

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

Accused Spies Portrayed as Incompetents

By Jay Mathews
and Mary Thornton
Washington Post Staff Writers

SAN DIEGO, Calif., Oct. 4—

They seem to have been two amateurs out of their depth: a troubled, journeyman FBI agent mistakenly given a new assignment to catch spies and a Soviet emigrant housewife in love with the idea of being a spy for anyone who would take her.

One FBI official today called Richard W. Miller, the first bureau agent ever charged with espionage, "an incompetent" with black marks on his record for being overweight and, according to another source, selling Amway products from the trunk of his government car.

A Russian Orthodox priest today portrayed the housewife, Svetlana Ogorodnikova, the Soviet emigrant who apparently lured Miller to his downfall, as "aggressive, abrasive and . . . sleazy," so immersed in her own fantasies that she threatened "to bring the FBI over" when her son was expelled from a church school because of his mother's openly pro-Soviet activities.

Of the many mysteries attached to the strange story of Miller and Ogorodnikova, perhaps the most haunting is why the FBI allowed them to get together and then did not realize immediately what they were about.

The crucial flaw, in the view of many people who knew them, was that Miller and Ogorodnikova never seemed a real threat to anyone. So it took more than two weeks—during which a secret U.S. counterintelligence manual of uncertain value fell into Soviet hands—before the FBI realized the two people so well-known to the bureau had pulled off an espionage coup right beneath its nose.

WASHINGTON POST
5 October 1984

In the wake of Miller's arrest Tuesday, attorneys, friends and other agents disclosed today that he was severely burdened with financial problems because of a failing avocado farm and responsibility for eight children.

One agent who knew Miller expressed chagrin in hindsight that for the last three years Miller was assigned to difficult counterespionage work in the ethnic cauldron of Los Angeles. One FBI official who asked not to be identified said Miller was transferred from a job in the semirural Riverside County office because of incompetence.

Agents in Los Angeles said they were aware of Miller's reputation for occasional lapses of judgment, but still liked and respected him as a pleasant man being paid more than \$40,000 a year but struggling with severe financial problems.

With 20 years of FBI service behind him, the 47-year-old graduate of Brigham Young University might have eased into a quiet retirement if he had not encountered Ogorodnikova, a tiny, sharp-nosed blonde who indicated to acquaintances and even other FBI agents that she desperately wanted to be known as an important person to the Soviet and U.S. governments.

She allegedly involved her husband Nikolay Ogorodnikov in her efforts, and both have been charged along with Miller in a conspiracy to give secrets to the Soviet Union.

But it was Ogorodnikova, living on welfare and her husband's meatpacking checks, who was always pushing, telling the FBI in 1982 of her exploits in stopping a Soviet shipboard mutiny, winning and dining Soviet diplomats in West Hollywood, and telling Miller she was "a major in the KGB."

One resident of Los Angeles' large Russian emigre community, a radio broadcaster who asked not to be identified, said Ogorodnikova and her 51-year-old husband made such a poor impression that no one could believe they were serious spies.

"They were completely uneducated," he said. "They did not even speak very good Russian."

At her a
les Wednesday, Ogorodnikova appeared in a red-and-black warmup jacket, torn khaki slacks and sandals. Her husband, arraigned separately, wore a blue sweatshirt and jeans, brown loafers and a black baseball cap. Each was ordered held without bail.

At his arraignment today in San Diego, Miller winked and smiled at his wife, Paula, and 19-year-old son Paul, a Brigham Young University undergraduate. Federal public defender John Moot told U.S. Magistrate Roger Curtis McKee that Miller planned to sell some assets and hire a private attorney and would plead not guilty. McKee ordered Miller held without bail.

About seven years ago, Miller moved his family from Santa Ana in Orange County to a ranch in the northern San Diego County community of Bonsall, where he and his father-in-law tried to turn a profit on 1,000 avocado trees growing on a 10-acre tract. Jack Story, an associate of Barlett Farm Management, which developed the grove for Miller, said the idea proved costly with prices hitting all-time lows.

Miller was continually looking for ways to make or save money. The Millers' five-bedroom house atop a small knoll appears worn and ill-kept, neighbors said.

Miller's acquaintances said he had hoped to be transferred eventually from the Los Angeles Field Office to the FBI office in San Diego so he could end his routine of spending nights at a small Los Angeles suburban house in Lynwood during the week.

Although neighbors of Ogorodnikova said she and her husband continued to live together until their arrest—and FBI agents saw them take frequent long walks in the neighborhood—Los Angeles court records say they legally separated in September 1982.

Ogorodnikov, who took his wife's last name instead of his own, Wolfson, in an apparent attempt to obscure his Jewish ancestry, reported an income of \$2,000 a month as a meatpacker at Hoffman Bros. Pack-

Continued