



COVER PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Carter Clarke, Robert Lamphere, Gene Grabeel, Meredith Gardner, Cecil Phillips, Kim Philby, Klaus Fuchs, Elizabeth Bentley, Alger Hiss, Julius Rosenberg



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# THE VENONA STORY

Robert L. Benson

*The release of VENONA translations involved careful consideration of the privacy interests of individuals mentioned, referenced, or identified in the translations. Some names have not been released when to do so would constitute an invasion of privacy.*

## Introduction

On 1 February 1943 the U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service, a forerunner of the National Security Agency, began a small, very secret program, later codenamed VENONA. The original object of the VENONA program was to examine, and possibly exploit, encrypted Soviet diplomatic communications. These messages had been accumulated by the Signal Intelligence Service (later renamed the U.S. Army Signal Security Agency and commonly called "Arlington Hall" after the Virginia location of its headquarters) since 1939 but had not been studied previously. American analysts discovered that these Soviet communications dealt with not only diplomatic subjects but also espionage matters.

Six public releases of VENONA translations and related documents have been made. These releases covered the following topics and are all discussed in this monograph.

1. Soviet atomic bomb espionage
2. New York KGB messages of 1942 and 1943
3. New York and Washington KGB messages of 1944 and 1945
4. San Francisco and Mexico City KGB messages; GRU New York and Washington messages; Washington Naval GRU messages

5. KGB and GRU messages from Europe, South America, and Australia

6. Messages inadvertently left out of the previous five updates of previously issued translations. Updates some translations by restoring names that had been protected for privacy reasons in the original releases.

The Signal Intelligence Service recruited dozens of language teachers and professors from across the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Miss Gene Grabeel, a young Signal Intelligence Service employee who had been a schoolteacher only weeks earlier, started the project on 1 February 1943. Meredith Gardner, a language instructor at the University of Akron, who spoke numerous languages, worked on the Japanese and German “problems” during World War II and met with great acclaim. As the war ended, Gardner joined the VENONA effort and spent the next twenty-seven years on the project. As the principal translator and analyst on the VENONA program, he wrote a series of eleven special reports during 1947 and 1948.

The accumulated VENONA message traffic comprised an unsorted collection of thousands of Soviet diplomatic telegrams



Arlington Hall before the war  
(This postcard was used by army recruiters.)

that had been sent from Moscow to certain of its diplomatic missions and from those missions to Moscow. During the first months of the project, Arlington Hall analysts sorted the traffic by diplomatic mission and by cryptographic system or subscriber.

Initial analysis indicated that five cryptographic systems, later determined to be employed by different subscribers, were in use between Moscow and a number of Soviet overseas missions. It also became apparent that one system involved trade matters, especially Lend-Lease. The other four systems appeared to involve the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow in communication with its missions abroad.

Further analysis showed that each one of the five systems was used exclusively by one of the following subscribers (listed in descending order according to the volume of message traffic which had been collected):

1. trade representatives – Lend-Lease, AMTORG, and the Soviet Government Purchasing Commission

2. diplomats – i.e., members of the diplomatic corps in the conduct of legitimate Soviet embassy and consular business

3. KGB – the Soviet espionage agency, headquarters in Moscow and residencies (stations) abroad

4. GRU – the Soviet Army General Staff Intelligence Directorate and attachés abroad

5. GRU-Naval – Soviet Naval Intelligence Staff

### ***Public Release of Translated VENONA Materials***

The first public release of translated VENONA materials, signals intelligence which had provided an insight into the alarming and hitherto unappreciated breadth and depth of Soviet espionage activities within the United States, was in July 1995.

That release was a compilation of forty-nine VENONA translations which related to Soviet espionage efforts against U.S. atomic bomb research, including messages about the Rosenbergs and the Manhattan Project.

The second release was of KGB messages between the New York KGB residency and Moscow Center during 1942-1943.

The third release comprised many more documents than either the first or second release – more than 500 translations – and included all the decrypted and translated messages between the New York and Washington KGB residencies and Moscow Center (minus the atomic bomb-related messages previously released in July 1995).

The fourth release was larger – some 850 message translations – and involved the KGB in San Francisco and Mexico City and the GRU in New York and Washington. This completed the release of U.S. (and Mexico) Soviet espionage message translations.

The fifth release contained translations of KGB, GRU, and Naval GRU messages to and from locations in Europe, Latin America, and Australia, as well as some messages of nonintelligence organizations: the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the Trade Ministry. The great majority of releases in this release involved the Soviet intelligence services. This was the final, and largest, release of VENONA translations – well over 1,000 messages.

The sixth release of VENONA translations and related documents included the translations of KGB messages inadvertently left out of the previous five. It also updated some translations by restoring names that had been protected for privacy reasons in the original releases.

This material can be reviewed at the National Cryptologic Museum library and is also available publicly on the World Wide

Web (<http://www.nsa.gov:8080/>), and at the Library of Congress, at state archives, and at university libraries around the country. Scholars, the media, and the public now have all the approximately 3,000 VENONA translations.

The British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), NSA's counterpart, has released to the Public Record Office the MASK message traffic – thousands of secret COMINT messages between various capital cities and Moscow from 1934 to 1937, which give a wealth of detail about Moscow's control of the various national Communist parties (including the American Communist Party). GCHQ has also released ISCOT messages. ISCOT was the codename for the British program to intercept and decrypt clandestine radio messages between Moscow and COMINT (Communist International) outstations in German-occupied Europe and in China from 1943 to 1945. The National Cryptologic Museum library holds a complete set of both the MASK and ISCOT messages.

### *The Shutdown of the Venona Program*

NSA is often asked why the VENONA program ran so long (1943 to 1980), given the fixed set of material that was being worked. The answer is that NSA's customers – FBI, CIA, and the appropriate United Kingdom and Allied services – asked that the program be continued as investigative leads were still being run, and there was hope that unidentified covernames could be identified. In 1977 William P. Crowell, then the acting chief of the NSA division that housed the remaining VENONA group,<sup>1H</sup> decided that the program should end in about two years. The group working on VENONA surveyed customers and evaluated the likelihood of finding further “matches” in the traffic. In 1978 NSA decided to end the program by 1 October 1980.

In September 1978 David Blee, head of the CIA Counterintelligence Staff, invited NSA, FBI, and Allied representatives to form a committee to evaluate the potential for





William P. Crowell  
(circa 1977)



Howard W. (Bill) Kulp

the VENONA effort during the next two years. Howard W. (Bill) Kulp and Mildred Hayes, heads of the VENONA unit in the later years, represented NSA.

During the last phase of VENONA (1978 to 1980), NSA issued thirty-nine first-time translations of KGB and GRU messages and reissued eight others. Some of these first-time translations were quite significant, though mainly for counterintelligence research purposes. In January 1980 Bill Kulp prepared a final technical and counterintelligence evaluation of the VENONA program and its prospects. The report concluded that the program should end as scheduled because of the age of the material being worked, the difficulty in conducting investigations and locating collateral material, and the fact that the most important material had been exhaustively analyzed. Nonetheless, NSA analysts Mildred Hayes, Angela Nanni, and Janice Cram continued their cryptanalytic work right up to the end of the project.

## Venona Chronology

- 1 February 1943** □ Gene Grabeel begins VENONA at Arlington Hall.
- November 1943** □ Lieutenant Richard Hallock makes first break into Soviet diplomatic cipher; break expanded by Frank Lewis.
- During 1943** □ VENONA program expands; Captain F. Coudert and Major William B.S. Smith in charge.
- November 1944** □ Break made in KGB cipher by Cecil Phillips, Genevieve Feinstein, Lucille Campbell.
- 1945** □ Gouzenko defects; Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers tell FBI about Soviet espionage in United States.
- May 1945** □ Military intelligence teams find Soviet codebooks in Saxony and Schleswig, Germany.
- July to Dec 1946** □ Meredith Gardner begins to analytically reconstruct KGB codebook; translates a few messages, including one about the atomic bomb.
- 30 Aug 1947** □ Meredith Gardner's study of KGB covernames in the messages

- Sept 1947** □ Carter W. Clarke of G-2 advises S. Wesley Reynolds, FBI, of successes at Arlington Hall on KGB espionage messages.
- 19 to 20 Oct 1948** □ Robert J. Lamphere, FBI HQ, begins liaison with Meredith Gardner and great number of espionage cases opened.
- 1948 to 1951** □ Exploitation of VENONA exposes major KGB espionage agents such as Klaus Fuchs, Harry Gold, David Greenglass, Theodore Hall, William Perl, the Rosenbergs, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, and Harry D. White.
- 1952 to 1953** □ An earlier KGB cryptosystem exploited; GRU messages attacked. More espionage agents identified over the next two decades.
- 1953** □ CIA officially briefed on VENONA and begins to assist in counter-intelligence work.
- 1960** □ The United Kingdom begins to exploit Naval GRU messages.
- 1960 to 1980** □ Hundreds of first-time translations of messages; many earlier translations reissued.
- 1 October 1980** □ VENONA ends.

## The Venona Breakthrough □

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From the very beginning in February 1943, the analysis of the traffic proved slow and difficult. Then in October 1943, Lieutenant Richard Hallock, a Signal Corps reserve officer who had been a peacetime archaeologist at the University of Chicago, discovered weaknesses in the cryptographic system of the Soviet trade traffic. This discovery provided a tool for further analytic progress on the other four cryptographic systems.

During 1944 the skills of other expert cryptanalysts were brought to bear on this Soviet message traffic to see if any of the encryption systems of the messages could be broken. One of these cryptanalysts, Cecil Phillips, made observations which led to a fundamental break into the cipher system used by the KGB, although he did not know at the time who used the system. The messages were double-encrypted and of enormous difficulty. In spite of Arlington Hall's extraordinary cryptanalytic breakthroughs, it was to take almost two more years before parts of any of these KGB messages could be read or even be recognized as KGB rather than standard diplomatic communications.

Three closely spaced counterintelligence events involving or affecting VENONA occurred in 1945. First, the FBI carefully questioned Whittaker Chambers, whose earlier efforts to disclose details of his involvement in Soviet espionage in the United States in the 1930s had gone unheeded. While not directly bearing on VENONA, Chambers's testimony helped bring Soviet espionage into focus at the FBI. Second, Elizabeth Bentley, a veteran KGB courier and auxiliary agent handler, went to the FBI and named names of government employees passing documents to the Soviets. VENONA messages verified much of what Bentley disclosed. Third, Igor Gouzenko, a GRU code clerk, defected in Ottawa. Gouzenko's revelations were important to Allied counterintelligence efforts, although they did not directly assist breakthroughs into the VENONA system.



Meredith Gardner (left)

In the summer of 1946, Meredith Gardner began to read portions of KGB messages that had been sent between the KGB residency (station) in New York and Moscow Center. On 31 July 1946 he extracted a phrase from a KGB New York message that had been sent to Moscow on 10 August 1944. This message, on later analysis, proved to be a discussion of clandestine KGB activity in Latin America. On 13 December Gardner was able to read a KGB message that discussed the U.S. presidential election campaign of 1944. A week later, on 20 December 1946, he broke into another KGB message that had been sent to Moscow Center two years earlier which contained a list of names of the leading scientists working on the Manhattan Project – the atomic bomb.

In late April or early May 1947, Gardner was able to read two KGB messages sent in December 1944 that showed that someone inside the War Department General Staff was providing highly classified information to the Soviets.

U.S. Army intelligence, G-2, became alarmed at the information that was coming out of Arlington Hall. An Arlington Hall report on 22 July 1947 showed that the Soviet message traffic

contained dozens, probably hundreds, of covernames, many of which were KGB agents, including ANTENNA and LIBERAL (later identified as Julius Rosenberg). One message mentioned that LIBERAL's wife was named "Ethel."

In late August or early September 1947, General Carter W. Clarke, deputy G-2, cautiously informed S. Wesley Reynolds, the FBI liaison to G-2 and Arlington Hall, that the army had begun to break into Soviet espionage messages. Over the next year, Wesley Reynolds received an unrecorded number of translations. Some of these translations were probably handwritten.



General Carter W. Clarke



S. Wesley Reynolds

By 1948 the British joined the VENONA effort; in particular, their signal intelligence service assigned full-time analysts to Arlington Hall. There was excellent cooperation between the two U.S. agencies and the United Kingdom over the many years of VENONA, in large measure a result of the early efforts of Robert Lamphere and Meredith Gardner.

In October 1948 Wesley Reynolds officially introduced Robert J. Lamphere, from FBI headquarters, to Meredith Gardner and the Arlington Hall leadership. From then until he left the FBI in 1955, Lamphere was in constant touch with Gardner and his associates.

receiving VENONA translations as soon as they were made. He had at least some version of every 1944 to 1945 New York (and probably Washington) message that was ever decrypted before the end of 1952. Army G-2's counterintelligence element, which had been studying the earliest Gardner translations, had long before dropped out of the picture.



***A Word about the Covernames***

Robert J. Lamphere

The VENONA messages are filled with hundreds of covernames (designations used in place of the real names to hide identities of Soviet intelligence officers and agents – i.e., spies or cooperating sources – as well as organizations, people, or places discussed in the encrypted messages). A number of public figures who had nothing to do with espionage were also designated by covernames, while others in that category appear in the text of the messages by their true names. The following are examples of covernames recovered from the VENONA corpus:

<b>Covername</b>	<b>True Name</b>
KAPITAN	President Roosevelt
ANTENNA, later changed to LIBERAL	Julius Rosenberg
BABYLON	San Francisco
ARSENAL	U.S. War Department
THE BANK	U.S. Department of State

ENORMOZ□ The Manhattan Project/A-bomb

ANTON□ Leonid Kvasnikov, KGB chief of A-bomb  
espionage in KGB's New York City office

Arlington Hall and the FBI studied the covernames for leads to identities, grouping them into families of covernames. Some covernames came from mythology, some were Russian given names, and others were names of fish, etc. KAPITAN was easily identified from the context as a good covername for President Roosevelt, but his covername was, nonetheless, outranked by those of persons of lower station, including KGB operatives covernamed PRINCE, DUKE, and GOD. Other KGB assets were just plain BOB, TOM, and JOHN, while Elizabeth Bentley had the covername GOOD GIRL. Sometimes the KGB was careless in choosing a covername. For example, the covername FROST was used for KGB agent Boris Moros. The Russian word for “frost” is “Moroz.”

Some VENONA translations will indicate in the analytic footnotes that a covername is unidentified. Another message may footnote that very same covername with identification. Analysts rarely hand-corrected a footnote identification to reflect later identification (unless a completely new translation was issued). For example, in some early message translations that were never reissued, covernames MER/ALBERT are footnoted as unidentified, when it was afterward determined, as footnoted in later translations of other messages, that this person was Iskak Akhmerov, the KGB's chief Illegal in the United States. Unfortunately for the reader, the KGB did occasionally reuse covernames: the same covername for different persons. This can usually be understood by context or geographic location.

Meredith Gardner was able to solve several KGB messages in 1946. From summer 1947 to mid-1948, Gardner published translations or summaries of several dozen KGB messages. At first he noted that the covernames LIBERAL or ANTENNA both referred to the same person (the covername had been changed



from ANTENNA to LIBERAL in September 1944. (KGB Moscow message #1251, 2 Sep 44). Later he gave full translations of some of these LIBERAL/ANTENNA messages but did not know at the time that those covernames were for Julius Rosenberg, Gardner, in 1947, personally identified the true names of a few covernamed persons, e.g., that the covername KOMAR was Viktor Kravchenko, who defected in the United States in 1944 and was being hunted by the KGB, as shown in VENONA.

Most U.S. covername identifications were made by the FBI through file review/analysis and by intensive investigation. The United Kingdom made some identifications, and, starting in 1953, CIA made others. Sometimes the true name of the agent is given in the message; that name could, by analysis or investigation, be placed against a covername seen in later messages (e.g., the case of Theodore A. Hall, subsequently named MLAD).

As shown in NSA VENONA papers, covernames ROBERT, DORA, and PILOT were found in VENONA messages as early as 1947. In November 1948 the FBI told Arlington Hall that those covernames were for Greg Silvermaster, his wife, Helen Witte Silvermaster, and Lud Ullman, who resided with them. In early 1949 the FBI advised that they had identified covernames SIMA (first found in a message in 1947) as Judith Coplon. Covernames CHARLES and REST were identified as Klaus Fuchs during the summer of 1949, based on VENONA messages that were decrypted from 1947 to 1949. Covernames LIBERAL and ANTENNA were first found in 1947, and the FBI made final identification of the Rosenbergs in 1950.

### ***The Venona Translations***

There were about 3,000 VENONA messages translated. Partial information was available from many messages as early as 1947 and later that year was provided to the FBI. The VENONA translations now released to the public often show an unexpectedly recent date of translation because the breaking of strong cryptographic systems is an iterative process requiring trial and

error and reapplication of new discoveries, leading to additional ones. A message may have been reworked many times over the years as new discoveries enabled progress in the decryption and understanding of more and more of the text. Only the last and best translations have been released.

Almost all of the KGB messages between Moscow and New York and Moscow and Washington of 1944 and 1945 that could be broken at all were broken, to a greater or lesser degree, between 1947 and 1952.

There are still gaps of two different types in the translated messages, as indicated by the words “unrecovered” or “unrecoverable.” The phrase “unrecovered” meant that the underlying Russian text in theory could be obtained, but the cryptanalysts did not have sufficient text to do so. “Unrecoverable,” on the other hand, indicates passages unaffected by the Soviet misuse of their own system which therefore could never be solved by cryptanalysts (see pages 26-27).

The serial numbers of the VENONA messages indicate that the KGB and GRU sent thousands of messages between Moscow and the overseas recipients. Only a fraction of the total messages sent and received were available to the cryptanalysts. The messages which have been exploited were never exploited in real time. In 1946 Meredith Gardner was working on KGB messages from 1944.

Arlington Hall’s ability to read the VENONA messages was spotty, being a function of the underlying code, key changes, and the lack of volume. Of the message traffic from the KGB New York office to Moscow, 49 percent of the 1944 messages and 15 percent of the 1943 messages were readable, but this was true of only 1.8 percent of the 1942 messages. For the 1945 KGB Washington office to Moscow messages, only 1.5 percent were readable. About 50 percent of the 1943 GRU-Naval Washington to Moscow/Moscow to Washington messages were read but none from any other year.

### ***VENONA Myths and Misunderstandings***

In spite of what has been written in a number of books and articles, Arlington Hall made the VENONA breakthroughs purely through sweat-of-the-brow analysis. There was no cryptanalytic assistance for Lieutenant Richard Hallock, Cecil Phillips, or Meredith Gardner, and their colleagues from lost, discovered, or battlefield-recovered Soviet codebooks during the years in which the main analytic breakthroughs were made (through 1952). It was not until 1953 that a photocopy of a partially burned codebook (recovered by U.S. military intelligence in 1945) was discovered to be related to the VENONA cryptographic systems after another cryptanalytic breakthrough. The successful decryption of the VENONA messages was a triumph of analysis by a small group of intelligent and dedicated women and men working long hours in their cramped offices at Arlington Hall.

### ***KGB Operations***

Information in the VENONA materials reveals KGB tradecraft (i.e., the practical means and methods of espionage and counterespionage) of the time in great detail. The sheer volume of data collected by KGB stations abroad was too great to be reported by telegram; instead the VENONA messages indicate that photocopies of classified documents went to Moscow by courier. In one translation, KGB in New York informed Moscow that it had fifty-six rolls of film from their agent, covernamed ROBERT, and that this trove of classified material was to be sent off by courier to Moscow Center.

Information in VENONA translations describes the KGB's modus operandi in arranging meetings with their agents, with much attention given to the security of these secret meetings. Other messages describe KGB countermeasures against the FBI surveillance, detection of bugging devices, and ensuring the loyalty of Soviet personnel in the United States. A particularly fascinating set of VENONA messages describes the KGB's efforts to locate Soviet sailors who had deserted from merchant ships in San Francisco and other U.S. ports. Some of the most interesting

messages detail KGB assessment and recruitment of American Communists for espionage work.

Almost all of the VENONA KGB messages during World War II are between Lieutenant General Fitin, the head of the KGB's First Chief Directorate (FCD) and his "rezidents" (station chiefs) abroad. FCD was the foreign intelligence arm of the KGB responsible for espionage and counterintelligence outside the Soviet Union. However, in terms of personnel, it was a very small part of the KGB then and later. Far larger were the KGB's Second Chief Directorate, which handled internal counterintelligence and security (this and related departments were the true secret police of the Soviet Union), and SMERSH ("Death to Spies"), which was responsible for military counterintelligence. The KGB had large formations of police troops, prison camp guards, and a small army protecting Stalin and the Soviet leadership. During 1943 to 1945, Arlington Hall and the U.S. Navy's signal intelligence organization also collected a small amount of police and SMERSH radio traffic.

### ***KGB Agents and Officers***

A KGB officer, whether under official diplomatic cover or operating as an "Illegal," was a Soviet citizen and a sworn officer of the KGB (usually holding police rank). In VENONA messages, KGB officers are often referred to as "workers" or "cadre." Illegals were Soviet citizens, KGB, or GRU officers, operating under cover in foreign countries with no visible connections to legal Soviet establishments. Illegals had no diplomatic immunity, usually entering the country illegally – hence the term. An agent was a private citizen recruited by the KGB to carry out espionage or other clandestine activities on behalf of the KGB. During the VENONA period the KGB used the coverterm PROBATIONERS to refer to their agents. In VENONA we also see some persons who appear to fall somewhere in between agent and officer. American Communists Jacob Golos, Elizabeth Bentley, and Greg Silvermaster, veteran controllers of agent networks, could be placed in this category. In fact, Silvermaster was at one time the only American citizen in the KGB Hall of Fame in Moscow.

### ***KGB and GRU Spies and Assets in the United States***

Several hundred named or covernamed persons found in the VENONA translations, persons then present in the United States, are claimed by the KGB and GRU in their messages as their clandestine assets or contacts. Many of these people have been identified, many have not been. These several hundred persons are separate from the many KGB and GRU officers who also appear in VENONA. One such asset, Robert Silvermaster, is found in VENONA translations several dozen times. Other covernamed persons were found only a few times. The majority of unidentified covernames in the New York KGB traffic appear three or fewer times.

### ***The American Communist Party in Venona***

Information derived from the VENONA translations shows the KGB's extensive contacts with the American Communist Party. Many of the espionage activities by members of the American Communist Party are reflected in the VENONA translations.

### ***The Rosenberg/Atomic Bomb Espionage Messages***

VENONA translations that had been identified as associated with atomic bomb espionage messages were released first. All but two of this group of forty-nine messages were KGB traffic – one is a GRU and one a Soviet diplomatic message.

These messages disclose some of the clandestine activities of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Harry Gold, Klaus Fuchs, David and Ruth Greenglass, and others such as the spy known by the covername MLAD (Theodore Hall) or the important, but still unidentified, PERS. The role played by the person covernamed VEKSEL remains uncertain but troubling. A number of other covernames of persons associated with atomic bomb espionage remain unidentified to this day.



Ethel Rosenberg



Julius Rosenberg



David Greenglass

VENONA messages show that KGB officer Leonid Kvasnikov, covername ANTON, headed atomic bomb espionage in the United States but that he, like the Rosenbergs, who came under his control, had many other high-tech espionage targets such as the U.S. jet aircraft program, developments in radar and rockets, etc.



ANTON  
Leonid Kvasnikov

As with most VENONA messages, the Rosenberg messages contain much information relating to KGB net control and tradecraft matters.

Klaus Fuchs, the atomic bomb spy, is mentioned in many other KGB messages: no. 1606, 16 November 1944, and Moscow Center's messages to New York, nos. 183, 27 February 1945, and 349, 10 April 1945. The last message, only partially recovered, will be of great interest with

CHARLZ  
Klaus



respect to the controversy about the pace of Soviet atomic bomb development. In it, Moscow tells New York that CHARLZ's (Fuchs' covername) information on the atomic bomb "is of great value," and his recent report "contains information received for the first time from you about the electromagnetic method of separation of ENORMOZ."

One translation, NYno. 1507, October 1944, footnoted covername BUMBLE-BEE (Russian ShMEL') as equating to David Greenglass; however, the translation shows a handwritten emendation of "David Greenglass" to "Walter Lippman," which is the correct equation.

The VENONA program concerned KGB and GRU messages that were available to Arlington Hall codebreakers. Most of the messages which were collected were not successfully decrypted, and short of a release of the KGB and GRU archives from the period, we may never know more about the KGB and GRU activities represented in the VENONA corpus of messages.

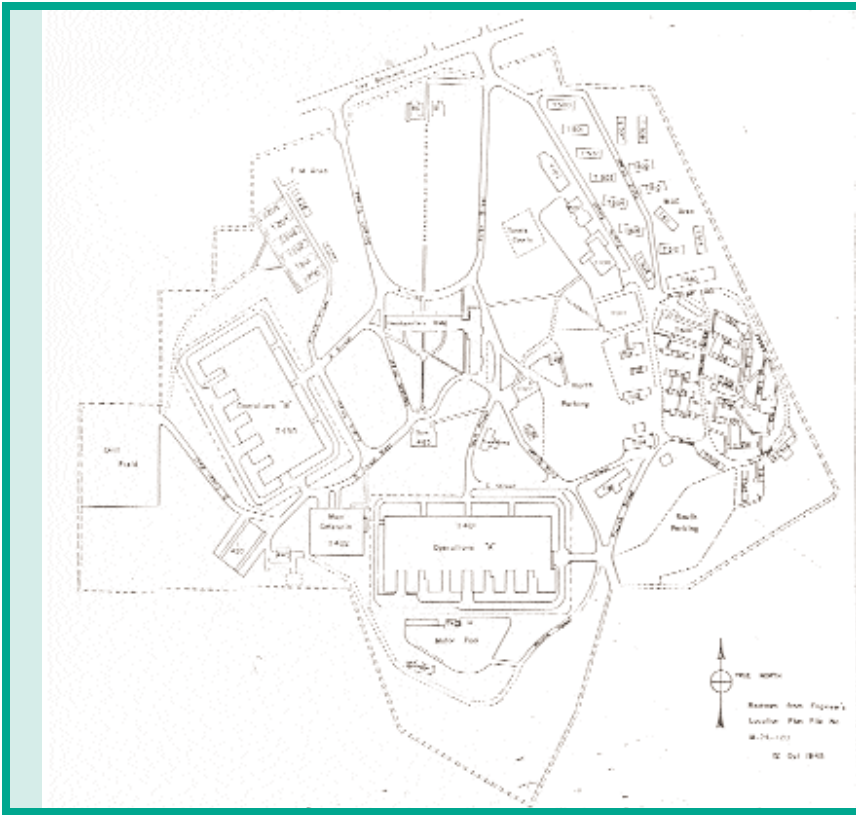
### ***KGB Espionage against the VENONA Program***

A number of sources outside of signals intelligence reveal that



Kim Philby

the KGB learned early on that the United States had begun to study Soviet communications. In late 1945 KGB agent Elizabeth Bentley told the FBI that the KGB had acquired some limited information about the U.S. effort during 1944. Kim Philby, while assigned to Washington, D.C., from 1949 to 1951, occasionally visited Arlington Hall for discussions about VENONA; furthermore, he regularly received copies of summaries of VENONA translations as part of his official



Map of Arlington Hall complex, circa 1940s

duties. But if the Soviets knew something about what Arlington Hall was accomplishing, they could not, at any rate, get the messages back. There was even a KGB agent inside Arlington Hall. This was Bill Weisband, a native speaker of Russian, who returned to Arlington Hall from an overseas assignment in the summer of 1944. Weisband, who reportedly had been a KGB agent since 1934, was reactivated by the KGB at a meeting in New York



ZVENO  
Bill Weisband



City in early 1945. Found in Venona as covername ZVENO, he worked in the Russian section at Arlington Hall from 1945 until his arrest in 1950. He caused very grave damage to the U.S. SIGINT program against the Soviet Union. For more details see The Korean War: The SIGINT Background (Center for Cryptologic History, 2000).

## The 1942 to 1943 New York to Moscow KGBH Messages

### *Messages from the KGB New York Residence to Moscow Center*

Although KGB and GRU communications between New York and Moscow during 1939 to 1941 were in a cryptographic system that could not be broken, a comparison of the New York to Moscow KGB and GRU message counts between 1939 and 1941 indicates that, at least in the United States, the GRU may have been the more active Soviet intelligence agency up until that time. For example, in 1940 the New York GRU sent an estimated 992 messages to Moscow while the KGB sent only an estimated 335 messages. Furthermore, releases of the VENONA translations from 1944 and 1945 messages show that a number of KGB espionage personalities had previously been GRU agents (or possibly COMINTERN agents under GRU control). In 1942 there were nearly 1,300 KGB New York to Moscow messages, but only twenty-three were successfully decrypted and translated. In 1943, however, there were a little over 1,300 messages with over 200 decrypted and translated.

### *The Comintern and the Soviet Intelligence Services*

The COMINTERN (Communist International) was a Soviet-controlled organization that conducted liaison with the national Communist parties of various countries, including the United States, in order to further the cause of revolution. Moscow issued guidance, support, and orders to the parties through the apparatus of

the COMINTERN. Nevertheless, Stalin publicly disbanded the COMINTERN in 1943. A Moscow KGB message to all stations on 12 September 1943, message number 142, relating to this event is one of the most interesting and historically important messages in the entire corpus of VENONA translations. This message clearly disclosed the KGB's connection to the COMINTERN and to the national Communist parties. The message details instructions for handling intelligence sources within the Communist Party after the disestablishment of the COMINTERN. The released translation is the Moscow to Canberra message, which was the only message of those sent to all residencies that was successfully decrypted.

### ***KGB Organization in the United States***

During the VENONA period, the KGB had U.S. residencies (offices) in New York, Washington, and San Francisco – the latter residency was not established (or possibly reestablished) until December 1941. There also was a geographic subresidency in Los Angeles.

The VENONA translations showed that the KGB New York residency operated under three official institutional cover arrangements – the Soviet consulate, the trade mission (AMTORG/Soviet Government Purchasing Commission), and TASS, the Soviet news agency. Other KGB officers worked at various locations around the United States under Purchasing Commission cover, often as factory inspectors working on Lend-Lease matters.

During 1942 to 1943, General Vassili M. Zubilin (true name: Zarubin) was the KGB resident (chief) in New York. In 1943 he was transferred to Washington to become resident there. Zubilin, known in VENONA by the covername MAKSIM, signed many KGB telegrams. His wife, Elizabeth, was a KGB colonel who had the covername VARD0. There are indications that Zubilin/MAKSIM was the senior KGB officer in the United States. For example, the KGB residency in Washington did not send messages until late 1943 after Zubilin arrived there. Before that, the Washington espionage messages were sent by New York.



General Vassili M.



Elizabeth Zarubin



Stepan Apresyan

All KGB residencies abroad came under the First Chief Directorate (Foreign Intelligence) of the Moscow Center. Lieutenant General Pavel Fitin, codename VIKTOR, ran the First Chief Directorate, and most VENONA messages from the residencies are addressed to him.

KGB officer Pavel Klarin, codename LUKA, succeeded Zubilin/MAKSIM in New York. In 1944 Stepan Apresyan, codename MAJ, became the New York resident. MAJ signed hundreds of VENONA messages. All these New York residents worked under the cover of vice-consul.

Although most or all KGB officers in New York worked for the First Chief Directorate, their day-to-day operations were defined by what the KGB called a "Line." A Line worked against a specific target set or carried out some specialized function. A number of Lines are mentioned in the VENONA translations, and their specialization can be either identified or easily inferred. Some, not all, of these may be seen in the 1942 to 1943 messages:

**Line**

**Target or Function**

KhU Line

High-tech targets including the Manhattan Project, jet engines, rocket engines, radar (Julius

	Rosenberg's group worked under ¥ this Line)¥
White Line¥	Probably worked against the White ¥ Russians¥
Fifth Line□	Security of the Soviet Merchant ¥ Fleet (probably connected to the ¥ Second Chief Directorate – internal ¥ counterintelligence at Moscow ¥ Center)¥
Second Line□	Watching nationalist or minority ¥ groups of interest to the Soviet state ¥ (e.g., the Ukrainians)¥
Technical Line “A”□	Special work such as document ¥ forgery. This was probably the ¥ Illegals' support line.¥
Fellow Countryman Line¥	Liaison with the American □ Communist Party□
Line of Cover□	The institutional or personal cover of ¥ the KGB officer¥

Other organizations referenced in the VENONA materials¥ include the Eighth Department at Moscow Center, which received¥ political intelligence; the special cipher office, which encrypted and¥ decrypted the telegrams; the Center-KGB headquarters; and the¥ “House” or “Big House,” which probably meant the COMINTERNY headquarters in Moscow (although it sometimes appears to be used¥ interchangeably for Moscow Center).¥

Telegrams sent by the KGB residency in New York were usually¥ signed by the resident (MAKSIM, LUKA, or MAJ) and were¥ addressed to VIKTOR, head of the First Chief Directorate.¥ Sometimes telegrams were signed with the covername ANTON,¥

head of the KhU Line, since Moscow Center gave him special authority to do so in 1944. In special circumstances, telegrams were addressed to or received from PETROV, believed to have been L.P. Beria, head of the Soviet security apparatus; however, PETROV might also have been V.N. Merkulov, a principal deputy of Beria, who probably headed KGB operations from the latter part of 1943.

At least in the case of the New York residency, we see what probably was the KGB in transition – trying to organize its espionage activities better while sorting out the impact of the dissolution of the COMINTERN. We also see considerable KGB interest in European and Latin American Communists, which presented opportunities for subversion, a classic COMINTERN methodology, rather than espionage. Nonetheless, the New York residency had many espionage assets during this period and was aggressive, even reckless, and imaginative in trying to recruit or place people in sensitive positions.

The activities of Soviet “Illegal” MER/ALBERT (covernames for KGB officer Iskak Akhmerov, who operated as a clothier) first came to light in the 1942-43 New York to Moscow messages. VENONA provides some insight into Illegals used by Soviet intelligence, although with the exception of the noteworthy activities of Akhmerov and a GRU-Naval operation involving an Illegal, there are only a small number of other cases of Illegals mentioned in the VENONA translations.

### ***The Translations and KGB Cryptographic Systems***

The VENONA translations from 1942 to 1943 messages occasionally are fragmentary and difficult to understand. The code itself was complex and difficult to exploit using pure analytic techniques. Moreover, the broad contextual sweep of the content of these messages vastly complicated the difficulty of reading these KGB systems.

The cryptographic systems used by the KGB’s First Chief Directorate involved a codebook in which words and phrases were represented by numbers. These numbers were then further

enciphered by the addition of random number groups, additives taken from a so-called one-time pad. A one-time pad comprised pages of random numbers, copies of which were used by the sender and receiver of a message to add and remove an extra layer of encipherment. One-time pads used properly only once are unbreakable; however, the KGB's cryptographic material manufacturing center in the Soviet Union apparently reused some of the pages from one-time pads. This provided Arlington Hall with an opening. Very few of the 1942 KGB messages could be solved because there was very little duplication of one-time pad pages in those messages. The situation was more favorable in 1943, even more so in 1944, and the success rate improved accordingly.

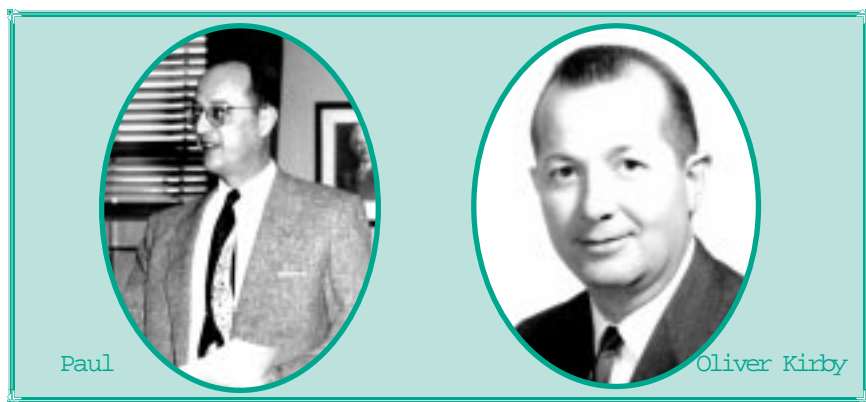
In order to break into the system successfully, Arlington Hall analysts had to first identify and strip off the layer of additive in order to attack the underlying code. These two levels of encryption caused immense difficulty in exploiting the codebook, and many code groups were, therefore, never recovered. The KGB messages from 1942 through 1943 and into 1944, as well as from earlier years, were based on one codebook version. The 1944 to 1945 messages were based on a new codebook.

### ***Recovered Codebooks***

As previously noted, the Arlington Hall breakthrough on the KGB cryptographic systems was accomplished entirely through sweat-of-the-brow analysis without the aid of any captured codebooks. Fundamental cryptanalytic breaks against the extra encipherment which overlay the various codebooks were made in 1943 and 1944 by Richard Hallock and Cecil Phillips, and a small team of experts, by their own cryptanalytic brilliance. The knowledge gained earlier about the extra encipherment layer allowed Meredith Gardner to break into the second KGB codebook in late 1946. The majority of KGB messages between the United States and Moscow that were solved employed this second KGB codebook and were broken between 1947 and 1952. These were based on a KGB codebook which Arlington Hall had never seen.

The KGB messages from 1942 and 1943 employed the earlier and more difficult codebook. These 1942 and 1943 messages were not attacked successfully until 1953 to 1954, when a second major cryptanalytic breakthrough was made through pure analysis by Dr. Samuel P. Chew at NSA, the successor of Arlington Hall. It was only after this second major breakthrough that a partially burned KGB codebook, which had been found in 1945, was able to be identified as the codebook employed in this system and to be put to use in attacking these messages.

A military intelligence team headed by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Neff, acting under Arlington Hall direction, had obtained a photocopy of this partially burned codebook at a Nazi Foreign Office signal intelligence archive located in a castle in Saxony during the last days of World War II in Europe. Neff's team got the material back to U.S. lines shortly before Soviet occupation forces moved into the area. The Nazis had acquired this codebook from the Soviet consulate in Petsamo, Finland, on 22 June 1941. KGB officers in the consulate had succeeded only in partially burning the codebook before the facility was overrun. At about the same time, Lieutenant Oliver Kirby, also connected to Arlington Hall, recovered related cryptographic material while on a special mission in Schleswig, Germany. (Both Neff and Kirby later became senior civilian officials at Arlington Hall and later with NSA.)



Paul

Oliver Kirby

**KGB SystemH    Message Translations    Help from H  
by Arlington HallY    by Captured H  
Codebook?H**

Pre-1939 into <input type="checkbox"/>	1953 to 1954 <input type="checkbox"/>	Some after Y initial analyticY breakthroughY
1944Y	& later <input type="checkbox"/>	
1944 to 1945Y	late 1946 to 1952 & laterY	NoneY

***KGB Tradecraft and Operations, 1942 to 1943R***

Several KGB tradecraft terms that appear frequently in theY  
VENONA translations are defined below:Y

<b>Probationers</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	KGB agentsY
<b>Fellow Countrymen</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	member of the Y American Communist Y PartyY
<b>Workers or Cadre</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	KGB officersY
<b>Put on Ice or in Cold Storage</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	deactivate an agent Y
<b>Legend</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	cover storyY
<b>Neighbors</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	how the KGB referred Y to GRU and vice versaY

The following references identify VENONA translations that giveY  
examples of KGB tradecraft and operations:Y

- **KGB agents in the OSS: No. 880, 8 June 1943; No. 782, 26Y  
May 1943Y**
- **NY KGB recruiting proposals: No. 854, 16 June 1942; No. 424,Y  
1 July 1942; Nos. 1132-33, 13 July 1943Y**
- **An unidentified KGB agent in the company of PresidentY  
Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill (note that the Illegal MER,Y  
later known as ALBERT, signed the message): No. 812, 29 May 1943Y**



## The 1944 to 1945 New York and Washington to Moscow KGB Messages

### *The Washington KGB Residency*

Except for its agents working against high-tech targets such as the atomic bomb project, the most important KGB sources were in Washington, D.C. Nonetheless, VENONA shows that these Washington-based espionage nets were apparently run by the New York residency; that is, the New York residency wrote and sent VENONA messages to Moscow even when these messages clearly concerned activities in Washington. KGB Washington sent no messages until very late in 1943. In 1944 Washington's message volume was still only half that of New York. Finally, in 1945 Washington KGB



VADIM

Anatolij Gromov /Gorsky

took charge, it seems, sending twice as many messages as New York. Vassili Zarubin, a KGB general officer who had been the resident (chief) in New York in 1942 to 1943, moved to Washington during 1943 as resident there. The Washington KGB thereafter began sending messages in ever-increasing volume. When Zarubin was recalled to Moscow in 1944, Anatolij Gromov, covername VADIM, replaced him in Washington. Gromov (actual last name Gorsky) was also a senior officer, in his late thirties, who had served for the preceding four years as the KGB resident in London. American spymaster and courier for the KGB Elizabeth Bentley knew him only as "Al."

### *New York Espionage Operations – the New KGBR*

In 1944 covername MAJ, Stepan Apresyan, became the KGB resident in New York. According to a complaint to Moscow Center by his co-resident or subordinate, covername SERGEJ, MAJ was a young, inexperienced officer who had not previously been posted

abroad. (In the U.S. covername SERGEI used the pseudonym Vladimir Pravdin. During the 1930s, “Pravdin” had been involved in killings and kidnappings in Europe for the KGB.) Apresyan was about twenty-eight years old; he operated in New York under the cover of vice-consul (see New York messages of 9 to 11 October 1944). While we do not know why MAJ was elevated early to senior KGB ranks, there were other major changes in KGB espionage operations, as we can see in the VENONA messages. Moscow Center and the New York residency intended to take more direct control of some existing espionage nets that had been run for the KGB by American Communists such as Jacob Golos (covername ZVUK) and Greg Silvermaster (covernames PEL and ROBERT). And, as MAJ reported to Moscow, the time might come when the KGB would need to have espionage agents not recruited from within the Communist Party. The transition was resisted by American spies Greg Silvermaster and Elizabeth Bentley, as well as by some of their agents. They complained that Moscow did not trust them and that, as a practical matter, the KGB would be less successful in running espionage operations if they put their officers in direct contact with the agents, bypassing the old guard Communist Party controllers. Perhaps mindful of this, the KGB introduced the Illegal ALBERT into their espionage operations. Silvermaster, Elizabeth Bentley, some of their individual agents, and members of the “new network” were now to fall under ALBERT’s control.

These translations frequently show KGB tradecraft – the techniques of secret espionage and counterespionage – in great detail. The KGB term *Konspiratoria* sometimes seen in VENONA refers to tradecraft and operational security. A few examples for quick reference (all New York to Moscow):

- [Agent Recruiting: No. 27, 8 January 1945 and No. 1506, 23 October 1944](#)
- [Meeting and Password Scenarios: No. 1220, 26 August 1944](#)
- [Secret Document Photography: No. 1469, 17 October 1944](#)

- Countersurveillance: No. 1755, 14 December 1944
- Technical Surveillance Countermeasures: No. 1824, 27 December 1944
- Document Forgery Operations (the KGB “A”-line technique): No. 1203, 23 August 1944
- Cover Business: No. 618, 4 May 44
- Payments/Rewards to Agents: Nos. 1052 and 1053, 5 July 1945

Also, VENONA has excellent examples of the work of a KGB agent and Communist Party functionary, covernames ECHO and DICK (Bernard Schuster), in carrying out investigations on behalf of the KGB as part of the vetting process of agent candidates (New York to Moscow, Nos. 1221, 1457, and 1512, all from 1944).

Alger Hiss, a veteran GRU agent, is presumably found in one KGB message: Washington to Moscow, no. 1822, 30 March 1945. In this message, “A,” meaning the chief Illegal ALBERT (Iskak Akhmerov) reports about his interview of ALES, who describes his recent GRU career and says he has been a GRU agent “continuously since 1935.” Analysts later identified ALES as probably Hiss. Presumably, ALBERT was examining the possibility of transferring Hiss from GRU to the KGB.



ALES  
Alger Hiss

### ***KGB Special Operations***

In addition to espionage, the KGB carried out other secret activities in the United States. In VENONA we can follow the KGB using its agents in the hunt for Viktor Kravchenko, covername

KOMAR, who in 1944 defected in Washington from the Soviet Government Purchasing Commission. (See especially New York to Moscow messages of May to August 1944, nos. 594, 600, 613-14, 654, 694, 724, 726, 740, 799, and 907.) In the latter message, sent from MAJ to PETROV (who was either L.P. Beria, head of Soviet State Security, or V. N. Merkulov, his principal deputy who functioned as the day-to-day head of the KGB), New York announces that KOMAR/Kravchenko had been located by their veteran agent Mark Zborowski, covername TULIP. Additional related messages of 1944 are nos. 1145, 1202, also no. 97 of 19 January 1945, the last VENONA reference to the case, which reports that KOMAR is “in a great panic” about his safety and that KGB agents KANT (the new covername for MARK Zborowski) and ZHANNA are carrying out the “work on KOMAR.” The KOMAR messages contain references to anticommunist emigre community involvement in the defection, including references to David Dallin, Isaac Don Levine, and even Aleksander Kerenskij, head of the post-revolutionary Menshevik government before it was overthrown in the Bolshevik coup. KGB New York also makes the mysterious remark (message no. 740, 26 May 1944) that “KOMAR is well informed about the KRIVITSKIJ case.” KRIVITSKIJ was a famous KGB defector who supposedly committed suicide in Washington in 1941.



Elizabeth Bentley

In 1945 Elizabeth Bentley, a KGB agent who also ran a network of spies and served as a courier, went to the FBI to describe Soviet espionage in the United States and her part in it. She gave a 100-page statement, in which she provided many names – persons in positions of trust who, she told the FBI, were secretly supplying information to the KGB. However, she brought no documentary proof. No espionage prosecutions resulted directly from her accusations. Over the years she testified before Congress and in

court and also published a book about her espionage career. Elizabeth Bentley was a controversial figure, and there were many who discounted her information. Ms. Bentley appears in these VENONA translations (as covernames UMNITsa – [GOOD GIRL] and MYRNA) as do dozens of KGB agents and officers whom she named to the FBI. VENONA confirms most of the information about Soviet espionage that Ms. Bentley provided the FBI.

### **Boris Moros**

Boris Moros was, like Ms. Bentley, another controversial figure of the Cold War. In 1959 he wrote an often criticized book, *My Ten Years as a Counterspy*, in which he described his long association with the KGB and his decision to go to the FBI with the story of KGB operations in the United States. In the book he wrote about various personalities who are referred to in VENONA, including Vassili Zarubin and Jack Soble. Moros appears in VENONA as covername FROST. In his book Moros described how KGB agent Alfred Stern provided his own money to fund a musical record company, managed by Moros, as a KGB front and a cover for international intelligence operations. This operation is confirmed in VENONA – Stern (covername LUI) is quoted as saying his “130,000 dollar investment is exhausted” but also that “I want to reaffirm my desire to be helpful. My resources are sufficient for any solid constructive purpose....” (See New York to Moscow, nos. 4-5, 11, and 18-19 of 3 and 4 January 1945.)



HOMER  
Donald Maclean

### **Donald Maclean**

Long-time KGB agent Donald Maclean, covername HOMER, a senior British diplomat posted to Washington during the 1940s, is found in several VENONA messages from New York and Washington (nos. 915, 1105-1110, 1146, 1263, 1271-74, possibly 1352, all sent during 1944). He was neutralized because of information from VENONA.

Since only 1.5 percent (thirty-six) of all Washington to Moscow KGB messages of 1945 could be decrypted, it is notable that six of these were HOMER messages (nos. 1788, 1791, 1793, 1808-1809, 1815, and 1826 – no. 1809 is a continuation of 1808). Note that the small body of Washington messages that could be broken was from small windows of cryptanalytic opportunity found by the Arlington Hall analysts in messages of March and June 1945 only. Therefore, we have but a glimpse of Maclean's involvement but ample opportunity to see the type of important information he was providing to the Soviets.

HOMER is the English rendition of the Russian covername spelling, GOMER. (The Cyrillic alphabet used in Russian has no letter representing the sound "h" of the Roman alphabet, and foreign words beginning with the "h" sound are regularly spelled with the Cyrillic equivalent of "g.") Meredith Gardner, Arlington Hall's principal VENONA analyst in the early days, began to break HOMER messages as early as 1947/1948, but the story did not come together immediately as the covername was variously represented in the messages as GOMMER (a KGB misspelling), GOMER, G., and "Material G." Initially, it was not apparent that these were all references to the same person, particularly as both New York and Washington traffic was involved, and Gardner worked the NYC traffic first.

### ***Covername Albert: Principal KGB Illegal in the United States***

Covername ALBERT (earlier covername MER) is found in VENONA more than fifty times, sometimes as signatory to messages sent by the New York residency. ALBERT was Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov, a veteran KGB officer who had two tours of duty in the United States as an Illegal, that is, an officer using a false identity and background (a *Legenda* in KGB parlance) and without diplomatic cover or immunity. ALBERT's career, ascertained from VENONA and other sources, gives an excellent example of the bewildering plethora of names by which a KGB personality might be known:

**Communications Covername** (the covername in VENONA): MER in 1943 to 1944; ALBERT, 1944 to 1945.

**Aliases** (1937 to 1945): William Greinke, Michael Green, Michael Adamec, and more.

**Street Names:** Michael, Bill. For example, Elizabeth Bentley knew him only as Bill—no last name, not even the alias, much less his true name. She knew his wife, also an Illegal, as “Catherine.” Catherine actually was VENONA covername EL’ZA, true name Helen Lowry, a niece of KGB agent and U. S. Communist Party leader Earl Browder (VENONA covername RULEVOJ).

**True name:** Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov. (In some cases so-called true names of KGB officers, the names that appeared on their passports and the diplomatic lists, were false. For example, Vassili Zubilin, the sometime KGB resident in New York and Washington, was actually named Zarubin. To add to the difficulty in understanding the names, other KGB officers used true names that were not names at all—Russian words, but not traditional Russian names. Some of these pseudonyms included senior KGB officers Vladimir Pravdin and Jacob Golos, whose last names mean, respectively, “truth” and “voice.”)

In one message ALBERT refers to his earlier work in the United States as an Illegal, and he mentions his old agents, covernames LEONA, JULIA, TONYA, and REDHEAD (REDHEAD was the covername for Hedde Massing). None of the others have been identified, nor do we know if ALBERT reactivated them in 1944 to 1945 (No. 975, 11 July 1944). See also the important message, Washington to Moscow, No. 1822, 30 March 1945, which reports of the well-placed veteran GRU agent ALES being interviewed by covername “A.” It appears that “A” was ALBERT.



ALBERT/MER  
Iskhak Abdulovich

## The Translations

The majority of these translations represent telegrams from the New York KGB residency to Moscow Center in 1944. Most of these messages were between KGB officers – covername MAJ (Stephen Apresyan) and covername VIKTOR (General Pavel Fitin). Approximately 50 percent of all the 1944 New York KGB to Moscow Center messages were sufficiently decrypted to be translated. In contrast, only 1.5 percent of the Washington to Moscow KGB messages from 1945 were ever successfully deciphered. While relatively few messages from the center to the residencies were broken, those that were broken are very important to our understanding of KGB operations and doctrine.

The translations are relatively easy to read and understand. The codebook and cipher procedures used by the KGB during 1944 and 1945 made it possible, after great effort, for the analysts to produce fairly complete translations. Nevertheless, translations often contain significant gaps – code groups that could not be broken. The New York translations in this set were the earliest of all the VENONA materials decrypted. All of the New York to Moscow messages (but not Moscow to New York) that were successfully solved were at



VIKTOR  
Lieutenant General Pavel

least partially solved during 1947 to 1952 and disseminated to the FBI (on a regular basis starting in 1948). Many of the Washington KGB messages were also first decrypted during this period but not quite so early as the New York material.

The 1944 and 1945 messages disclose mainly U.S. individuals involved in a massive Soviet espionage effort – over one hundred Americans, most of them Communists, are mentioned in the



translations of this release. Some of the organizations infiltrated by these individuals included the following:

**U.S. Agency**                      **Some of the Relevant VENONA Messages**

Department of the Treasury	NY No. II 19-1121, 4 to 5 August 1944; 1634, 20 November 1944
Office of Strategic Services (OSS)	NY No. 954, 20 September 1944
War Department	NY No. 1721-28, 8 December 1944
Department of State	Wash. No. 1822, 30 March 1945
Department of Justice	NY No. 27, 8 January 1945

The translations disclose agents with access to the White House, Congress, and political parties, as well as agents in the media and in high-tech defense industries. New York message nos. 1635, 21 Nov 44 and 12-16, 4 Jan 45 reveal assets and infighting relating to ROBERT's (Greg Silvermaster) large KGB net in government departments and agencies in Washington.

The KGB successor organization has recently provided historians some information about Lona and Morris Cohen, their agents in the United States in the 1940s, and later infamous Illegals operating in the United Kingdom as Helen and Peter Kroger. Reportedly, Lona Cohen had the covername LESLIE while she was involved in atomic bomb espionage courier duties for the KGB (see NY's no. 50, 11 January 1945, the only VENONA reference to this covername. This message suggests that LESLIE/LESLEY had not been active for the previous six months).



LESLIE  
Lona Cohen

## The KGB in San Francisco and Mexico City □

.....

### *Covername GNOME – Trotsky’s Murderer*

The KGB communications between Mexico City and Moscow during 1943 to 1946 are a particularly rich historical trove, showing the elaborate plans to free from prison a man assigned the covername GNOME, who had murdered Trotsky in Mexico City in 1940. The murderer, who had been arrested at the scene of his crime, was known as Frank Jacson; he held Canadian documentation. Mexican authorities readily saw this documentation as a sham, but it would be many years before GNOME’s true identity was known, for he had many aliases. GNOME (GNOM in the Russian spelling) was in reality Ramon Mercader, a Spanish Communist recruited into KGB service by his mother, the Spanish Communist and KGB agent-officer Caridad Mercader. She appears in these VENONA messages as covername KLAVA.



Ramon Mercader  
(Covername GNOME),  
after capture by Mexican police

The Soviet Union opened an embassy in Mexico City in 1943, which provided a cover for a KGB residency (before then the KGB had operated in Mexico City without diplomatic protection). During 1943 to 1945 that KGB residency sent about 570 messages to Moscow Center, while the Center sent 400 messages to Mexico. This was a substantial number, though fewer than half could be sufficiently decrypted to be issued as the translations seen in this release. Many of these messages concern the GNOME affair and indicate that the KGB had two plans to facilitate his release: a combat operation, to spring him by force, or an effort to use influence. In any case, the KGB drew upon American, Mexican, and Spanish Communists to accomplish this mission, but the operation failed. The following KGB messages related to the GNOME case (all except the last two were from Mexico City to Moscow) are particularly interesting. Some of these messages were addressed to covername PETROV (L. Beria), head of Soviet state security:

- Plans for the Combat Operation: No. 158, 23 December 1943; Nos. 174-76, 29 December 1943

- The work of KGB agent Jacob Epstein: Nos. 193-94, 14 March 1944

The KGB has suspicions about one of their agents: Nos. 553-54, 29 June 1944

- Influence operations and an agent with access to GNOME in prison: No. 474, 6 June 1944

- GNOME's mother's presence in Mexico is complicating the case: Moscow Center to Mexico City, Nos. 172-174, 9 to 10 March 1945

- A scathing criticism of the work of the KGB resident (chief) in Mexico: San Francisco KGB to Moscow, Nos. 321-322, 19 August 1944

Other Mexico City messages discuss or mention a remarkably varied group of KGB personalities, including General Leonid Eitingon (covername TOM), who had organized the murder of Trotsky; Dolores Ibarruri, the Spanish Communist leader known as “La Pasionara”; the later Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda; and Communist Party member and KGB agent Kitty Harris (covername ADA), sometime lover of KGB agent and American Communist Party leader Earl Browder. In several messages, the KGB discusses Otto Katz (also known as Andre Simon), a prominent Communist executed with other members of the Czech Communist Party leadership after World War II in an infamous purge ordered by Stalin. The story, simultaneously seen in the New York City KGB messages, of Nicholas and Maria Fisher, whom the KGB was trying to get into Mexico via a U.S. transit visa, also continues. The Fishers were clearly important KGB officers, operating under instructions from Beria. Their goal was to take over the GNOME affair, to support operations in the United States, maybe even for atomic bomb espionage.<sup>2H</sup>

### *The KGB in San Francisco*

The KGB established a residency (office) in San Francisco in December 1941. The resident from 1941 to July 1944 was Grigori Kheifits (covername KHARON). He was replaced by Grigori Kasparov (covername DAR). In 1945 Moscow Center sent the New York Resident Stepan Apresyan (covername MAJ) to take over the San Francisco operation in anticipation of the UN conference (attended by KGB agent Harry Dexter White). Arlington Hall and NSA were unable to decrypt the approximately 125 messages sent by that residency in 1941 to 1942 (only two or three messages were sent in 1941).



Grigori Kheifits (right);  
Grigori Kasparov (left)

As often happened, (see the released New York, Washington, and A-bomb translations), the San Francisco KGB got most of its agents – spies – from the local Communist Party. Isaac Folkoff (covername DyaDYa – “uncle”), a grand old man of the California Communist Party, is seen in VENONA as an agent, espionage talent spotter, and recruiter for the KGB. But there is one surprise: a major KGB agent in the West Coast defense aviation industry was not a Party member. This was Jones Orin York, covername IGLA, who later admitted he was in it for the money, although he received very little.

One other oddity of the San Francisco translations is that, with one exception,<sup>3H</sup> there is no obvious reference to atomic bomb espionage (though non-VENONA sources confirm that such espionage was in progress at least in 1942 to 1943). Perhaps that work had ended locally by the time of the readable VENONA messages (and it should be noted that the Los Angeles KGB message traffic, though of small volume, is entirely unreadable). The San Francisco messages do contain evidence of espionage against other high-tech targets.

One important KGB officer, Olga Valentinovna Khlopkova (covername JULIA), is seen in both San Francisco and New York KGB messages. She was on some missions of interest to Beria, possibly involving internal KGB security issues.<sup>4H</sup>

### ***The Hunt for Sailor Deserters***

Several dozen San Francisco KGB messages concern the hunt for deserters from the Soviet merchant fleet and investigations into the suicides or accidental deaths of other sailors. There is, for example, the tragic story of ship’s officer Elizabeth Kuznetsova, who jumped ship in Portland, Oregon, on 9 February 1944. According to a later VENONA KGB message, she subsequently married a taxicab driver in San Francisco. The VENONA part of the story ends, “On 4 November this year the traitor to the fatherland KUZNETSOVA was shipped to Vladivostok on the tanker ‘BELGOROD.’ Details to follow in a supplement....”<sup>5H</sup>

## The GRU in New York and Washington □

.....

### *Shedding Light on GRU Espionage in the U.S.R*

As noted earlier, up until 1941 the GRU, the intelligence directorate of the Red Army General Staff, had been the principal foreign intelligence agency of the Soviet Union. By the time of VENONA readability (the 1939 to 1941 messages of KGB and GRU in the United States could not be decrypted), Stalin had made the KGB his top espionage organization. Still the GRU continued to run espionage operations (though many of its best assets had been transferred to the KGB), and these are seen in the fifty or so translations of 1943 messages from the GRU residency in New York.

Hundreds of GRU New York messages remain unsolved. The loss to history in the record of the GRU in Washington is particularly noticed. Of the several thousand Washington messages from 1941 to 1945, only about fifty were decrypted, in spite of the best efforts of the United States and the United Kingdom. Unlike the New York GRU messages, where translations concern espionage, these few Washington translations deal with routine military attaché matters (such as overt visits to U.S. defense factories). However, a separate Washington GRU cryptographic system, which was never read, presumably carried GRU espionage traffic.

The New York GRU messages show that the organization had good espionage sources in some government agencies, including the OSS, the predecessor to CIA. GRU New York also had a radio-equipped illegal, covernamed MOK.<sup>6H</sup>We see some of the work of the spy (and Communist Party member) Joseph Bernstein, covername MARQUIS, and his recruitment of fellow Communist T.A. Bisson, covername ARTHUR.<sup>7H</sup>The GRU chief in New York, covername MOLIERE, was Pavel P. Mikhailov (the alias he used in his cover assignment as vice consul; true name was probably Menshikov or Meleshnikov). A number of GRU sources remain unidentified.

### ***Some Notes on Analysis of GRU Systems***

Exploitation of GRU (both Red Army and Naval) messages lagged behind the cryptanalytic successes and exploitation of KGB messages by many years. While the 1945 defection in Ottawa of GRU code clerk Igor Gouzenko provided message texts that revealed a great deal of espionage, Gouzenko did not produce any cryptographic materials of direct use to Arlington Hall's cryptanalytic effort. In the long run, success against GRU messages came from the accumulated knowledge and experience gained exploiting the Soviet trade, true diplomatic, and KGB systems and the application of early computers. In particular, the 1949 to 1950 theoretical work of the distinguished mathematician and former navy cryptanalyst Dr. Richard Leibler opened new methods of attack against the VENONA-related diplomatic systems – including those of the GRU.

In 1952 cryptanalyst-linguist Charles Condray proposed an attack against unknown message beginnings which was based on Dr. Leibler's work. The computer implementation of this attack by mathematician Dr. Hugh Gingerich led to detection of reused key in GRU messages and, ultimately, to the solution and translation of GRU messages.



Dr. Richard Leibler

The Naval GRU systems resisted the best efforts of Arlington Hall, NSA, and the U.K. SIGINT service until 1957, when a U.K. analytic attack provided the first results in detecting reused key.

### ***Translations of Naval GRU Messages***

NSA and the United Kingdom service decrypted some 300 GRU Naval messages that had been sent in 1943 between Washington and Moscow – including about half (200 of 400) of the messages sent by

Washington. However, only a few naval GRU messages from any other year could be decrypted and none from any other U.S. location.

Commodore I. A. Egorichev was Soviet naval attaché in Washington at that time, and he was probably also the resident (chief) of the secret intelligence apparatus as well. His superior in Moscow was the Soviet director of naval intelligence, probably Commodore Mikhail A. Vorontsov.<sup>8H</sup>

The Naval GRU was clearly the junior Soviet intelligence service, at least in the United States. The translated messages show the Washington Naval GRU wrestling with various unrelated missions while trying to establish secret espionage networks. In fact, the Naval GRU's cryptographic system was used for various nonintelligence entities, such as the Soviet naval Lend-Lease representatives, their naval weather service personnel, and Soviet naval convoy officers. Some of the topics of Washington Naval GRU messages were these:

- Counterintelligence in Tampa, Florida: Washington to Moscow Nos. 834, 846-848, 18 April 1943

- Recruitments and handling of American Communists as espionage agents: Moscow to Washington, No. II 5,20 January 1943; No. 704, 1 April 1943; No. 1194, 10 July 1943; Washington to Moscow, No. 1969, 13 August 1943 (mentions exceptional possibilities in the high-tech field)

- Moscow lays out the rules for “the primary and basic aims” of naval intelligence: No. 1109, 26 June 1943

- Regular attaché business – exchange of information with U.S. Navy: Washington to Moscow, No. 1657, 17 July 1943

- Human interest – a grief-stricken Soviet admiral: Washington to Moscow, No. II 50, 27 May 1943



### *The Case of Sally* □

Naval GRU assigned covernames AUSTRALIAN WOMAN and then SALLY to an Illegal to be sent by ship from the Soviet Far East to the U.S. West Coast. Fourteen messages relating to this operation were translated. The first of these, Washington to Moscow, Nos. 2505-2512, 31 December 1942, is one of the longest messages in VENONA – an extraordinary document showing the Naval GRU's inexperience in this sort of activity and the need for assistance from the GRU and/or KGB. The last decrypted message about the case states that SALLY had been landed in San Francisco from a Soviet freighter (Washington to Moscow No. 1983, 14 August 1943). The FBI later learned that SALLY had been known in the United States as Edna Patterson, that she had left the United States suddenly in 1956, and that she was a Soviet citizen who had been born in Australia.

The reader will recall that several Illegals appear in KGB traffic, most notably covername MER/ALBERT. Other Soviet Illegals include the GRU Illegal MOK and various Illegals in the Mexico City messages (these included probably Spanish nationals and a Canadian, who probably were not Soviet citizens—a variation on the usual origin of Illegals).

## The KGB and GRU in Europe, South America, and Australia

### *Insight into Foreign Ministry and Trade Matters*

Trade and Foreign Ministry messages were rarely translated. The VENONA breakthrough was not generally achieved until years after the messages had been sent. Trade and Foreign Ministry messages were not of intelligence value once they had been broken. The voluminous trade messages involved mostly Lend-Lease matters; the Foreign Ministry messages most often dealt with routine consular affairs. Nevertheless, these messages were important for two reasons: they helped in the cryptanalysis of KGB and GRU messages (this was absolutely critical in the case of the trade material), and they provided occasional information concerning Soviet security, counterintelligence, and cryptographic policy. For example, a June 1945 message from the deputy foreign minister to all posts abroad warned that a “foreign intelligence service” (not further identified) was showing an interest in the movement of Soviet diplomatic mail and would attempt to “extract documents” from these courier shipments.<sup>9H</sup> Another security warning message of May 1947 ordered ambassadors, consuls, and their subordinates to immediately discharge from their personal service any foreigners they might have hired as “cooks, nursemaids, washerwomen, maids, etc.”<sup>10H</sup>

Among the few trade messages translated are discussions of “two cases of safe cracking” at the Lend-Lease office annex in Washington in December 1942.<sup>11H</sup> A Moscow to Washington Trade Ministry message of December 1942 mentions “those confidential and secret reports” obtained by “Comrade SHUMOVSKIJ” during 1938 to 1942 and gives instructions for his continued work. This is especially interesting because Shumovskij was a lieutenant colonel in the KGB seen as covername BLERIOT in the KGB VENONA messages.<sup>12H</sup>

### ***KGB Messages to the London Residency***

Only a small set of London KGB messages was available for exploitation – mostly incoming messages from Moscow Center sent in September 1945. This small opening, taken together with the exploitation of certain messages of KGB New York and Washington (translations previously released), assisted in the identification of important KGB agents Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, and Guy Burgess.<sup>13H</sup> These agents are seen in VENONA under the following covernames:

STANLEY	Kim Philby
HICKS	Guy Burgess
GOMER (HOMER)	Donald Maclean (who is found in the New York and Washington traffic)

Three other KGB messages will be of particular interest to U.S. readers:

- No. 6 from Moscow, 25 September 1945, discusses a U.S.-connected agent covernamed DAN, who, when contacted by the KGB in London, was to be greeted at the meeting place by the password scenario, “Didn’t I meet you at VICK’s restaurant on Connecticut Avenue?”

- No. 13, also from Moscow, 16 September 1945, concerns espionage against the atomic bomb by the unidentified agent TINA, whose information on that target had been for the KGB “of great interest and represents a valuable contribution to the development of the work in the field.” TINA has since been identified as Melita Norwood.

- No. 36, from Moscow, 17 September 1945, says that the unidentified covername EDUARD had served in Washington from 1939 until February 1945 and that the politicians “mentioned in your letter with whom EDUARD comes in contact are of great interest to us.”

## *GRU Messages between London and Moscow*

The translations of messages between the GRU's London residency and headquarters in Moscow are a particularly interesting and perhaps unexpected addition to the public's knowledge of Soviet espionage. The exploited messages, about 260 overall, date from 1940 to 1941 and then from 1945 to 1947, and they cover a wide range of topics, techniques, and espionage personalities. Here is dramatic, professional intelligence reporting about the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, the expected German invasion, the preparations of the British forces, and the emergency procedures of the GRU, including their establishment of at least three clandestine radio stations. The espionage reporting is substantial. Referred to are a GRU spy group called the "X Network," the unidentified agent BARON, who apparently reported information obtained from U.K. decryption of German Enigma messages, clandestine radio operators STANLEY, MUSE, and the famous SONIA (Ursula Buerton).

In a London GRU message of 10 August 1941 is a reference to the GRU's reestablishing contact in the United Kingdom with Klaus Fuchs and from him learning about early efforts to develop the atomic bomb. Fuchs later went under KGB control in the United States as the covername REST and CHARL'Z of KGB New York VENONA messages. The GRU resident (chief) in London was probably Simon Kremer, who had the cover assignment of private secretary to the military attaché. Note that several messages deal with cipher matters – in 1940 to 1941, the London GRU used a so-called Emergency System, a variation of the basic VENONA cryptosystems. London GRU messages merit very close attention. Examples of GRU messages:

- *Air Raids, Invasion Preparations in the United Kingdom:* London No. 800, 23 July 1940; 922, 22 Aug 1940; 1009, 13 September 1940 (all London to Moscow)

- *GRU agents in DeGaulle's government:* London No. 776, 17 July 1940

- *GRU clandestine radios:* London No. 798, 22 July 1940

- Moscow's Instructions for agent networks in the United Kingdom: Moscow No. 450, 7 September 1940

- First mention of SONIA (Ursula Buerton): London No. 2043, 31 July 1941

- Agent BARON reports on U.K. Enigma decrypts: London No. 649, 3 April 1941

- Klaus Fuchs and the GRU/the A-bomb: London 2227, 10 August 1941

- The X Group espionage net in U.K. forces: London to Moscow, No. 1188, 18 October 1940

### ***The Arthur Case: The KGB in Latin America***

The VENONA translations show the establishment of regular KGB residencies (offices) in Bogota and Montevideo during World War II. Taken together with previously released Mexico City messages, we see attention to subversion and the establishment of agent networks – as always drawing upon the Communist Party for clandestine assets. Covername ARTHUR, seen in New York, Montevideo, and other KGB communications, has recently been identified as the famous KGB Illegal officer Uozas (Joseph) Grigulevich, who had a long undercover career in Latin America and elsewhere, and an equally bloody career during the purges and the Spanish Civil war. He, and his associate who used the covername ALEKSANDR, was a very busy (if judging from VENONA), somewhat unfocused, operative. According to one message, he had begun his South American operations in 1940, after which he operated in Chile and moved on. ALEKSANDR was probably a Chilean national. There are about 150 Montevideo and Bogota KGB translations in this release. Some examples of KGB messages:

- Moscow's Nos. 61 and 154-55 to Montevideo, 23 June 1944 and 8 September 1944, contain information on ARTHUR's background and instructions for him.

• Moscow No. 164, 23 May 1945, to Montevideo discusses the use of covername JAN and that the center would especially “like him to help us in getting our bearings in the situation in the Latin American countries.”

An interesting exchange between Bogota KGB and the center involves the recruitment of the head of the Venezuelan Communist Party. The center approves but notes, in a typical agent assessment and recruiting formula, that before recruiting him “you should thoroughly check his sincere devotion to the Soviet Union.”<sup>14H</sup>

Joan Malone Callahan, the first U.S. VENONA analyst/linguist to serve at GCHQ 1949 to 1954. She became project supervisor and principal customer interface in 1954 when Meredith Gardner replaced her in the United Kingdom.



Arlington Hall bowling team of cryptanalysts ca. 1947. Standing (left to right): Cecil Phillips, Bill Lutwiniak, Paul Derthick. Below: (left to right) Frank Lewis, Louise Derthick. (All except Louise worked at some time on VENONA-related



Charles Condray (left)  
The principal linguist/code  
builder on trade and  
diplomatic codes for more  
than twenty-five years. He  
supervised the total  
VENONA-related project in  
the later years.

Gene Grabeel (right)  
She began work on  
Soviet diplomatic  
messages on I  
February 1943 and  
continued working the  
problem until the late  
1970s.



Gloria Forbes (left)  
She began processing  
Soviet diplomatic  
messages in mid-1943  
and continued to  
supervise this and  
related activities for

Mildred Hayes  
VENONA linguist/analyst for  
more than twenty-five years.  
She closed the VENONA effort  
on 1 October 1980.



### ***The KGB in AustraliaR***

Unlike any other group of VENONA messages, some KGB messages on the Canberra-Moscow communications link were decrypted in near real-time, that is, close to the date of transmission. Further, the Canberra material, though of modest volume, is readable (if intermittently) for the longest period of time, 1943 to 1948. More than 200 messages were decrypted and translated, these representing a fraction of the messages sent and received by the Canberra KGB residency. In this body of translations, we see typical KGB coverage: their agents inside government departments and interesting places in the private sector; those agents were drawn from the Communist Party. Some examples of what is contained in the Canberra KGB material:

- Communist Party member/KGB agent in the Australian government: Canberra No. 130, 25 April 1945
- Payment to a KGB agent inside the Australian government: Canberra No. 141, 5 May 1945
- KGB agent reports about the Australian Security Service: Canberra No. 324-25, 1 September 1945
- A Communist Party member who is a KGB agent well placed in the Australian Department of External Affairs: Canberra No. 361-62, 29 September 1945



- Instructions for handling important agents: Moscow No. 7-8, 9  
January 1947

- Instructions for developing agent networks: Moscow No. 34, 8  
March 1948

### ***The Stockholm Messages***

The translations of messages of Soviet intelligence in Stockholm are particularly rich for their variety and volume: more than 450 messages of the three Soviet services, KGB, GRU, and Naval GRU. Sweden, neutral during World War II, gave the Soviets a valuable listening post concerning German military activities in Norway, Denmark, Finland, and the Baltic. Note the great attention to transborder operations: debriefing refugees from Norway and sending Norwegians back to Norway.

An interesting Naval GRU message, No. 682, 13 April 1942, Stockholm to Moscow, describes a German peace initiative to the banker Jakob Wallenberg, uncle of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat and humanitarian. No translation in the VENONA material, however, is known to concern the case of Raoul Wallenberg, who was arrested by SMERSH (military counterintelligence) in Budapest in 1945 and was reportedly murdered by the KGB in Moscow. Examples of other Stockholm messages:

### ***KGBR***

- A detailed report of German naval construction, disposition of ships, movement of men and equipment in and out of occupied Norway: Stockholm No. 3090, 21 November 1943

- Discussion of important KGB agent and Swedish Communist, covername KLARA, “who is completely devoted to us.”

### ***GRU and Naval GRUR***

- Much GRU discussion about clandestine radio and the construction and use of agent cipher systems (for example, Moscow

No.797, 6 September 1941 and Nos. 938 and 939, both dated 13 October 1941)

- A GRU source reports on Swedish signal intelligence work against Soviet naval communications, No. 1564, 12 December 1941)

- Finnish Army order of battle reported by GRU in No. 151, 22 January 1942)

- GRU to dispatch agents to Norway, No. 656, 8 April 1942)

- In a message of 19 March 1943, No. 901, Stockholm Naval GRU reported the results of their search for Leica cameras and accessories – a worldwide tradecraft matter in the VENONA messages: obtaining cameras and film for secret document photography)

In late 1944 General Carter W. Clarke, the assistant G-2 and Arlington Hall's overlord, called to the Pentagon Lieutenant Paavo Carlson, an Arlington Hall cryptanalyst. Knowing that Carlson spoke Finnish, Clarke told him to prepare to leave within days for Stockholm, where he would act as an interpreter for the U.S. military attache, who would be meeting with representatives of the Finnish SIGINT service, then evacuating into Sweden. The Stockholm OSS chief would participate in the meeting. Carlson later recalled that the Finns handed over a German Enigma machine with the rotors and also described to the Americans their success in working against Soviet military communications (and U.S. diplomatic communications).

It was this same Lieutenant Carlson who in mid-December 1942, in Lynchburg, Virginia, recruited Miss Gene Grabeel for employment at Arlington Hall, where six weeks later she opened the attack on Soviet diplomatic communications that became known as the VENONA program.

## Special Reports □

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### **Translations**

Twenty-four KGB message translations, discovered in reconciling the historic collections, were included in the sixth release. Of particular note are messages describing the activities of Jack and Dr. Robert Sobel, veteran KGB agents operating in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>15H</sup> These include arrangements for a cover business for Jack Sobel; movement of money between Canada and the United States; and the reactivation by the KGB of the correspondent and Hollywood producer Stephen Laird.<sup>16H</sup> There are reports from about the well-placed KGB agents PLUMB, RAIDER, and FRENK (previously identified as Charles Kramer, Victor Perlo, and Laurence Duggan, respectively). Also of interest is a long and complicated message about affairs in Hungary, which is based on a secret report that had been lost in a taxicab in New York and obtained by the KGB.<sup>17H</sup>

Several dozen other previously released translations have been made available in more complete form (see, for example, the Stockholm GRU and Naval GRU translations). This material concerning Soviet espionage in the United States, is grouped in the same order in the previous releases. More complete versions of the first release may shed additional light on KGB espionage in Chicago against the atomic bomb project (e.g., that covername FLOX was Rose Olson) and on the other KGB operations in New York, Washington, and San Francisco.<sup>18H</sup>

### **Meredith Gardner's Special Reports**

Mr. Gardner wrote a series of eleven special reports from 1947 to 1948. The first of these was released at the VENONA Conference in October 1996 and is included in this set. The remaining reports should help date some of the earliest work on important VENONA cases such as covername LIBERAL/ANTENNA (eventually identified as Julius Rosenberg) and LIBERAL's wife Ethel.

Mr. Gardner composed these special reports to record what he was finding in the VENONA messages and to alert his chain of command and G-2's counterintelligence group. When Robert Lamphere of FBI headquarters became involved in VENONA full time, Mr. Gardner began to issue individual message translations, and the special report series was discontinued.

Following is a list of these special reports. Some are not dated, but all were issued between 30 August 1947 and 12 August 1948.

1. Gardner's initial overview of the covernames he was finding in the VENONA messages

2. Mention of covernames GOMER/HOMER and YUN, later identified as Donald Maclean and Stephen Laird

3. KGB Canberra

4. ENORMOZ (atomic bomb) espionage including the work of covername LIBERAL

5. Confirmation that VENONA messages were KGB

6. LIBERAL's network

7. The KOMAR affair (KOMAR was Kravchenko, who defected from the Soviet trade mission in Washington and was being hunted by the KGB)

8. Messages changing covernames

9. Covername KARAS (Ivan Subasic, KGB agent involved in Serbo-Croatian matters in the United States and abroad)

10. Covername CHETA (later identified as KGB officers Micholas and Maria Fisher)

11. ANTENNA/LIBERAL's wife Ethel

An interesting example of the type of material found in the reports would be in Special Report #6, 28 April 1948, which summarizes or gives the text of a significant number of LIBERAL/ANTENNA translations. See, for example, message number 1053, 26 July 1944, New York KGB to Moscow Center (paragraph 6) that concerns ANTENNA's proposal to recruit his friend Max Elitcher, who was a Communist, as were all members of the Rosenberg espionage ring. The translation of New York to Moscow No. 628, 5 May 1944 (paragraph 4), is important to the story of the development of the Rosenberg case. As of April 1948 the Arlington Hall VENONA unit had not been able to decrypt the first twenty-four groups of that message. Lacking this critical context, Mr. Gardner translated the message as giving a description of ANTENNA. When those missing twenty-four groups were decrypted – see the reissue of the translation on 27 June 1950 – it was shown that the message was in fact about Rosenberg's description of his friend Al Sarant, whom he recruited for the KGB.

One of the special reports issued in July 1948 (1948 was a presidential election year) gives the earliest translation found of the KGB message concerning bribery of persons around David Niles, an important advisor to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman (New York to Moscow message 786, 1 June 1944).

### ***Other Documents***

Related to the Gardner special reports is the covername book used by Arlington Hall and later by NSA analysts, to record the KGB message covernames, every appearance of them by message number and date, and the identities of the covernamed persons where known. This covername book contains terms used in KGB New York, Washington, and San Francisco communications and messages to those stations from Moscow Center. The dates of entries made in the covername book are unclear, but it was developed and used from early 1949 until the VENONA program ended in 1980.

Two additional Meredith Gardner documents deserve attention. One is his short account of the development of the GOMER/HOMER case (Donald Maclean) from the Arlington Hall point of view. This

account must not be taken as a full representation of the counterintelligence investigation chronology, however. In the second document, short but undated, Mr. Gardner recorded some dates concerning who had access to VENONA information in the early days. This is also a valuable part of the historical record.

### *Envoi*

A few closing remarks follow, some in response to questions from the public.

VENONA was the final NSA codeword for this very secret program. Earlier codewords had been JADE, BRIDE, and DRUG. All these codewords were selected at random by the United States and the United Kingdom and are not acronyms or abbreviations.

There was outstanding cooperation between Arlington Hall (later NSA) and its partners and customers. From 1945 to 1946 Cecil Phillips, an Arlington Hall cryptanalyst, briefed the U.K. SIGINT service on the program. In 1947 Meredith Gardner, the principal early analyst and translator of the VENONA messages, explained his progress to his British counterpart. During September 1947 General Carter W. Clarke of G-2 brought the FBI into the problem, and, by the end of that year, the bureau had begun to open espionage cases based on VENONA. CIA joined the effort in late 1952.

The courage and wisdom of General Carter W. Clarke of G-2 and Robert J. Lamphere contributed mightily to the VENONA success story as did the leadership of Frank B. Rowlett and Oliver Kirby at Arlington Hall. But it all rested on the skills, patience, and determination of the Arlington Hall analysts who made it all possible.

## Notes

1. William Crowell was deputy director of NSA from February 1994 to September 1997.

2. See, for example, No. 334, Moscow Center to Mexico City, 30 May 1944. However, for context see especially the previously released message, New York KGB to Moscow, No. 786, 1 June 1944, that mentions that friends of David Niles (a White House staffer) “will arrange for a bribe,” i.e., get the transfer visas for the Fishers.

3. See No. 619-620, 27 November 1945.

4. See, for example, San Francisco to Moscow, Nos. 510 and 519, December 1943.

5. See San Francisco messages to the Center, from 1944: Number 65, 151, 159, 293; and messages numbers 166, 295, and 568 of 1945. See also the very detailed message from Moscow Center that sets up new procedures for the KGB’s Fifth Line in handling the security of the Soviet merchant fleet on the West Coast, No. 379, Moscow to San Francisco, 16 November 1944.

6. See messages New York to Moscow Nos. 895-985, 987, 1295.

7. This will be of interest to students of the so-called Amerasia affair. In 1945 the OSS Security Division and the FBI searched the offices of the magazine Amerasia, which was suspected of holding classified government documents. The staff of the publication included Communist spies and agents, including Joseph Bernstein. In subsequent years, the case resulted in several convictions, none major, and a number of congressional hearings were held on the case. The book *The Amerasia Case* by Harvey Klehr and Ronald Radosh presents more details on the matter.

8. The signatories and addresses of the Naval GRU messages are quite confusing as this service dedicated a block of code groups at the back of their codebook for covernames. As these do not fall in alphabetical order and are not seen in any other context, the actual meaning of these code groups could not be found. Thus, we see the arbitrary numbering and lettering systems adopted by the United States-United Kingdom (not by the Soviets) to identify these covernames, e.g., Name No. 5.

9. Moscow Foreign Ministry Circular to all posts, 8-13 June 1945

10. Foreign Ministry, Moscow, to all posts No. 019, 22 May 1947

11. Trade messages, Washington to Moscow, No. 8166, 29 December 1942 and 8167-68, same date

12. Stanislau Shumovskij recruited Jones Orin York in approximately 1935 in California, beginning York's long career in espionage for the KGB. York is the covername IGLA (NEEDLE) of Venona.

13. See, for example, the Moscow to London messages of 17 September 1945 about Kim Philby's report on the Gouzenko defection in Ottawa and 21 September 1945 about the handling of key KGB assets in light of the Gouzenko case.

14. Bogota No. 120, 6 July 1944 and Moscow No. 129, 13 August 1944

15. New York to Moscow, 24 June 1943, 6 July 1943, 5 May 1944, October 1944

16. 12 and 23 August 1944

17. Message #1669ff, New York to Moscow, 29-30 November 1944

18. "Rose Olson" appears to have been Roz Childs, wife of Morris Childs, a prominent Communist and later a double agent for the FBI.