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THE ROCKBOTTOM CASE  
John Benjamin Clark WATKINS

WATKINS was born at Norval Station, Ontario on December 3, 1902. He obtained his B.A. in English and History, and his M.A. in English at the University of Toronto from 1922 to 1927 and then taught at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph from 1928 to 1930. From 1930 to 1945 he was associated with the American-Scandinavian Foundation in New York City obtaining his Ph.D. in Old Norse Icelandic Language and Literature from Cornell University in 1944. After a year as an Associate Professor of English at the University of Manitoba, WATKINS joined the Department of External Affairs in September 1946. From 1948 to 1951 he served as Charge d'Affaires in Moscow, followed by 18 months as Head of European Division in Ottawa and a tour as Minister in Oslo from 1952 to 1954 with accreditation to Iceland from June 1953. WATKINS was Canadian Ambassador in Moscow from 1954 to 1956. He then returned to Ottawa to take up appointment as an Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs dealing with European matters. In 1958 he was appointed Canadian Ambassador to Denmark. After returning from Denmark in 1960, WATKINS was a Special Assistant to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs until his retirement in 1963.



Investigation by the RCMP suggested the person involved was J.B.C. WATKINS and led to subsequent questioning of him by members of the RCMP in France, the U.K. and Canada. WATKINS, who had not enjoyed good health for a number of years and among other things had a serious diabetic condition, suffered a fatal heart attack in Montreal on October 12, 1964 during the course of one of the interviews which members of the RCMP had with him.

Although WATKINS admitted to a sad and sordid story of homosexual activity, in Canada and abroad, he was emphatic throughout our contact with him that he had not knowingly disclosed privileged information to any Soviet with whom he was in contact either in Canada or the USSR. Although we were never able to establish that WATKINS was a conscious RIS agent, there seems little doubt but that he acted as an unconscious agent of influence and privileged information. He acknowledged

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that he was both naive and gullible in accepting, without question, the bona-fides of individuals who were in fact KGB officers, and also accepted that these agents, and their accomplices, could have played upon his simplicity to advantage. It is unlikely that we shall ever establish the full intelligence value the RIS placed on their association with, and exploitation of, WATKINS.

WATKINS was initially interviewed in Paris in September 1964 and subsequently moved to London and on to Montreal. On October 1, 1964 he visited relatives at Norval, Ontario returning to Montreal late on October 10, 1964. Both he and the interviewers (L.J. BENNETT and H.W. BRANDES) stayed at the Holiday Inn Motel, St. Laurent, Quebec.

The attached report written at that time describes in some detail the events surrounding the death of Mr. WATKINS.

The file reflects that on October 13, 1964 Commissioner George B. McCLELLAN, spoke with the Prime Minister stating that there would not be an inquest, the body was being released to the relatives for burial and the cause of death was obviously heart failure. On Friday, October 16, 1964 a meeting was held at the Department of External Affairs attended by the Under-Secretary of State, Mr. Marcel CADIEUX and the head of D.L.2 Division, Mr. James McCARDLE, during which they were provided with full details of the circumstances of John WATKINS' death.

It should also be noted that on October 7, 1970 Prime Minister TRUDEAU was provided with a summary of this case in preparation for his trip to the Soviet Union.

*This same brief was forwarded to Solicitor General Kaplan on June 13, 1980 and returned to us on July 16, 1980.*

*H.W. Brandes*

H.W. BRANDES, C/Supt.,  
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