

6. The Okhrana's Female Agents Part II: Indigenous Recruits

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

22 SEPT 93

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*Some foreign operations of the
Tzar's political police.*

THE OKHRANA'S FEMALE AGENTS

PART II: Indigenous Recruits¹

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From the early stages of its existence the Okhrana adhered to a firm policy of strictly segregating its truly clandestine services. It divided agents into two categories, "external" and "internal," meaning roughly overt and covert respectively. The external agents were investigators. They did open and clandestine surveillance and a variety of detective work, including cooperation with other government security agencies at home and abroad. Whether known to the public as Okhrana employees or not, they were officially recognized within the government and paid overtly by it. The internal service, in contrast, was essentially a system of penetrations and thus by necessity completely secret. Its personnel were unknown not only to the public and other government agencies but for the most part to Okhrana officers themselves. The identity of its agents was masked even in the operational files recording their activities. Each was known personally only to his case officer and, usually, the chief of the unit he worked for; agents did not know of one another's existence.

Similarly no external agent was ever supposed to know an internal one, who would normally be operating under some revolutionary cover. So strictly was this rule enforced that an external agent who learned the identity of an internal agent would be dismissed. Thus it often happened that it was the duty of an external agent to mount surveillance on an internal agent ostensibly working for a subversive group. One obvious advantage of this circumstance was to provide a multiple check on the veracity and dependability of the penetration

¹ For Part I, *Russian Women*, see *Studies IX 2*, p. 25 ff. These articles are based primarily on the Hoover Institution's collection *Zagranichnaya Okhrana*, consisting chiefly of the Okhrana files from Paris, the main center of Russian revolutionary and anti-revolutionary activity abroad before World War I. These files, presented after the revolution to Herbert Hoover by the Kerenski government, have only recently been opened to the public.

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agents, a number of whom turned out to be playing a double role; but this was just a side benefit from the compartmentation practiced for the sake of the internal agents' security.

The principle of two separate categories of agents lent itself remarkably well to the operating problems of the Okhrana stations abroad. The first chief in Paris, Pëtr Ivanovich Rachkovsky (he held the post from 1884 to 1902), soon realized that external agents of Russian nationality were totally unsuitable for work in western Europe. Not just their language but their very appearance and behavior gave them away immediately. Gradually, therefore, all the Russian investigators were returned home and replaced by French, Italian, German, and British agents. The Okhrana abroad thus reinforced the functional dichotomy of the two agent categories with an ethnic one: foreigners, recruited largely from among host government and private detectives, became the investigators, while agents from Russia were devoted to penetration operations against the revolutionaries.

In the fall of 1913, however, most of Paris Okhrana's external, investigation agents were exposed by the revolutionaries' counter-intelligence. In the ensuing upheaval former investigator Jollivet was suddenly transformed into a penetration agent inside the revolutionary service. Paris Okhrana found it expedient also to be flexible in the use of an array of mistresses of Monsieur Henri Bint.

The Women of Henri Bint

This Alsatian gentleman, hired by Rachkovsky in 1885 after ten years of service with the French *Sûreté*, remained one of the Paris station's principal investigators until the first world war. (During the war the Okhrana took him off routine investigation work and supplied him with funds to establish a residence in Switzerland, from where he could get agents into Germany and Austria. The Swiss imprisoned him in January 1917.) Apparently he never married, but he was never without mistresses, one at a time after he had learned quite early that it was neither healthy nor economical to have two or more together.

Life on the Riviera

Another thing Bint learned was to avail himself of the help his mistresses could render in connection with his job. In 1912, as leader of a surveillance network on the Riviera, he took along a mistress and loaned her free of charge both to a younger agent of his network

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named Fontana and to officers of the French and Italian police departments cooperating with him. This generosity led on one occasion to a serious contretemps. The mistress, staying with Fontana at a hotel in La Spezia, stole from his suitcase a batch of photographs and letters and gave them to a cooperating Italian agent, and there ensued a fist fight in one of the city's public squares. The police interfered, the press got interested, and there were provocative stories in French and Italian newspapers. Bint, although it was not entirely his fault, received a stern reprimand from the chief.

Bint had been dismissed from the Okhrana on two occasions, primarily on account of indecorous relations with the fair sex, but both times he was promptly rehired. The chiefs valued his professional skill and realized that he occasionally got results from his mistresses' peeping into the activities of unreliable Russian aristocrats in Paris. Although a French demoiselle could not understand what the Russians were saying among themselves, she could keep company with individual conspirators, who could all speak some French. By using his girls Bint thus became more than a mere detective; the information they procured was almost in the category of that from internal agents.

Understandably enough, however, the system gradually wore out: the revolutionaries became wary of Parisian female companions. Then in 1911, when Bint's colleague Leroi defected from the Okhrana to join Burtzev's revolutionary counterintelligence, Bint had to cut off all *espéglerie* with the females, as the practice was called. Bint and Leroi had worked together for years against the same targets, using the same techniques and often sharing mistresses for whatever job was on hand. No one cursed Leroi so much as Bint for his defection; he knew he would tell Burtzev all about it. He even anticipated that on Leroi's advice Burtzev would sooner or later try the trick on him, hiring some female to work on him. And so he did.

Tables Turned

Liubov Julia was a Parisian whose first name suggested Russian origin. The use of Julia as a surname was most likely her own invention. When Bint first saw her, in a public café, she was with a group of revolutionaries, but she seemed much too frivolous and gay to be concerned with politics or conspiracies. She acted like any ordinary Parisian *demimondaine* of the period. He made her acquaintance and found that she was just as jolly in his company as she had seemed among the Russian intellectuals. At the moment

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he was not particularly tied to any mistress, so he took her home with him, and there she stayed.

This was early 1913. He reported in full to his Okhrana superiors. His case officer thought that Julia might prove useful in work among the revolutionaries, cables and dispatches were exchanged with Petersburg headquarters, and Julia was hired under the code name "Jourdain." She was to receive 100 francs a month for reporting to Bint on several groups of conspirators in Paris.

Thus there happened to Bint what he was afraid would happen: he had a mistress spy on him just as he had used mistresses to spy on others. Julia was Burtzev's plant. She would regularly bring Bint quantities of attractive information, all written in her own hand, which always turned out to be of little or no value to the Okhrana. Bint's case officer, who had reports about Julia's activities from other sources, soon decided that she ought to be able to produce much better intelligence. Gradually it was possible to check the sources of the information she delivered, and it was discovered that all of it was prepared by Burtzev's counterintelligence people.

Just about this time Julia suddenly came forth with a demand for 500 francs in cash, threatening to sue Bint and expose him in the French press. She was dismissed at once. In the lengthy explanations dispatched to headquarters toward the end of 1913, the Paris station maintained that Julia could not possibly have gained access to any information about the Okhrana and could not even have supplied Burtzev with any knowledge about Bint except the fact of his physical association with her.

A Woman Scorned

Burtzev and Leroi had had even less success in an earlier, somewhat dissimilar attempt. In 1908 Henri Bint made the acquaintance of Lea Chauvin, and she stayed in his apartment, on and off, collaborating in his professional work, for some three years until in 1911, shortly after Leroi's defection, Bint was called to Petersburg. It was not customary to bring non-Russian external agents to headquarters, but he, as the most important sleuth of three decades and chief manager of the network of detectives, was made an exception. The consultation with him was to include some training, which would entail his absence from Paris for many weeks, possibly two or three months.

By age, Bint could have been Lea's grandfather. Although he always preferred young girls, this affair had lasted much longer than

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usual and his leaving for Petersburg seemed a good occasion to close it off. He told the girl that it would be sensible for her to find someone more suitable to her age. But she did not want to be sensible. She refused to leave; she would stay in the apartment and wait for his return. Bint would not have it. There were several rough scenes, and when she still refused to go he had to call the police to make her get out.

Lea was in a fighting, vengeful mood. She would never have obeyed Bint's order to leave; the ingrate had to call the police to throw her out. That was what she told Leroi, who somehow learned of her distress and promptly called on her to offer consolation. Leroi of course knew all about Lea's life with Bint. He himself had always had a soft spot for her, but now she might have information about Bint's recent activities and the purpose of his trip to Petersburg. In this emotional state she even seemed a good prospect for agent work—well motivated and familiar with Bint's contacts and operations.

After much talk about his friendship and understanding for her feelings, Leroi persuaded Lea to visit Burtzev's office. She was ready for anything as long as it meant hurting Bint, and Burtzev and Leroi found it easy to recruit her for intelligence work against Bint and against the Okhrana that had taken him away from her. Leroi's enthusiasm for the prospective operation was probably enhanced by his fondness for Lea, but Burtzev trusted his judgment. He had made him chief investigator in all operations against the Okhrana's non-Russian networks.

For a short time Lea became as much devoted to Leroi as she had been to Bint, but soon she seemed to have developed some second thoughts. Who can tell what was really in her mind? Maybe she thought she could reawaken the affections of her dear old Bint when he returned, or perhaps she developed an aversion to the rather uncouth and frequently drunk Leroi. Whatever the reason, after everything was agreed and she was to become an agent of the revolutionary counterintelligence, she secretly went to see the chief of Paris Okhrana, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Krassilnikov. Yet this was just a probing action; all she did was complain about how Bint had thrown her out on the street. In relaying her story to headquarters, Krassilnikov wrote that he had given her 500 francs to keep her quiet and recover from her a packet of Bint's personal letters which she had appropriated to use just in case.

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Lea was astonished by the 500 francs. She had never had that much money in her hand before. She became bemused with the possibilities of earning more; she had already observed that the revolutionary intelligence office was short of funds. So she made a second visit to Krassilnikov, and this time she told him all about how Burtzev and Leroi had recruited her to work for them and assured her of a steady income. She said she did not trust Leroi, he had deserted his friend Bint, and he would desert her the same way. Finally she offered her services to Krassilnikov, saying that she knew from living with Bint and helping him just what she would have to do to be useful.

Redoubled Hero

A case officer was assigned, and soon thereafter Lea's reports were being dispatched to headquarters under the code name "L'héros." The Okhrana instructed her to stay on the job in Burtzev's office and report on every assignment she received. At first it was just debriefings: one lengthy report on a luncheon with Burtzev and Leroi told of pressing questions on the current whereabouts of Harting, former Paris Okhrana chief, and hundreds of questions on the orders received by Bint, the times and places he would meet with Okhrana officers, his non-Russian affiliates, and his methods for receiving pay and instructions and submitting reports. As a double agent working in Burtzev's office with the position of assistant to Leroi, she was paid 200 francs a month by the Okhrana.

Mme. Chauvin, as she was introduced to visiting revolutionaries in Burtzev's office, delighted her chiefs there by her willingness to be of use, though she was disappointingly ill acquainted with the operational information they wanted. Burtzev decided to use her in other operations. Once Leroi took her to Place Bouveau, in front of the Ministry of the Interior and the *Sûreté Générale*, gave her a camera, and told her to take pictures of a man he would point out leaving the building. This project of Leroi's was soon brought to the attention of the Okhrana liaison officer in the *Sûreté*, M. Moreau, chief of the political police who, it happened, was the man whose picture Leroi wanted.

Another time Leroi took her to a lawyer named Tomasini, who she found out later was a naturalized Frenchman of Russian origin. The two wanted a statement from her to the effect that Bint had been receiving from the Monyjeux District post office a number of letters

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addressed to Russian revolutionaries. (Burtzev repeatedly tried to prove that Paris postal officials were selling revolutionary correspondence to the Okhrana.) Lea replied that she knew nothing of any such mail being given to Bint. They pleaded with her for a long time to write and sign such a deposition. Though they offered her 1,000 francs cash and the assurance of 200 francs a month for the rest of her life, according to her report forwarded in a dispatch to Petersburg, she answered only that she could not affirm what she did not know.

Dispatches to Petersburg in the Paris Okhrana files show that L'héros continued as a double agent until the outbreak of the war. Her pay was increased to 275 francs a month, delivered to her regularly by Bint, who on his return became her case officer, nothing more this time.

Jane

Marcel Bittard-Monin, supervisor of most of Paris Okhrana's non-Russian agents, made Mme. G. Richard Le Davadie sign five papers relating to the termination of her service. She was furious. The smooth talk with which the goaty Lothario tried to cheer her in her misery only enraged her more; he was taking the side of the Russian bosses. She didn't give a damn, she said, what new twists they were taking in their policy. She could not care less whether they conformed to the attitude of the French government. What she wanted and needed was the job they were taking away.

She felt cheated by this sudden deprivation not only of income but of everything she had enjoyed for a half dozen interesting years of spying—first for Bittard personally and then for the Okhrana behind him. She had had tours at the best times of year to the Côte d'Azur and the Italian Riviera, all expenses paid. In the endless variety of tasks that she performed she had earned much praise, which always made her feel happy, useful, and young again. The job had become part of her; she truly believed that the Russian service could never find anyone more willing to work and to sacrifice herself when necessary. She knew, and the Okhrana bosses must know, that no male detective could replace her. They could tail the conspirators to the gates of their residences; she could follow them, if need be, into their bedrooms.

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