

Inside the Pentagon by Tecumseh

The FBI's biggest 'failure' yet

The Walker spy ring leaked top military secrets to the Russians for 20 years. What was the FBI doing?

When asked what I thought should be done if the people were guilty, I said I thought they should be shot, though I suppose hanging is the preferred method." That was the judgment of Caspar Weinberger on the implications of the activities of the Walker spy ring, the most damaging espionage activity discovered in recent U.S. history.

A frank military assessment of the effects of the ring was provided by Secretary of the Navy John Lehman and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Watkins: "The damage done by the Walker spy ring is very serious. It will cost us many millions of dollars and many, many man-years to undo the damage done by this ring. . . . We must assume that the Soviets had real time information from the message circuits important to submarine operations. Clearly this gave them a leg up on understanding U.S. submarine practices and procedures to help them in their counter-strategies. . . . [The Soviets] could have learned about tactics and procedures used in air and antiair warfare . . . and filled important voids in their bank of knowledge.

"We witnessed them gaining on us in the technology differential that was significant 10 years ago and has been shrinking. Perhaps the Walker case contributed to the rate of technological gap that existed a decade ago and is beginning to close at a high rate."

Revelations about the activities of this ring have prompted the largest peacetime review of security procedures in the military and intelligence

community in U.S. history. Nonetheless, whatever shortcomings may exist in security procedures within the military, they are dwarfed by the counterintelligence failure on the part of the FBI, the agency entrusted with the responsibility to counter espionage activities in the United States.

The spy ring came to light in mid-May, when the estranged wife of John Walker, a retired Navy Chief Warrant Officer, went to the FBI and reported on the spying activities of her husband. She did this on the advice of a spiritualist medium with whom she shared an apartment in a small town in Maine. Acting on the strange windfall, the FBI followed Walker to a drop point, and recovered a large number of classified documents, apparently destined for his KGB case officer.

John Walker, the leader of the ring, had held a top-secret clearance during most of his career in the Navy, and had repaired coding machines and other sensitive equipment at the Navy's crypto repair school in Vallejo, California. He also served as the radioman on two nuclear-powered missile submarines. The other named members of the ring are Walker's brother, retired Lt. Cmdr. Arthur James Walker, 50; John Walker's son, Seaman Michael Lance Walker, 22; and John Walker's friend, retired Senior Chief Radioman Jerry Alfred Whitworth, 45.

Although CNO Watkins did not discuss the ring's capabilities, sources have said that compromised coding machines would include the KW7 and

KW26, used to encode teletype messages, and the KG13 and KY9, specialized encryption equipment. In addition, it must be assumed that repair and operations manuals were passed on to the Soviets as well.

Access to this information, plus up-to-the minute operational intelligence, of the type supplied by Walker's son, who was responsible for disposing of classified documents on the carrier Nimitz, would provide the Soviets with a window into the details of the anti-air and anti-submarine tactics and doctrine of the U.S. Navy. The Soviets would, for example, have been able to observe and analyze the capabilities of NATO forces as they scrambled to respond to the 1984 Soviet naval maneuvers, the largest in history, which caught NATO intelligence completely by surprise.

Pentagon responses to the revelations have so far focused on the need to tighten up and overhaul the process of granting security classifications, reducing the number of persons with security classifications, introducing the use of random polygraph tests, and so on. The DoD has established a committee to review the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which does not have an espionage section in peacetime.

Unfortunately, none of these measures addresses the most glaring feature of the case. Walker's detective agency, Confidential Reports, Inc., of Virginia Beach, Va.,

lygraph examinations that they could offer to counter the findings in the Navy's spot checks for drug use! Further, Walker was well known as a recruiter for the Ku Klux Klan, an organization thoroughly penetrated by the FBI. Walker bragged to all who would listen that he was an undercover FBI agent penetrating the Klan! Was the FBI merely incompetent, not to have caught him for 20 years—or was it worse?