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Briton gets 35 years as spy

Former intelligence employee admits he worked for Soviets

By Ray Moseley
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LONDON—A former employee of British intelligence pleaded guilty Wednesday to spying for the Soviet Union over a 14-year period and was sentenced to 35 years in prison for the "incalculable harm" he caused the Western alliance.

Geoffrey Prime, 44, described by his own attorney as "a sexual and social misfit," was sentenced to an additional three years on unrelated charges of indecently assaulting young girls.

British newspapers described the case as one of the most important espionage cases since World War II.

Prime was formerly a senior employee at the top-secret Government Communications Headquarters—commonly known as GCHQ—at Cheltenham.

The GCHQ, with the U.S. National Security Agency, monitors Soviet bloc military and diplomatic communications around the globe and is charged with responsibility for breaking the codes of other nations.

The nature of the information Prime passed to the Soviets was kept secret.

BUT ESPIONAGE experts said he could have given the Russians valuable information on the extent to

which their codes are known in the West and enabled them to disseminate false and misleading information to those listening to their communications.

Britain's lord chief justice, Lord Lane, passed sentence after Prime had calmly pleaded guilty to seven counts of espionage and told him:

"You have done incalculable harm to the interests and security of this country and the interests and security of our friends and allies. It is said you are anxious to repair the damage you have done. But it is perfectly plain that the huge proportion of it is quite irrevocable."

The Prime case has caused a rift between the British and U.S. intelligence agencies, with the Americans complaining that they had been unable until now to get a full report from the British on the case. Three senior officials of the NSA, not identified, were in court for the trial.

The case also is likely to have severe political repercussions for the government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, especially in light of statements by several GCHQ employees that security at the facility in Cheltenham is extremely lax.

THATCHER HAS promised to make a full statement about security to the House of Commons Thursday.

Prime, who resigned his Cheltenham job in 1977, was unmasked early this year after police questioned him about sexual assaults on young girls.

After police left his home, Prime confessed to his wife that he not only was guilty of the assaults but had been a spy for the Soviets. His wife Rhona, 37, who broke down and wept at his trial, then contacted the police and told them of his confession.

Sir Michael Havers, the attorney general, said Prime subsequently confessed to police that he spied for the Russians through "a misplaced idealistic view of Soviet socialism compounded by basic psychological problems within himself."

He said Prime confessed that he initiated contacts with the Soviets in Berlin in 1968 when he worked for the Royal Air Force signals intelligence division.

Prime told police that he was trained in "the arts of a spy" in East Berlin where he was taught invisible writing, use of a miniature camera, handling of microdots and dead letter box procedures.

HE WAS GIVEN the code name "Rowlands" and a password. If his contact said: "I believe we met in Pittsburgh in 1968," he was to reply: "No, at that time I was in Berlin."