

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 4A

WASHINGTON TIMES
24 September 1985

'Gigolo' spies abound, former CIA aide says

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A brilliantly wicked espionage drama is unfolding in Germany that might aptly be titled, "The Gigolo Spies."

It has played in semi-secret for years, known mostly to an admiring and frustrated handful of counter-spies. With the recent defections to East Germany of at least four female private secretaries to high-level West German government officials, some of the action is out in the open. It is full of crafty plots and subplots, high and low comedy, betrayal, duplicity and death.

George Carver, 55, a retired Central Intelligence Agency officer who served as station chief in Bonn and as a deputy to several CIA directors, in a recent interview told of an early and darkly famous episode that sets the present-day scene:

"She was a lonely woman who worked for the West German foreign office on assignment in Paris in the mid-1970s. At a seemingly innocent garden party hosted by the West German Embassy, she was introduced by friends to an attractive German man. He had no ride. They shared a car. The chemistry was right.

"For weeks he wined and dined her. Eventually he proposed.

"They were married by a priest at his romantic schloss in Austria. His parents attended.

"Later, after she committed suicide with sleeping pills, it became known that the castle was actually owned by a man connected with the Hauptverwaltungaufklaerung, the East German intelligence service, known as the HVA. The priest was no priest; he was a dressed-up HVA agent. The parents were both agents. And so was the bogus husband, who by the time of her death had deeply involved her in spying for his masters."

New versions of that cautionary tale of the spy as gigolo are coming to light daily in the news. Herta-Astrid Willner, 45, and her husband, Herbert, 59, disappeared during a vacation in Spain last month and turned up as turncoats in East Berlin.

Among espionage buffs in Germany it is assumed that Mrs. Willner, a secretary in the office of West German Chancellor Helmut

Kohl, had been spying for the HVA since not long after she met Herbert, who quite possibly encountered and married her on orders from the HVA.

It also is assumed by intelligence community officials that yet another hard look will be taken at the trustworthiness of middle-age females, both married and single, in the employ of West Germany — since they are particular targets of the HVA's scenario of sexual intrigue.

Mr. Carver explained that the script for infiltration of the West German government by gigolo-controlled female "assets" was writ 10 years ago by a little-publicized East German spy master named Markus Wolf, who has been in charge of the Ministerium fuer Staatssicherheit (MfS), the main East German security agency, for more than 30 years. The agency is integrated with the KGB, the Soviet intelligence service, and performs major subcontracting for the Soviets in Marxist and pro-Marxist Third World nations.

The HVA falls under the MfS.

Markus Wolf, now 62, holds the military rank of general.

What is not widely known about Gen. Wolf would fill an espionage encyclopedia. But some biography is available. As Mr. Carver briefly recounted it, Gen. Wolf's father was a playwright in the post-World War I days in Germany. He took his family to the Soviet Union about the time Adolf Hitler made it clear to Jews that Germany was no longer a healthy place to live. Gen. Wolf, his father and brother returned on the baggage trains when Soviet troops entered Germany and the Third Reich was crumbing.

Gen. Wolf got a job in the fledgling foreign service. He worked in the Economic Research Bureau, which was the embryo of the East German intelligence services.

Mr. Carver pointed out a significant difference between the CIA and the HVA:

"In those nearly 40 years, [the East German security agency] has had one director. The CIA has had 12. He [Gen. Wolf] can plan for the long term. He can do things that have no immediate payoff. He doesn't have to

come up with something by the next election."

Mr. Carver said that Gen. Wolf early took advantage of a melancholy result of World War II: There are many more women in their late 40s and 50s in Germany than there are men of that age and older. Both the Eastern and Western fronts decimated the ranks of German soldiers, leaving a large population of women without men of suitable ages for companionship.

"So," Mr. Carver related, "Wolf floods West Germany with assets. His minions are everywhere, and they operate like the lecherous young man who propositions every girl he meets. He may not get what he wants every time, but he has some interesting afternoons and evenings along the way."

The liaisons, often enough, are with women who have achieved sensitive jobs with the government, military or industry.

The spy agency also has set up a meticulous, computerized, highly sophisticated system to monitor office gossip — seemingly trivial stuff, sexual banter, money worries, promotions and demotions. These reports become the basis for a lucrative spy operation.

"Let's say," said Mr. Carver, "that there is a woman in a sensitive ministry who loses a boyfriend, or her husband is killed or she has a spat.

"The odds are very high that within a very short span she will meet someone — a male, if that is her preference — who is very charming, who happens to share her preferences, who plays chess if she loves chess, or enjoys art or music. One thing, as it often does, leads to another.

"Her new boyfriend asks her for a few small favors. She performs them. He asks for a few more. She is in love. Soon, she is snared, and she can't get out."

Mr. Carver is convinced that Gen. Wolf has developed a never-ending, two-part problem for West German counterintelligence.

One is the recruitment of women already living in West Germany through contacts, lovers, boyfriends and the like. They must be trained, he said, "to be skeptical and suspicious of anybody. It is not easy, but in certain jobs, you must do it."

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The other is the Wolf-created problem of "illegals" — those women with secretarial skills who are dispatched from East Germany and get into West Germany under the Israeli-like "Law of Return," which treats Germans from both sides of the wall as West German citizens, if they pledge to be.

With the advantage of long stretches of time with which to work, Gen. Wolf sends in platoons of female spies with false names and documents who, Mr. Carver said, "lay doggo" for years before they worm their way carefully into government jobs — some of which ultimately lead to the most top-secret government offices.

Of course, the inevitable defections of superspies stir up Gen. Wolf's masterfully constructed productions, and his "assets" must scurry for protection, as they are doing now.

Yet the fact remains, Mr. Carver observed, "That there are an awful lot more lonely females in Bonn than there are lonely males."