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The case of espionage in the embassy

■ They are bright and alert looking, handsome young soldiers. Yet it now appears that these sturdy Marines—"a few good men," to use the Corps's famous phrase—have allowed themselves to be drawn into the most elemental of espionage snares, one that could result in the most extensive and damaging intelligence loss in American history. Veteran espionage operatives and devotees of Le Carré spy fiction are familiar with the term for the snare, the honey trap. In essence, the Marine spy scandal in Moscow was just a simple marketplace swap: Sex for secrets.

How could it have happened? In hindsight, it seems so obvious. Young, unmarried Marines are sent to so-called hardship posts around the globe on 15-month stints to provide security for U.S. embassies and diplomatic missions. Naturally, instructors tell the young Marines, whose average age is 24, to avoid contacts with residents of the host country, particularly women, and to report any advances to superiors. In Moscow, where the Soviets run scores if not hundreds of female agents—known as "swallows" in the language of the spy trade—the lesson is even more heavily emphasized than elsewhere, sources say. But judging from what is already known about the conduct of some of the Marine guards there, the lesson seems to have been ignored, and supervision seems to have been woefully inadequate. "I look to the leadership," says Brig. Gen. Walter Boomer, director of Marine public affairs and former security-guard commander. "These young Marines for the most part will not let you down if it's clear to them what it is they're supposed to do."

Costs that dollars can't cover

Whoever ultimately shoulders the blame for the appalling security breakdown, it had to have been clear to the Marine guards involved that their amatory adventures would come with a high

price, not only for themselves but for their country. With three Marines in custody and two more to be questioned in the affair this week, analysts for the Naval Investigative Service say the damage done may take years to undo. Just in terms of dollars and cents, *U.S. News* has learned, cost estimates of up to \$100 million have been provided for replacement of electronic coding equipment and new security measures.

But the real cost, in terms of lost and compromised intelligence, probably will be far greater. It is now believed that, thanks to the secret listening devices planted in the most secure areas of the embassy compound with the aid of at least two Marine guards, the Soviets have been reading all of the coded communications sent from Moscow over the past year. As a result, analysts say, the KGB has identified virtually every Soviet contact for U.S. intelligence agents. Even more embarrassing, the bugging

devices may also have given the Soviets advance knowledge of U.S. negotiating tactics last fall during the detention of *U.S. News* Moscow correspondent Nicholas Daniloff and prior to the summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik—where the Soviet leader is widely regarded as having outmaneuvered the President. "America," says Representative Daniel Mica (D-Fla.), who will be in Moscow this week examining the embassy security problem, "has lost big in this one."

As Secretary of State George Shultz prepares to visit Moscow next week for

meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, U.S. officials are putting on a brave public front, but privately they express fears that the Soviet eavesdropping capabilities may force the State Department to fly over a secure communications facility beforehand or have Shultz use the coded radio on his Air Force jet to talk with Washington.

For such an enormous debacle, its beginnings were quite simple. In September of 1985, Marine Sgt. Clayton Lonetree ran into a woman named Violetta Seina in the Moscow subway.

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Seina is about 5 foot 9, with gray eyes and shoulder-length brown hair. She worked as a receptionist in Spaso House, the American ambassador's residence. According to records of Lonetree's interrogation by the Naval Investigative Service, Seina missed her subway stop at that first meeting and continued talking with him on the train. "We got off together at a later stop and began a long walk together," Lonetree recalled, "talking about various subjects, including American movies, books, food, likes and dislikes, etc." They agreed to see each other again,

the records of the interrogation show, and Lonetree saw Seina again at a Marine Corps ball in November, 1985. An American who recalled seeing Seina at several embassy parties described her, with her statuesque figure and fashionable clothes, as "a presence." Indeed, one source recalled, Seina was once crowned Queen of the Marine Ball.

The corporal and the cook

At the same time Lonetree's relationship with Seina seemed to be blooming, another Marine, Cpl. Arnold Bracy, was apparently becoming involved in an affair with a Soviet woman who worked as a cook in the embassy. By the summer of last year, Bracy was discovered in the midst of sexual relations with the woman in the apartment of an unnamed U.S. attaché at the embassy. The woman has since been identified by the CIA as a KGB swallow.

Investigators are still sorting out the details of the Marines' activities, and the sequence of events that led to the bugging of the embassy is still far from clear. What is known is that, at some point in their relationships with the two women, Lonetree and Bracy helped sneak Soviet agents into the most secure areas of the embassy on the sixth, seventh and eighth floors. One well-placed source in Moscow has told *U.S. News* that the agents were able to tap into the electric typewriters on those floors with electronic devices capable of intercepting incoming and outgoing cable traffic.

The fear now is that these and perhaps other types of bugs were placed

even in the embassy's supersecure "bubble," which diplomats refer to as the "glass house." Those who have seen the device describe it as a kind of windowless "room within a room" that seats seven people. Furniture includes a table, chairs and a typewriter, and the walls consist of a double layer of clear, plastic-like material. The walls are lined with a metal-based sheeting that deadens sound. As far as is known by the United States, the security of the bubble was compromised only once before, in the mid-1970s, when an American diplomat had his shoes resoled and a tiny listening device was later found to have been implanted in them. The diplomat had participated in several conversations in the bubble before the bug was detected.

With a third Marine, Staff Sgt. Robert Stufflebeam, in custody in the evolving sex-and-spy scandal, some intelligence experts say it is likely to do more damage than the defection in 1985 of former CIA agent Edward Howard; in fact, as U.S. intelligence analysts begin to re-evaluate the problems and setbacks attributed to Howard, some are coming to the conclusion that the leaks of sensitive information may have come from the Soviet bugs in the embassy.

However wide the scandal spreads, U.S. officials cannot claim to have been blind-sided. A report sent to the President two years ago by his advisory panel on intelligence warned that the Moscow embassy was vulnerable to Soviet espionage, and one board member, Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot, was said to be so angered by the lack of action that he quit in disgust. Last year, a Senate panel warned then U.S. Ambassador Arthur Hartman of a similar threat, but Hartman is said to have dismissed the warning. "Part of the problem," says a Senate staffer, "is that the State Department just says, 'Ho hum.' They take the position that gentlemen always read other people's mail." ■

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