



Robert Philip Hanssen

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent
- Principally served in Soviet counterintelligence assignments in New York City and Washington, D.C.
- Held Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) clearance.
- Had access to intelligence and counterintelligence activities of the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)



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CASE STUDY

Espionage

WHAT HAPPENED

Hanssen's initial espionage began in November 1979 and continued intermittently until his arrest in February 2001. Over the next year and a half, Hanssen conducted clandestine exchanges with the Soviet Main Intelligence Directorate, the Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (GRU,) receiving cash payments totaling at least \$21,000. Hanssen paused his espionage activity from 1981 until October 1985.

Hanssen's second period of espionage contributed to the execution of at least three human sources and caused hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of damage to U.S. intelligence programs. In return, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) gave Hanssen cash payments of at least \$500,000, as well as three diamonds. Hanssen spent some of the money he received on an addition to his home, cars, tuition payments for his children's private schools, gifts, a loan to his brother-in-law, and at strip clubs. After picking up a \$12,000 KGB payment in December 1991, Hanssen again broke off contact with the Soviets.

In his third period of espionage beginning in 1999, Hanssen volunteered again to assist the KGB. He provided the Russians with information concerning some of the FBI's most significant KGB sources and most sensitive espionage investigations. He obtained most of this information from improper searches of the FBI's Automated Case Support (ACS) software system and communicated with the KGB through dead drop exchanges.

Hanssen was identified after the FBI paid \$7 million to a KGB agent to obtain a file on an anonymous mole, whom the FBI later identified as Hanssen through fingerprint and voice analysis. After a three-month investigation, Hanssen was arrested on February 18, 2001, at Foxstone Park, near his home in Vienna, Virginia, after leaving a package of classified materials at a dead drop site. To avoid the death penalty, Hanssen pleaded guilty to fourteen counts of espionage and one of conspiracy to commit espionage on behalf of the (KGB).

He was sentenced to fifteen life terms without the possibility of parole and was incarcerated at the United States Penitentiary, Administrative Maximum Facility (USP Florence ADMAX), On June 5, 2023, Hanssen was found unresponsive in his prison cell and was pronounced dead after unsuccessful efforts to revive him.

INDICATORS

Access attributes – Hanssen held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) clearance and had access to intelligence and counterintelligence activities of the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

Personal Conduct – Hanssen was dissatisfied with his job at the FBI. He had a fervent desire to play a more thrilling, field agent role, contrasted sharply with his actual position as an analyst. This unmet expectation, combined with his ambition and sense of self-importance, led to his decision to betray his country.

Financial Considerations – Hanssen's spending continually outstripped his income. He had significant credit card debts, car loans, bank loans, and tuition payments for his children.

IMPACT

- From September 1985 to August 1987, Hanssen delivered thousands of pages of highly classified documents and dozens of computer disks to the KGB detailing U.S. strategies in the event of nuclear war, major developments in military weapons technologies, identities of active and historical U.S. assets in the Soviet intelligence services, the locations of KGB defectors in the United States, analytical products from across the Intelligence Community, comprehensive budget and policy documents, and many other aspects of the Soviet counterintelligence program.
- He also passed some of the most damaging information including the true names of the FBI's most significant Soviet sources at the time. Hanssen also compromised the FBI's espionage investigation of a senior State Department official suspected of providing information to the KGB, and an FBI analytical report regarding possible Soviet penetrations.

ADDITIONAL INFO

- Hanssen's decision to commit espionage arose from a complex blend of factors, including low self-esteem and a desire to demonstrate intellectual superiority, a lack of conventional moral restraints, a feeling that he was above the law, a lifelong fascination with espionage, the financial rewards he would receive, and the lack of deterrence - a conviction that he could "get away with it."
- Hanssen's first period of espionage ended in the spring of 1981, when his wife Bonnie inadvertently discovered him reviewing a GRU communication in the basement of their home. The most significant information that Hanssen passed during this period concerned the identity of a long-time FBI asset in the GRU.
- Hanssen resumed his espionage for KGB in 1985. Hanssen provided the KGB with information concerning the Intelligence Community's most important Soviet counterintelligence and military secrets, much of which he had learned while assigned to the Soviet Analytical Unit.
- In late 1989, Hanssen began a year-long relationship with a stripper, Priscilla Sue Galey. Hanssen paid for Galey to accompany him on an FBI Inspection Division trip to Hong Kong, bought her a Mercedes Benz, provided her with an American Express card, and gave her jewels, cash, and other gifts.
- After picking up a \$12,000 KGB payment in December 1991, Hanssen broke off contact with the Soviets.

Questions to consider:

- What predispositions did Hanssen have that may have made him more likely to take a negative action?
- Hanssen had several security violations that made other FBI Agents feel that he was untrustworthy. Why might these indicators have been dismissed and gone unreported?

Resources for further exploration:

- [Understanding Espionage and National Security Crimes Job Aid](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf)
(<https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf>)
- [The Critical Pathway – Episode 2 “Indicators”](https://www.cdse.edu/Training/Security-Training-Videos/Insider-Threat/The-Critical-Pathway-S2-E2-Indicators/)
(<https://www.cdse.edu/Training/Security-Training-Videos/Insider-Threat/The-Critical-Pathway-S2-E2-Indicators/>)
- [CDSE Counterintelligence Awareness Security Training Video](https://www.cdse.edu/Training/Security-Training-Videos/Counterintelligence/CDSE-Counterintelligence-Awareness/)
(<https://www.cdse.edu/Training/Security-Training-Videos/Counterintelligence/CDSE-Counterintelligence-Awareness/>)

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Name: _____ Agency/Department: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP Senior Official/ITP Manager