

July 6, 2003

Dear Wesley,

Good to hear from you again, and to learn that you are still labouring away on the official history of the Canadian intelligence community. I fear, however, that I may not be able to help you much with respect to the Penkovsky-vanVliet incident.

I first re-focussed on the incident, after a 30-year delay, when I received a request for information from author Dean Beeby dated February 19, 1991, to which were attached two documents, my letter of January 9, 1961 to Ottawa (copies to RCMP and to JIB), and a memo of January 13, 1961 by van Vliet reporting on the incident. You have the former. If you do not have the latter, I can send it to you if you will give me a mailing address.

Looking into my personal file which I set up at the time, I find a bundle of documents which were provided to me in February, 1991 under Access by Peter Austin, then ATIP officer at CSIS. It includes the above-mentioned documents and a number of others: further memos by van Vliet and Harrison, interview reports by the RCMP, etc., all blanked out in places and rather repetitive. There is little to indicate follow-up to my letter by Ottawa. There must be some thirty pages in all, but not very enlightening.

Also in my file I find an article by Beeby in the Ottawa Citizen dated March 1, 1991; a letter of mine printed by the Ottawa Citizen on March 13, 1991; a reply by Beeby in the Citizen on March 26, 1991; an article by John Starnes (no record of date or paper); and an article in the NYT on March 3, 1991 by John Burns.

I also found a hand-written note which I must have made at the time (1991) which indicates that van Vliet's memo went to "US and UK Embassies" (presumably Moscow), and no doubt to RCMP also. I'm not able to state at this remove the basis for this notation. The note also indicates that John Starnes met with M.O. (Maurice Oldfield?) about March 3 and with Horton of CIA a fortnight earlier and referred to Penkovsky. I think this was based on a word with Starnes at the time.

I cannot recall with certainty whether at the time I discussed the incident with US and UK colleagues in Moscow, though as I indicated in my letter to the Citizen there was a constant flow of information of mutual interest among Western diplomats.

I certainly briefed Arnold Smith on the incident when he arrived in Moscow in early February, and he gave me no indication of dissatisfaction with how it had been handled. I must say that I was not happy with Arnold saying to the press in 1991 that he was "deeply shocked" by the handling of the incident. He may quite likely have spoken with his British and American colleagues about it, but I doubt that this was the first information they had about Penkovsky. Arnold was in Toronto at this time and I did not get a chance to discuss this matter with him before his death.