



DOUBLE SPY

An autobiography by:

PETER VAN WERMESKERKEN



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By
Peter van Wermeskerken



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Dedication

To Käthe, for it was because of her the whole story began. You, dear readers, do not know her, and it should stay that way. Her real name is different. Our friendship has already lasted over fifty years.



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Prologue

I'll come straight to the point. I was a double agent, working for the Dutch BVD (Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst—Dutch Secret Service; now AIVD—Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, General Intelligence and Secret Service), and against the East German foreign intelligence service, the HVA (General Reconnaissance Administration) of the Ministry for State Security (abbreviated Stasi). Many people have asked if I found my activities exciting, or if I had been in danger.

I can answer both questions with a clear “No.” One has to keep a clear head, and be matter-of-fact and resilient. Boredom and long waiting periods are essential aspects. You have to be able to cope with that. But dangerous? No way. First of all, the HVA used me. I didn't use them. If they had locked me up in an East German prison cell, it would have meant that when I returned to the Netherlands, I would have been subjected to a thorough interrogation by the BVD. And I would have told them everything I knew about the East German intelligence service. But I was in danger in the Netherlands. In any case, I had “bought myself off” since, after being recruited by the East Germans and accepting their offer, I was given clear rules by the BVD that I had to comply with. Point-blank.

In addition, Walter Ulbricht and later Erich Honecker and his little Margot, who was despised by the people, knew how to suppress their own people. They had learned how from Russian dictators and from Hitler. The intelligence service was completely harmless. The 3,800 officers of the HVA (there were no troops) all came from the same grammar school in the GDR, and they had all attended a kind of college for espionage. All HVA staff boasted fervently that, “After the Israeli Mossad, we are the best intelligence service in the world.” When I heard that, I could only laugh. What arrogance! Pride comes before a fall—and that was the case here. Apart from with the Federal Republic of Germany, the

HVA had little success. That was why I am convinced that the American CIA, the Russian KGB, and even the Dutch BVD were a class above them.

On account of being epileptic and especially because of the adverse effects of my medication, which I'd had to take since 1946, I unfortunately had no great school career. That changed in 1958 when I went to agricultural college. Grammar school in 1953 was simply not within my reach. However, there was no comparison with the Dutch grammar schools and those in the GDR—and probably also those in West Germany. Many hours were wasted on communist and political “education” in the GDR. That was how people in communist countries learned and learn to stand up without criticism for the teachings imposed upon them from on high.

Those who haven't been taught to think critically about the society in which they live cannot ask critical questions. They cannot ask themselves, those to whom they are close, and those in their surroundings. This ultimately means an introverted society—a communist society, for example—that discourages creativity and eventually fails. I am convinced communism will ultimately fail in China, Cuba, and North Korea.

The luses in the HVA were not even clever enough to deduce that I had changed to the Dutch counter-espionage side. They never once tried to test me. With my character, they would not have had much luck anyway, but they clearly did not have the intellect to ask shrewd questions. Once they tried to drink me under the table. The attempt failed because being epileptic, I drank little alcohol—and at that time, none at all.

For me, this period of my life was interesting, and I gained a lot of experience. People around me feared for me, but I didn't worry. Being Dutch, I was always truthful to the BVD. In return, the service managed me in such a way that I was never uncovered on the other side of the Berlin Wall. The impertinence I revealed in my work as a journalist caused a lot of laughter in the BVD.

The football game between Dukla Prague and Ajax took place in March 1967. It was in the aftermath that the HVA recruited me as a spy. Within five days after my return to the Netherlands, the BVD had made me a double agent. Officially, the story continued until September 1970. In the autumn of 1969, because of the insistent pressure of my wife and the fact that we'd just had a son, I informed both intelligence services that I intended to cease my activities.

I would have loved to see the faces of the Stasi officials (from a safe distance) when they read the article in the *Algemeen Dagblad*—a major Dutch newspaper. The BVD revealed the transgressions of the Stasi with sparing words. I am totally convinced that my supervisor in Berlin really got into trouble. And certainly things became a lot worse for him when some two months later, another double agent he'd supervised told his story to a Dutch magazine.

During the Cold War period, the place was afloat with spies and double agents. The East German intelligence service received high praise in the newspapers. They prided themselves on their successes in the Federal Republic. Their spies there were warmly welcomed, as were all East German citizens.

In this way, the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS) was able to bring Günther Guillaume into West Germany. He'd been recruited four years earlier to settle in the heart of capitalist West Germany in Frankfurt am Main. With his wife, Christel Boom, also a "certified" spy, he opened a coffee shop. In 1957, Günther became a member of the local Social Democratic Party SPD. At that time, the West German intelligence service and the SPD should have seen signs. Even in the years that followed, when the pair worked their way up in the SPD, someone should have been suspicious. But both the SPD and West German counter-espionage failed. In 1968, Markus Wolf, the highest chief of the HVA, was able to recruit a twenty-five-year-old political science student, Gabriele Gast from Cologne, as an agent. In 1973, she got a job with the Federal Intelligence Service and worked her way

up to become a director. She was never debunked. Only after the fall of East Germany was she betrayed by a HVA colonel.

Christel Boom also worked her way up to secretary in the SPD office in Hessen. Guillaume steadily climbing the career ladder within the SPD. In 1964, he became a full-time party official, was elected to the municipal council of Frankfurt in 1968, and in 1969, managed the election campaign of Transport Minister Georg Leber. He was able to put Guillaume into close contact with Willy Brandt, and Guillaume got a post at the Federal Chancellery (German White House). Thanks to his zeal and his organizational talents, Brandt made him his personal secretary. There, the spy from the GDR had access to all the Chancellor's secret information and confidential discussions. Only in mid-1973, *seventeen* years after he'd become a secret agent, did West German intelligence become suspicious. When he was arrested on 24 April 1974, Guillaume said cheekily, "I am an officer of the National People's Army of the GDR and on the staff of the Ministry of State Security. I ask you to respect my officer's honour."

For Brandt, it spoke in his favour to an extent that he was the first West German Chancellor who sought communication with the East German authorities—unfortunately without success as East German leaders Ulbricht and Honecker were far too stubborn to enter talks.

In my time, about fifty thousand people worked for the Stasi, with over 90 percent involved in domestic repression. Under the Honeckers, this number doubled to over ninety thousand oppressors and several thousand clerks. Moreover, at that time, an unprecedented system of one hundred thousand semi-professional informers was set up in the GDR. Each of these domestic spies had about forty informants. That way the Stasi knew what was going on in almost every family.

Internal repression is a weak feature of every dictatorship and is associated with many cruelties. The scale of the atrocities that the GDR regime committed against its own people, among other things, came from former SS camp

guards and interrogators from the Third Reich. Moscow supported this with certain tricks to detect the desired “truth” from its prisoners. That all German war criminals were West German or that they had been sent from the GDR to West Germany, was purely a propaganda lie.

The BVD had a dual task: It had to look after me, but it had to pay attention to those who on behalf of East Germany tracked contact between spies and BVD agents. The BVD, therefore, had to know pretty well who else was working in the Netherlands as a spy for East Germany.

Contact with Other Side of Iron Curtain Via Correspondence Chess

As an ambitious young chess player, I started to participate in international correspondence chess tournaments in the early sixties. The tournaments were useful in three respects: Firstly, it was fun to play; secondly, I deepened my knowledge of opening theory; and lastly, it was fun to hear interesting things from all kinds of people, everywhere in the world. With many opponents in the tournament, I would play a second game. For me it was about deepening the opening theory in my repertoire. Sometimes, letters of two, three, or even four pages were written—all about one specific move with many variants and sub-variants.

Besides the tournament games, some participants wrote about different topics—with an American missionary in Kenya, for example. I was also in contact with a student in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, who studied tropical architecture. One day, he asked me to order certain books about tropical architecture in New York and London, which I should send on to his university, to the attention of his professor. The books arrived after a few months safe and sound. As a thank-you, he sent me the first three volumes of the four-part

series of Russian chess grandmaster, Yuri Awerbach, about the endgame. The books were in Russian, but I found a Dutch booklet with a rough translation. I could understand everything else quite well since the Russian chess moves are written using our alphabet.

A correspondence chess tournament had eight participants, three usually from East Germany. This was one of their few chances to make contact with people from the West. You did not necessarily have to be extremely good at playing chess because there were groups for every level. Nowadays, there are chess tournaments on the Internet. But in those days, a tournament took quite a long time—a single game could take up to two years. Thus, the chances were good that the East Germans could also learn interesting facts from the West apart from chess. Censorship in the GDR was strict, but chess letters were forwarded quite quickly. In addition to the postal delay, there was a delay of approximately three days. Also, the post from the East Germans was read by a censor. Therefore, a game of thirty moves took about sixty weeks without the additional delays from holidays.

In one of these tournaments, I had Johann Bosch as an opponent. He worked in the Barkas plant in Chemnitz (formerly Karl Marx Stadt), which produced light trucks. One day, Johann asked me in a letter if I knew a young man in the Netherlands or another Western country who would like to correspond with a girl who worked at his company.

I thought about it and finally concluded that I could very well be such a young man. And thus, I wrote my very timid first letter to Käthe. She was almost two years younger than me, and she has a strong personality. Her letters were, not just replies to mine and stories about her life, but also German lessons for me. In her opinion, my German was terrible, but good enough so she could understand me. We exchanged two or three letters a week. Each took about a week and a half to get to Chemnitz from Zeist.

Käthe had already sent many letters and photos to Zeist, and at some point, she wanted to meet me. She could not

come to Zeist because the GDR did not allow its citizens to travel to the West. So I had to find a way to visit Käthe. Now GDR authorities were not very keen on nosy people from the West, and certainly not journalists. So I had to think of something.

CHAPTER 1—

Youth Radio Report On Youth In The GDR

As a young twenty-year-old, I made contact with Minjon, the youth wing of AVRO, a major Dutch broadcaster. Herman Broekhuizen and Gerrit den Braber who did programmes for children and young people, encouraged me to set up a section in Zeist, which I did. A room in my home was the first “studio,” with three microphones, three tape recorders, a record player, and numerous tapes with a corresponding amount of material for cutting and fixing.

One of our members from Bilthoven was very creative when it came to radio plays. Together we wrote the stories, found the sounds and music, and finally looked for the voices to match the personalities. The recordings did not take long, but mixing and cutting the music, the voices, and the sounds was very time consuming, often taking weeks. Thankfully we had Ineke. With her wonderful, quiet, and clear voice she read flawlessly into the microphone.

In our department, I usually had the ideas for features and documentaries. The biggest success was a festive event from which the proceeds went to a village for the disabled. Initially we sold thirteen hundred tickets, but ultimately almost two thousand paying visitors turned up. The biggest attraction was the Royal Navy’s steel band. The sailors did not even ask to be paid, only reimbursement of their expenses and beer!

The heads of departments at Minjon regularly came together in Hilversum to exchange offers. In one of these meetings in late 1962, I suggested we make a broadcast about youth in the GDR. They had recently been trapped behind the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, which started going up in August 1961. Once the idea had been discussed and approved by the executives, we got permission after a few weeks. Of course, the programme could not contain political

propaganda for the East German regime. AVRO gave me a letter of recommendation for the State Radio of the German Democratic Republic. Sound recording devices were not allowed to be brought into the country, but were made available there. After some back-and-forth, a programme was created, which would be shot exclusively in Berlin. Strangely, the East German authorities in 1963 did not care at all about where I would stay. However, it was already clear from my application for a visa that I would stay in the GDR much longer than necessary to complete the documentary. That was because I wanted to visit my friend Käthe in Chemnitz.

Travelling by train, I took gifts for Käthe and her family. Western and German reading material was of course contraband, so everything I had, I hid behind folding seats in the aisles. I also hid some papers in the toilets, which passengers could not use during the customs inspection stop. For a girl one I was in love with, one also takes gold jewellery. If I had declared this, the officers would have had to literally cut off 30 percent of the weight as import duties because money was not accepted as a substitute. The State needed gold to cover the East German mark, which was fairly stable at the time. So I had no choice—I had to smuggle the jewellery into the GDR. This can be easy if you look innocent, are friendly to the officials, and show the contents of your suitcase. So they didn't have me empty my pockets, and that's where the jewellery was, wrapped in a handkerchief. During my train journeys to and through the GDR, I often played chess—especially during inspections. Waiting, waiting, the endless waiting. That was dreadfully boring. I played chess with a German textbook. Then and later again, I made sure I had with me a chess book published in East Germany (Leipzig). Compared to Western prices, the cost was only half, and the books were at least as good for the chess players. West German books were not to be brought into the GDR. The customs officials could not read other languages, so these were also banned.

To my dismay, a harsh-looking man entered and sat down in my compartment, to continue towards Dresden. I had West

German magazines and newspapers still hidden behind the seats in the aisles. I apologized, took a nearly empty bag out of my suitcase, and recovered all the reading materials from their hiding places. The man was amazed when I returned with a full bag and put it silently in my suitcase. Just before Dresden, I tried to get into conversation with him—in vain. But he did not turn out to be a traitor. I had to change trains in Dresden. After half an hour of waiting, I took the little train on to Chemnitz. After my arrival, I called the family from the station. As there was no cosy bench to sit on, I sat down on my suitcase. After some time, everything went black—because my eyes were suddenly covered by Käthe’s hands! I had not heard her approach. There was a very cordial first meeting. Her father accompanied her when she picked me up from the station by car.

After a very warm welcome from Käthe’s mother and sister at home, something happened that would have been unthinkable in the West. The first question was: “Do you have a Western newspaper with you?” All of them grabbed a book and a newspaper from my suitcase. I was pacified with coffee, cake, and tasty sandwiches. The main thing was, I kept my mouth shut. Käthe and her mother made sure that I was well taken care of. Meanwhile, all four absorbed like a sponge everything that was going on in the West. What a success those German newspapers and magazines and copies of the German *Reader’s Digest* were, all purchased at Amsterdam Airport and at the stations in Utrecht and Hengelo!

The family had indeed prepared to delve right into the reading material and learn all about the West. I heard “ohs” and “ahs!” You see, there, deep in the southeastern GDR, there was no chance of receiving Western newspapers, television, or radio stations. The exception was the radio broadcasts from the American sector of West Berlin on Radio Free Europe, which were professionally disrupted by the East Germans. Whoever looked for that station in Chemnitz only heard noise, with the news barely audible. Käthe’s father also strongly advised against listening to this propaganda station,

for if you did two “grey mice” would shortly appear at the door to pay a visit on behalf of the Stasi. They invited you to visit the police station, where you had to surrender the radio. In addition, your employer was informed that you’d stupidly collected fake information that was dangerous to the State. They also threatened that such so-called subversive activities would impact on their own lives and the lives of family members. As a father and head of the family, he had to have the family under control. If you came home from the police, the whole neighbourhood knew where you had been—and why.

After they all calmed down from the excitement of the Western newspapers, the other gifts were next. Of course, the gold chain was for Käthe. Her mother and Angela looked at the rest. Mother grabbed the chocolates so she could conjure these up before the visit of the East German family and friends. However, she could not prevent her husband, a sports doctor, from quickly popping one in his mouth as he gazed lovingly at his wife. Angela was delighted with the silver brooch with rhinestones. And then there were the tights as well as the Nivea and other creams and lotions. My mother had helped me choose them—(as later my wife Marga would help choose Christmas presents for Käthe). They were also very happy about the copies of the *Reader’s Digest*, which at the time often contained anti-communist articles. Her father warned us that no one say anything about any of this outside the house. Much later, I found out that these books would up travelling around the GDR. The family, as far as I know, was never connected with them by the Stasi or other state agencies.

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