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Tinker, tailor, sailor, spy

By Tim Dunne

Canada not first, and won't be last, to suffer security breach

Jeffrey Paul Delisle is escorted into Halifax provincial court on Feb. 8. He was later was sentenced to 18 years and five months in prison for selling security information to Russia. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)
Military spy Jeffrey Delisle's arrest, conviction and sentencing opened the door for politicos and pundits to predict that this caper would seriously damage Canada's relationship with our closest allies.

But if our allies are pointing the proverbial accusing finger at Canada, then three are pointing back at themselves. Each has had its turn through the espionage turnstile.

The United States, no stranger to the havoc that an agent can wreak, has had more than its fair share of turncoats.

By October 1967, U.S. Navy Chief Warrant Officer John Walker, with 12 years of service in surface ships and nuclear submarines, had become a respected sailor with a top secret cryptographic clearance. But disenchantment and financial problems caused him to drive from Norfolk to Washington, D.C., and in a move similar to Delisle's experience, simply walk into the Soviet Embassy and pass a photocopied document to KGB station chief Boris A. Solomatin.

During the next 17 years, Walker deluged his "handlers" with information, including the classified key lists for encrypting teletype machines, operational orders, war plans, technical manuals and intelligence digests.

Walker recruited others into his spy ring, including his son Michael, then a young sailor on the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, who provided more than 1,500 documents for Soviet intelligence. Michael's older brother Arthur, a retired USN officer working for a defence contractor, contributed repair records for some warships and a set of damage control manuals for another ship.

The patriarch spy, John, unsuccessfully attempted to enlist his youngest daughter Laura, then serving in the United States Army.

His wife Barbara became an FBI informant, resulting in John's arrest on May 20, 1984, quickly followed by the arrest of his sons and his co-conspirator, Senior Chief Petty Officer Jerry Whitworth. Michael Walker was released for good behaviour in February 2000. John and Arthur will be eligible for parole in 2015. Whitworth still has 349 years remaining in his sentence.

The list of American citizens who betrayed their nation continues, but one in particular stands out.

U.S. Marine Corporal Clayton Lonetree was, in the words of U.S. National Security Archive senior fellow John Prados, "the lovesick marine" at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. He succumbed to the allure of a KGB "swallow," a seductive woman agent, and provided the KGB with information about the U.S. Embassy.

Britain's most famous spy case was "The Cambridge Five." In 1934, Soviet intelligence officer Arnold Deutsch met with Cambridge University graduate student Harold (Kim) Philby and pointedly asked him to spy for the U.S.S.R. Philby not only agreed but also helped recruit Donald Maclean, Guy

Burgess, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross, all of whom went on to key positions in foreign and domestic intelligence and the Foreign Office.

Burgess and Maclean gave the Soviets documents about allied strategy in the Korean War; Cairncross informed Moscow of Anglo-American work to develop an atomic weapon in 1941; and Philby betrayed Project Venona, the U.S. program to break encoded Soviet diplomatic messages.

Burgess and Maclean defected to Moscow in 1951, forcing Philby and Cairncross into retirement; and Blunt confessed and was granted immunity. Philby defected to the U.S.S.R. in 1963. He was buried with full Soviet military honours in 1988.

Australia's encounter with the "dark side" involved last year's allegations that a senior trade official at the Australian Embassy in Vietnam had a secret affair with a top official of Vietnam's state intelligence agency. This liaison was conducted against the backdrop of bribe-ridden negotiations for a multi-million-dollar sale of Australian polymer banknote technology to Vietnam.

Canada's Jeffrey Delisle is not the first to do this, merely the latest. The disgrace he engendered by his espionage activities rests on his shoulders alone.

At the end of the day, those who are entrusted with the security of our nation — military, police, intelligence and security personnel, and even some of our elected representatives — are still individual Canadians. Background and reliability checks, and an aggravating and seemingly endless array of security checks, balances and validations by security officials, endeavour to ensure that they warrant our confidence.

The gaps in our security system which Delisle exploited demonstrate that the system urgently needs repair. When that is accomplished, all we can do is place our trust in those who protect our official secrets until some shred of evidence indicates that one of these people may no longer deserve that trust.

Our allies have gone through this before, and will doubtlessly go through it again when some individual's personal, financial or ideological circumstances change.

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