

That dinner was the first of many meetings and the beginning of a close relationship that flourished for three years and a half. At first the two friends simply got together at one or the other's apartment; but it occurred to Andersson as well, presumably, as to Anissimov--that it wouldn't be a good idea for a Swedish warrant officer to be seen going around with a Soviet representative, so they agreed to meet most of the time outside the city proper, where they might be recognized, in suburbs and outlying towns like Huddinge, Tullinge, Stäket, and Hägernäs. They would go for walks and bicycle rides and eat in restaurants or picnic in the country. After almost a year of this Anissimov once brought a camera along and took several pictures of his friend. Later he got Andersson to bring him his identity documents and a list of his naval service assignments, honors, and achievements. Still no demands, no talk of espionage, but in anticipation Andersson grew more reticent among his fellows about his political views and stopped his open Communist associations. He had never joined the Party proper.

Another year, and finally, at the end of November 1949, the Tass man asked if Andersson would be willing to provide some information on the Swedish fleet. The spy presumptive had had moments of doubt that year after his son was born: if he were caught and jailed for the rest of his life the baby might have as rough a childhood as he himself had had. But he had thought the problem through and decided that such sentimental, personal considerations had no weight beside the larger issues. Now he assented without hesitation. His handler then wrote down three questions: the names of the warships stationed at Skeppsholmen and the battle-readiness of each; future plans for reassigning or remodeling any of these ships; and the composition and command organization of the Swedish coastal fleet. He offered no guidance on how to get this information; the means were left to Andersson's initiative.

The first two questions, about his own base, presented no great problem. Stationed as he was on the destroyer Romulus, he knew most of the answers already, and he could fill in the rest by discreet and indirect questioning, often by saying something wrong and letting a colleague show his superiority by correcting him. He even included several of the small minesweepers attached to the base in his report.

But on the coastal fleet he had little first-hand information. Nevertheless, by dint of diligent research and questioning, he learned the names of all the ships in it and could make some observations on their divisional subordination. Before the end of December he wrote out his report in pencil on board the Romulus and took it with some pride to Anissimov's apartment. Anissimov barely glanced at it, set a date for a meeting in January, and told him he'd better go.

In January the Tass man began by expressing his dissatisfaction with the report: it didn't include data on all the mine-sweepers! Andersson, hurt, resolved never again to put himself in a position to get such a reprimand; and he never did. The rest of this meeting and others for the next five months were devoted to tightening up security procedures and training in them. Reports were to be done in invisible ink, a sodium sulphate solution. All meetings were to be at 8 p.m.; the day would be signalled by disguised chalkings on a wall or building, "T" for Monday, "W" for Tuesday, etc. If a meeting ever failed, it would be tried again exactly two weeks later at the Karolinska Hospital. Against the possibility that Anissimov might have to send a substitute handler, Andersson should make himself recognizable by carrying a briefcase, lock side out, in his right hand, with a roll of paper sticking up out of it. For mutual recognition there were four key words that should be used in the opening sentences, two on each side, of a self-introductory conversation. The left hand in pants pocket would be a danger sign.

## **Busy Days**

In May Andersson learned that he was to be transferred to the icebreaker Ymer, which was sailing south on 10 June for an overhaul at the Karlskrona naval base. A meeting with Anissimov had already been set for 27 May, and here Anissimov presented him with a written request for a repeat of the report he had made in December; it seemed the Russians wanted this updated semiannually. Andersson wished he had saved his notes for the first one, and after that he did. In addition, this time, he was asked for full details about security arrangements at Skeppsholmen, including shelters, stores, and supply depots, together with a sketch covering all installations. He would now have less than two weeks to complete the assignment. When he told the Russian about the

Ymer he was given as a subsequent assignment the job of reporting much the same things about Karlskrona as he was doing for Skeppsholmen, but with more sketches and covering additional subjects such as communications facilities and foreign representatives or visitors at the base. He got 400 kronor (about \$100) for expenses; no receipt required, but he would have to account for it when he submitted his report.

He continued to have trouble with the coastal fleet in preparing his second report, but he did a smashing good job of the required Skeppsholmen sketch-map. He bought an ordinary streetcar map of the island, enlarged it, sketched the three dozen or so important buildings in to scale, and keyed these by numbers to an attached description of each. Most of them he had been familiar with before, but he made it a point to visit a typical bomb shelter and note things like the locations of its entrances, the thickness of its roof, and its resistance to gas. He copied the map and his eight-page report in invisible ink, and on the day before the Ymer sailed he went to a bicycle stand on St. Erik's Terrace, found Anissimov's bicycle, as agreed, parked there, and put the apparently blank papers in its tool case.

The Ymer was docked in Karlskrona for over three months, until 14 September. Plenty of time for observations and questions, which security-wise were easier than at Skeppsholmen: it was natural to be curious when you hadn't visited a place for three years. But Andersson didn't therefore take it easy. He used his lunch hours to wander about the base, refreshing his memory, observing changes, and taking mental notes, and his longer periods of free time were spent in excursions in the area, notably to prominences on the mainland and islands in the archipelago surrounding the base. He would study maps and hydrographic charts, try to figure out the logical places for military installations, and then go verify his guesses. He usually went in civvies on his bicycle, having given out among his acquaintances that he was fond of picking berries and mushrooms.

He would keep all his observations in his head until he got back to his quarters and could sketch them; there was too much danger that someone might become suspicious and set the police on him. Twice, in fact, he was accosted. Once an MP sergeant asked him what he was doing there. He said he was looking for the personnel office, trying to get on as an engineer in Karlskrona; and the sergeant, though he still looked suspicious, let him go. Another time, when he was examining defense

erections on one of the islands, a man came up and asked him why. Andersson, who had just had a couple of bottles of beer, said "I'm spying for the Russians." The man stared and shook his head and went away.

He found hanging on plywood in the Karlskrona base's electrical shop, where he frequently went on business, a big map of the dock and base area, as well as part of the city, with numbers keying some 800 installations to a legend and flags indicating the location of all ships being worked on. He persuaded the electricians, since, he said, his comrades on the Ymer were having an awful time finding their way around the base, to lend it to him as a guide for the icebreaker's crew. He hung it up on deck and then, choosing times when the crew were all busy elsewhere and keeping a sharp lookout, he copied it in four sections as the basis for his report. In the two months it took him to complete it, he tripled the number of original notations with additional observed detail. He hid his sketches and notes in an old pair of field boots. He went over the notes again and again, memorizing and compressing, until there were only three or four cramped pages, mostly figures, beside what he had in his head.

Two or three British destroyers called at Karlskrona that summer of 1950. Andersson observed them closely and succeeded in getting aboard one of them and talking to the crew. He asked them what they thought about the world situation, the next war, and the Russians and what the British were doing in the Baltic.

Back in Stockholm in mid-September, he worked far into the night for many nights expanding his report and putting it into secret writing. He had previously agreed to meet with Anissimov during the third week of that month on a not yet specified day at 8 p.m. in Örby, a suburb on the south of the city containing a small forest. Now he put a red chalk mark on a building near the Tass office to indicate the day. He traveled to the rendezvous by bus, Anissimov by taxi, and the two walked into the woods, where Andersson handed over his 20-page report with map and sketches and his expense account. He told the Russian about the risks he had run in copying the big map of the base and suggested that he could have avoided these if he had been sure of being able to make a satisfactory photograph of it. As personal chitchat he mentioned that his baby had just got over a serious attack of bronchitis, and the hospital bill was terrific. Anissimov promptly lent him 400 kronor, which he later gratefully repaid. They decided that Stäket, fifteen miles northwest on the way to Enköping, would be the best place for future

meetings, and they set a date for the next one. Then they rode back to town together.

## **New Skills and Voyages**

They rode to Stäket on the same train but ignored each other until they had walked from the station out into the countryside. Anissimov said he would be leaving Stockholm sometime before the spring of 1951, so at some future prearranged meeting it would be his successor that would appear, to be recognized by the prescribed procedures. Andersson for his part reported that in December the Ymer would be sailing up the Norrland coast on ice-breaking missions, and he would be the ship's chief electrician. He was therefore given, in addition to the semiannual Skeppsholmen report to prepare before he left, written requirements for information on Norrland coastal fortifications, ports, and likely landing areas near important centers and military installations. But more generally he was to observe and report anything that might be of intelligence interest; his judgment was now trusted.

Most of the five- or six-hour meeting, however, was devoted to photography. Anissimov had brought along a small Exacta for Andersson to practice with under his direction. He gave him 1200 kronor to buy one like it and presented him with two handbooks, one in German and one in English, on document photography. Since the Ymer would be gone five months, the next meeting, presumably with a new handler, was set for 4 June. The next day Andersson splurged on 2000 kronor worth of photo equipment, including a telescopic lens and materials for developing and printing his own pictures. He threw himself with characteristic energy into mastering the new art, both by practicing all its aspects and by research in the City Library.

Concurrently he was preparing his routine Skeppsholmen report, not hurriedly because he thought he had plenty of time. But suddenly the Ymer was ordered to leave a week earlier than planned, on 6 December, and he had to work frantically. He stayed up all night putting it into writing before the morning she was to sail, and barely a couple of hours ahead of departure time he rushed across town to Anissimov's apartment and handed it to him personally. He would never see him

again.

On board the Ymer he let it be understood that he had won the camera in a lottery and had become engrossed in his new hobby. He enthusiastically took pictures of the ship, the crew, the scenery, sea gulls, everything that came by, and incidentally of coastal features for his report. With the captain's permission he set up a dark room in a lavatory in the sick bay. When the ship made an ice run up the Ångermanälven river as far as Gustavsvik he was able to photograph the defense establishment there. Aside from photographs and his own observations he picked up a good deal of incidental information. One day, for example, when an officer and two NCO's hitch-hiked a ride down the coast on the Ymer, they pointed out where work was being done on fortifications to which thirty-odd men would be assigned.

At the end of March 1951 the Ymer returned to a secret bunker in the Stockholm archipelago for refueling. Here the Exacta got six or seven good pictures showing its approaches, defenses, and the entrances to its rock tunnels. Moreover, Andersson took advantage of the fueling stop to strike up a conversation with some of the men stationed there and learned how many ships the bunker serviced, what thickness of rock lay over the tunnels, and what kind of fuel was stored in each of the various compartments.

For the first half of May, after the ice became workable in the northernmost tip of the Bothnian Gulf, the Ymer was stationed up in Luleå. Here the ship's NCO's were invited to dinner by the NCO's of the local airbase, F 21. Andersson was able to observe F 21's bunkers and defenses and took advantage of the friendly social conversation to learn the number and types of planes at the base and get some notion of their operational mission.

A few days before the icebreaker was to leave Luleå the officers and NCO's from F 21 and other airbases in the area were invited on an excursion up the river to Boden to tour the fortress there. Through Andersson's good offices the Ymer's NCO's were included in this invitation, and he and two others went along. The party was taken on a guided tour of the fortress area and through one of the forts and given explanations of present and planned dispositions. Although he had had to leave his camera outside and could not make notes, Andersson was able by intense application to observe and memorize a mass of detail about anti-tank obstacles, the location of gun batteries, the caliber of

guns, the power of the diesels, the construction of the armored turrets on the forts, tunnel entrances, camouflage devices, and many other features. He could even make an educated calculation of the strength with which the place was manned. As soon as he got back to his ship he wrote all these things down.

## A New Regime

When the Ymer got back to Stockholm he bought three General Staff maps covering the Luleå, and Boden area and used these as the basis for maps for his Norrland report, which filled twelve pages and was accompanied by three or four hundred photographs. He was so busy doing this, he later explained, that he completely forgot the 4 June meeting arranged with his handler; but one suspects that the repugnance he felt at being taken over from his admired friend Anissimov by a stranger may have interfered with his normally acute memory. At any rate he got a telephone call at home the next evening with "greetings from his friend" and agreed to arrangements for a meeting at the same time and place the following day.

The new handler, it turned out after the recognition ritual, was 26-year-old Nicolai P. Orlov, a clerk for the Soviet naval attaché. His head full of the precepts taught in the Operations Course he had just completed, - he laid down some new procedures. These risky personal meetings would be the exception. If Andersson had a report to deliver, he could request by three vertical red chalk marks that Orlov's bicycle be left on St. Erik's Terrace, as Anissimov's had once been, to receive it. He could start by delivering the Norrland report this way. Alternatively he could hide a report under a certain rock in the woods around Frescati, on the northern outskirts, and signal by a horizontal white chalk mark that it was there. Orlov would use counterpart procedures for transmitting assignments and pay. Punctillious about the pay aspect, he asked if 700 kronor would do for the immediate future, which would be devoted to the semiannual Skeppsholmen report.

Andersson completed this routine assignment handily before the end of June and left the report in the bicycle tool case on St. Erik's Terrace. He didn't like this impersonal means of delivery as a regular practice,

especially in such an open spot where he could easily be observed. He resolved to protest it, and he soon had a second reason to signal that he wanted a meeting with Orlov. He had been scheduled for transfer to the destroyer Öland that summer, but now two alternative possibilities opened up, a well-paid engineer assignment in the electrical section at Skeppsholmen or a course in radar which could lead to running a radar station. He was attracted by the engineer pay but decided that he could be more useful to his other employers if he took the radar training, and he wanted to tell Orlov about it.

They met in Stora Mossen out in Bromma, not far from where Andersson had used to live. They agreed that in the future Orlov would park his bicycle by the busy shops under the viaduct at Tegelbacken and Andersson would pick it up and ride it down to the Southern Hospital and leave it there; thus he could do his business with the tool kit at any opportune point along the way. Orlov approved his decision on the radar course and promised that he wouldn't suffer financially. A few days later he received an envelope containing 200 kronor.

## **Last Mission**

It apparently hadn't occurred to Orlov that his ostensibly aimless wanderings on foot and bicycle didn't conform with the normal activities of Soviet embassy personnel, but it occurred to the Swedish security police, especially when he went out on bicycle and came back on foot or vice versa. His shabby vehicle, moreover, was distinguished by a flashy new tool kit. They began to follow him discreetly on these expeditions. On the evening of 11 September they saw him park the bicycle at Tegelbacken and go away, and they took the opportunity to search it. They found in the tool kit two sheets of blank paper rolled and tied with blue and gold string, each enclosing several 100-kronor notes, a total of 1200 kronor. They tied them up again and put them back and watched. The next morning they saw Andersson come and ride the bicycle away, leaving his own in its place. The tag on it identified him.

The paper around the money, Andersson found, contained instructions for him to go to Karlskrona and report what he could about a fleet of British submarines visiting there. He asked for emergency leave, saying

he had to go to Nässjö on urgent personal business, and took the morning train on 13 September straight through to Karlskrona. He traveled in civvies but took his uniform, as well as his bicycle, along. He spent a day finding out as much as he could from friends, then went in uniform to the quay where the British ships were tied up and engaged the crews in conversation. In the afternoon, as a civilian, he succeeded in joining one party that was taken aboard a submarine and another that was shown around a delimited area of a sub tender. On the latter he told the guard he had been invited down below by one of the crew and so managed to gain admission to the restricted area also.

Returning to Stockholm, he prepared an eight-page report and on 20 September rode Orlov's bicycle from Tegelbacken to the Southern Hospital. The police, finding the eight blank sheets wrapped around the pump, succeeded in developing the writing and discovered that it conveyed information not only on the British submarines but on Swedish warships currently at Karlskrona, their armament and prospective missions, the strength of the coast artillery regiment there, and the disposition of the internal guard at the base.

Andersson was arrested the next morning on his way to work. At his trial he was calm, straightforward, and unhesitating in his testimony. He had acted, he said, only as a Swedish patriot should: "I wanted to do as much good as I could with as little harm as possible." "Harm?" asked the prosecutor. "Yes, harm for mankind, and in that I include also you who judge me here," he answered. And when an unperceptive lawyer asked him whether he had never tried to fake his reports, he was offended. "That would have defeated my purpose," he said. "I always tried to make correct reports."

He was sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor, the latter a thing not strange to him.

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1 See John Bulloch and Henry Miller's *Spy Ring*, reviewed in *Intelligence Articles* V 4, and Arthur Tietjen's *Soviet Spy Ring*, reviewed in *Intelligence Articles* VI 2.

2 See W. W. Rocafort's "Colonel Abel's Assistant" in *Intelligence Articles* III 4.

3 The story of this case is told in Curt Falkenstam's *Röd Spion* (Stockholm, 1951). English-language summaries are included in Francis Noel-Baker's *The Spy Web* (London, 1954) and John Baker White's *Pattern for Conquest* (London, 1956). All of these accounts lack some of the details that an intelligence officer finds intriguing.

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