

SAVED \$300,00 DURING U.S. STAY; FORMER KGB AGENT WANTS TO GO HOME WITH HIS CASH
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WASHINGTON

To his FBI captors, KGB Col. Rudolf Albert Herrmann was "a big fish" -- one of the highest-ranking spies they had snared in decades.

When they displayed him to reporters in 1980 behind a murky glass screen, a modulator disguising his voice, he had already put them on the trail of a top Soviet agent in Canada and pinpointed "dead drop" sites where Soviet operatives relayed intelligence secrets and picked up their pay.

By that time, Herrmann, now 57, had outlived his usefulness as a double agent. So the FBI gave him a false identity and staked him to \$35,000 a year, and he became a home builder and remodeler who has amassed \$300,000 in savings in just six years.

But this "practicing capitalist," as one U.S. intelligence official described him, proved also to be "a committed Marxist." And now, \$300,000 in hand, he wants to go back to his native Czechoslovakia.

In two days of interviews conducted in the presence of FBI counterintelligence agents, Herrmann insisted that life in America, for all its advantages, forced him into a "straitjacket." All the news in this country is "processed" to reflect a single viewpoint, he said.

Herrmann, a squarely built man whose gray-rimmed glasses match his close-cropped gray mustache and hair, contended that the poor are treated so shabbily here that he can no longer tolerate it. And from a personal standpoint, he said, living under a false name in a foreign culture leaves him with a sense of gallows humor but little sense of identity.

Speaking in a voice that betrayed his Eastern European origins, Herrmann said he had agreed to cooperate with the FBI only because he lacked the diplomatic immunity of many other East Bloc spies and had only one other choice -- jail. He said he decided "to save my skin and that of my family;" his wife and older son also had worked as KGB agents.

Illustrates Difficulties

His decision, beyond representing another step in the odyssey of a KGB colonel, illustrates the difficulties faced by U.S. officials as they try to make defectors feel at home in the United States. Although Herrmann rejects the label "defector" on the grounds that he always intended to go home, his departure will represent a setback for U.S. counterintelligence.

Back in Czechoslovakia, Herrmann can provide the KGB and Czech intelligence with valuable pointers about how the CIA and FBI operate.

He can relate, for example, how FBI agents constantly tailed him after he agreed to cooperate with them, using methods that he was unable to identify even with his intelligence training. "Once I fiddled with the battery in my car, and they appeared immediately," he said. "So I concluded it was something they had put on the battery."

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He can tell East Bloc intelligence officials of the techniques used by the FBI to interrogate him. That, he said, would provide "a big value if you want to instruct other people" being sent as spies to the United States.

He can detail mistakes the KGB made in supervising his conduct as an agent in the United States. In this category is the KGB's order that his older son gain admission to a costly Ivy League college when Herrmann was ostensibly working as a free-lance photographer with relatively modest earnings.

Graduate of Georgetown

That son, who eventually was graduated from Georgetown University in Washington, could give Communist Bloc intelligence insights into the thinking on U.S. college campuses, Herrmann said.

As it happens, Herrmann and his family may never get such a chance. Czechoslovakia, which confiscated his bank accounts and stripped him of his citizenship after he collaborated with the FBI, rejected his application to return with his wife and two sons.

The 18 pieces of luggage that Herrmann sent ahead to Prague, full of everything from \$450 skis to his younger son's comic book collections, have disappeared. "All of this you cannot get in Czechoslovakia," he said.

Herrmann is convinced that the Czechs turned down his request to return primarily because bureaucrats in the state security police, who lent him to the KGB, do not want to confront mistakes they and the KGB made in handling him. "The bureaucrats can't face me," Herrmann said. "That's it."

The Czechs, however, say that Herrmann, whom they know under the name Valousek, cannot return because he is no longer a Czech citizen. "I cannot tell you how he lost his citizenship," said Gabriel Brenka, second secretary and consul at the Czech Embassy here.

Czech Citizenship Lost

Herrmann said Brenka told him: "You are stripped of Czech citizenship because of collaboration with anti-socialist activities."

U.S. intelligence experts suggest that the Czechs may fear that Herrmann is a triple agent who would continue cooperating with the United States once back in the East Bloc. Herrmann, discounting that opinion, noted that "anyone exposed to the West is put in a category of people never accepted for a position of importance."

Herrmann's roots in communism date to his teen-age years when he joined the Communist Party in postwar Czechoslovakia at age 17, a year before he reached the minimum age for membership. A brilliant student -- he has a genius IQ level -- Herrmann studied at Charles University in Prague, was assigned to intelligence while in the Czech army and was sent to East Germany to master German.

In 1962, already promoted to captain, Herrmann was sent with his wife, Inga, to Toronto. As a cover, he operated a delicatessen. Displaying his entrepreneurial flair, he sold the business a year later for a profit of nearly 80% and began making advertising and promotional films.

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At one point, the KGB directed Herrmann to make contact with Prof. Hugh Hambleton of Laval University in Quebec City. Hambleton was one of its top agents in Canada. Ten years later, after Herrmann was caught by the FBI, he put them on the trail of Hambleton, who was convicted in Britain and is serving a 10-year prison sentence.

Met Ex-Prime Ministers

Soon after gaining Canadian citizenship and meeting such important Canadian political leaders as former Prime Ministers John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson, Herrmann was reassigned to the United States in 1968. He and his wife and sons -- Peter, who was born in East Germany, and Michael, who was born in Canada -- settled in Hartsdale, N.Y., about 15 miles north of New York City.

Herrmann, returning to film making, attracted such major clients as IBM Corp.

Herrmann also undertook a variety of intelligence assignments, some successfully, some not. In 1969, he tried without success to abort a Cape Kennedy space flight by sending an anonymous letter warning of sabotage. He selected espionage drop sites around sensitive research facilities and military bases.

His double life as an agent, with its ever-present threat that his cover might be blown, took its toll. He said he always had difficulties in casual conversations in which the subject turned to old times.

"When you meet people," he said, "they always go back to their youth with recollections. They tell fish stories that have some truth. But if you don't have any history and everything about you is made up for the 'legend,' you cannot participate. If I would tell stories about girls in my prep schools, it would create tremendous pressure. Everything you say is like evidence against you. This is what drives you crazy."

Mother's Maiden Name

The fear persisted even after Herrmann quit working for the KGB and took on yet a new identity as he cooperated with the FBI. Not long ago, for example, he tried to open a checking account and was asked for his mother's maiden name. "Oh my God," Herrmann, a committed atheist, said to himself. "I've had five mother's maiden names."

He is caustic about the way the KGB oversaw his work, recalling with considerable bitterness, for example, that the KGB criticized him when he added a room to his Hartsdale house at a cost of \$6,000. "It was an extremely modest place -- a house a postman would have," he said. "They reprimanded me, told me to stop living the dolce vita."

He criticized the KGB for giving him the "legend" of a working man with no college education and then asking him to infiltrate "think tanks" and associate with highly educated Americans. "It was absolutely ludicrous -- how Maxwell Smart (the bumbling secret agent of the TV series "Get Smart") would have handled things," Herrmann said.

Herrmann said that from the day he began cooperating with the FBI, he had intended to return to the East. The notion turned into a plan of action after the summit meeting in Geneva last year between Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev and President Reagan.

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'Comes to Little Brother'

Gorbachev, Herrmann believes, "is a reformer in the style of (former Czech Premier Alexander) Dubcek. Since Lenin's time, no big leader would go to a factory and discuss problems with workers, as Gorbachev has done. Once it starts with Big Brother, it's only a small period before such change comes to little brother."

He knew he would be subject to punishment back home for cooperating with the FBI, but the successful defection to the Soviet Union a year ago of KGB spy Vitaly Yurchenko eased those fears. "Most predicted he would be shot in two weeks," Herrmann said.

He expected more trouble from American authorities over returning than he actually encountered. "They tried to convince me I was doing the wrong thing" Herrmann said, but they raised no other impediments.

Reunite Family

Returning would reunite Herrmann's immediate family with his 90-year-old mother and his brother, who works for a Prague television station. And his \$300,000 in savings would translate into about 9 million Czech crowns, a tidy sum in his native land. The average college professor's income is about 50,000 crowns a year, he estimated, and "a nice house" sells for 400,000 to 500,000 crowns.

He said he has been repeatedly reminding his sons that the kind of material wealth they see in the United States will not be found in Czechoslovakia. "At 16, my son Peter had a car," Herrmann said. "At that age, I was still wanting a bicycle. When I tell my sons this, they don't believe it."

Likes Much in U.S.

Herrmann conceded that he found much to like in the United States -- the easy crossing of class lines, the positive attitude toward work, Americans' "ingenious way to solve problems."

Spoke With IBM Chairman

He recalled how no less powerful a figure than former IBM Chairman Thomas Watson spoke with him repeatedly while he was filming an IBM ceremony. "In our country, you immediately smelled the importance of a person," Herrmann said. "In this country, it's not so. There's a lot positive about America."

But Herrmann's intense dislike of the U.S. political climate convinced him he could never remain here permanently.

"What I consider unbearable in the U.S. and convinced my family would be superior in Europe is the way you treat your lowest element," he said. At least once a week, he said he drove his sons to a run-down part of town to see "people lying down on newspapers in the cold rain. Then they would hear people talk about all the bums getting too much welfare."

"Everything in this country is individualistic, not social as it is in Europe," Herrmann said. "This is not an atmosphere you can live in."

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Other Reasons Emerge

As Herrmann describes his life in the United States, however, other, more personal reasons for wanting to leave emerge.

For example, he told of resisting his older son's involvement with a Chinese woman, whom Herrmann described as "good looking, smart, a good skier, very sporty" -- but lacking in ideological commitment. He told Peter "how bad it was if people didn't represent any ideology, whatever it was." The couple eventually broke up.

But Herrmann worries about his sons' future in the United States. He called Michael, now 23, "very average," uninterested in his father's passions of ideology and politics and inclined to run with a "non-achieving, fast crowd."

Now, rejected by his homeland, Herrmann plans to leave soon for Europe and work his way toward Czechoslovakia. Once in Europe, he says, it will be possible to at least get together with his brother in some third country.

But Herrmann expects to make it all the way to Czechoslovakia. And when he does, he said, he wants "to get close to a Czech brewery and have one or two beers from the tap, not from bottles, and talk in a barbershop kind of conversation about football."