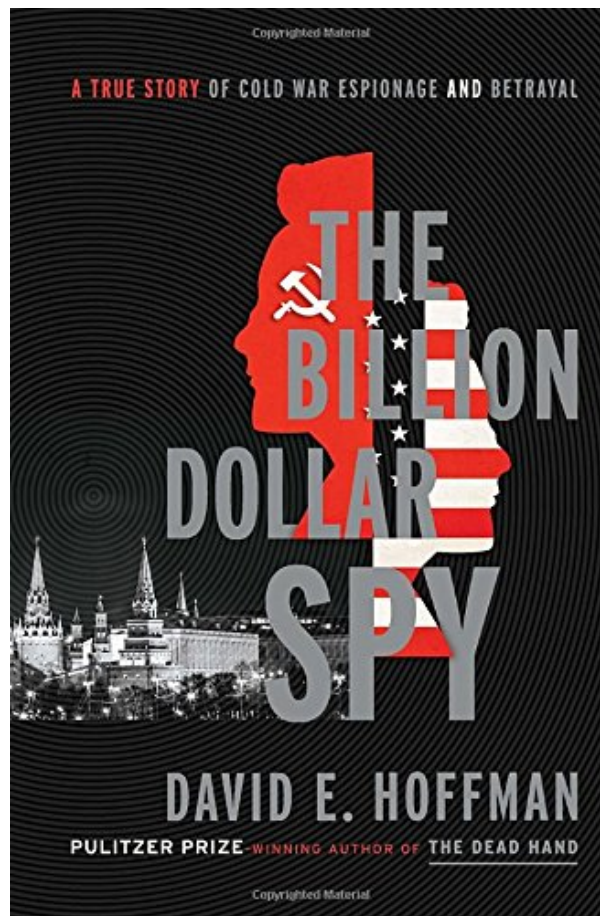
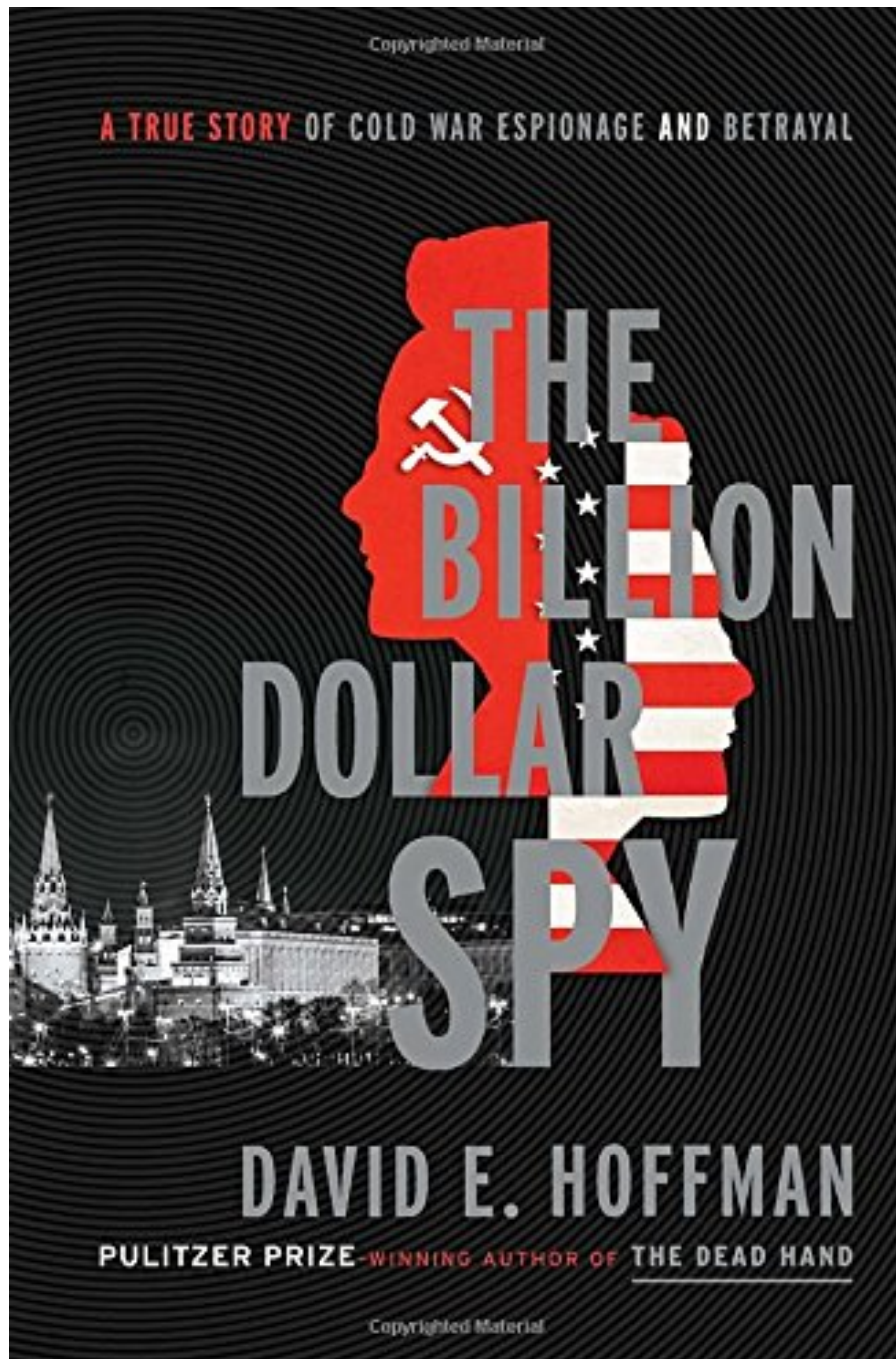


THE BILLION DOLLAR SPY: A TRUE STORY OF COLD WAR ESPIONAGE AND BETRAYAL BY DAVID E. HOFFMAN



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Review

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—Departures

"Hoffman [proves] that nonfiction can read like a John le Carré thriller ... This real-life tale of espionage will hook readers from the get-go."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

"Hoffman carefully sets the scene with both cautious and free-wheeling CIA directors and staff and also provides intimate details that prove fascinating and give human faces to these brave participants, including spies often known by code names and encountered in 'fast drops.' The book's hero—who gave the U.S. technological information worth billions, with the technology still in use today—is Adolf Tolkachev, a Russian engineer, and Hoffman's revealing of him as a person and a spy is brilliantly done, making this mesmerizing true story scary and thrilling."

—Booklist, starred review

"Gripping and informative ... Focusing on Adolf Tolkachev, who served as a spy inside the Soviet Union for more than 20 years before being betrayed, the author sets out to write the story of a spy and in so doing, chronicles Cold War espionage and an overall compelling tale that draws on secret documents from the CIA as well as interviews with surviving participants. Hoffman succeeds on both accounts."

—Library Journal

"This painstakingly researched tale reads like le Carré"

—Details

“David Hoffman has written one of the best real-life spy stories ever told. This is a breakthrough book in intelligence writing, drawing on CIA operational cables—the holy grail of the spy world—to narrate each astonishing move. Hoffman reveals CIA tradecraft tricks that are more delicious than anything in a spy novel, and his command of the Soviet landscape is masterful. Full of twists so amazing you couldn’t make them up, this is spy fact that really is better than fiction.”

—David Ignatius, Washington Post columnist and author of *The Director*

“A fabulous read that also provides chilling insights into the Cold War spy game between Washington and Moscow that has erupted anew under Vladimir Putin. *The Billion Dollar Spy* is an espionage thriller worthy of John Le Carré but much more than that. It is also an evocative portrait of everyday life in the crumbling Soviet Union and a meticulously researched guide to CIA sources and methods. I devoured every word, including the footnotes.”

—Michael Dobbs, author of *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*

“A scrupulously researched work of history that is also a gripping thriller, *The Billion Dollar Spy* by David E. Hoffman is an unforgettable journey into Cold War espionage. This spellbinding story pulses with the dramatic tension of running an agent in Soviet-era Moscow—where the KGB is ubiquitous and CIA officers and Russian assets are prey. I was enthralled from the first instance of a CIA officer ‘going dark’ all the way to the terrible, tragic climax.”

—Peter Finn, co-author of *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book*

“*The Billion Dollar Spy* reads like the very best spy fiction yet is meticulously drawn from real life. It is a gripping story of courage, professionalism, and betrayal in the secret world.”

—Rodric Braithwaite, British Ambassador in Moscow, 1988-1992

About the Author

David E. Hoffman is a contributing editor at *The Washington Post* and a correspondent for PBS's flagship investigative series, *FRONTLINE*. He is the author of *The Dead Hand*, about the end of the Cold War arms race, and winner of a 2010 Pulitzer Prize. He lives with his wife in Maryland.

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1

Out of the Wilderness

In the early years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Central Intelligence Agency harbored an uncomfortable secret about itself. The CIA had never really gained an espionage foothold on the streets of Moscow. The agency didn’t recruit in Moscow, because it was just too dangerous--“immensely dangerous,” recalled one officer--for any Soviet citizen or official they might enlist. The recruitment process itself, from the first moment a possible spy was identified and approached, was filled with risk of discovery by the KGB, and if caught spying, an agent would face certain death. A few agents who volunteered or were recruited by the CIA outside the Soviet Union continued to report securely once they returned home. But for the most part, the CIA did not lure agents into spying in the heart of darkness.

This is the story of an espionage operation that turned the tide. At the center of it is an engineer in a top secret design laboratory, a specialist in airborne radar who worked deep inside the Soviet military

establishment. Driven by anger and vengeance, he passed thousands of pages of secret documents to the United States, even though he had never set foot in America and knew little about it. He met with CIA officers twenty-one times over six years on the streets of Moscow, a city swarming with KGB surveillance, and was never detected. The engineer was one of the CIA's most productive agents of the Cold War, providing the United States with intelligence no other spy had ever obtained.

The operation was a coming-of-age for the CIA, a moment when it accomplished what was long thought unattainable: personally meeting with a spy right under the nose of the KGB.

Then the operation was destroyed, not by the KGB, but by betrayal from within.

To understand the significance of the operation, one must look back at the CIA's long, difficult struggle to penetrate the Soviet Union.

The CIA was born out of the disaster at Pearl Harbor. Despite warning signals, Japan achieved complete and overwhelming surprise in the December 7, 1941, attack that took the lives of more than twenty-four hundred Americans, sunk or damaged twenty-one ships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and thrust the United States into war. Intelligence was splintered among different agencies, and no one pulled all the pieces together; a congressional investigation concluded the fragmented process "was seriously at fault." The creation of the CIA in 1947 reflected more than anything else the determination of Congress and President Truman that Pearl Harbor should never happen again. Truman wanted the CIA to provide high-quality, objective analysis.¹ It was to be the first centralized, civilian intelligence agency in American history.²

But the early plans for the CIA soon changed, largely because of the growing Soviet threat, including the blockade of Berlin, Stalin's tightening grip on Eastern Europe, and Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. The CIA rapidly expanded far beyond just intelligence analysis into espionage and covert action. Pursuing a policy of containment, first outlined in George Kennan's long telegram of 1946 from Moscow and later significantly expanded, the United States attempted to counter Soviet efforts to penetrate and subvert governments all over the world. The Cold War began as a rivalry over war-ravaged Europe but spread far and wide, a contest of ideology, politics, culture, economics, geography, and military might. The CIA was on the front lines. The battle against communism never escalated into direct combat between the superpowers; it was fought in the shadows between war and peace. It played out in what Secretary of State Dean Rusk once called the "back alleys of the world."³

There was one back alley that was too dangerous to tread--the Soviet Union itself. Stalin was convinced the World War II victory over the Nazis demonstrated the unshakability of the Soviet state. After the war, he resolutely and consciously deepened the brutal, closed system he had perfected in the 1930s, creating perpetual tension in society, constant struggle against "enemies of the people," "spies," "doubters," "cosmopolitans," and "degenerates." It was prohibited to receive a book from abroad or listen to a foreign radio broadcast. Travel overseas was nearly impossible for most people, and unauthorized contacts with foreigners were severely punished. Phones were tapped, mail opened, and informers encouraged. The secret police were in every factory and office. It was dangerous for anyone to speak frankly, even in intimate circles.⁴

This was a forbidding environment for spying. In the early years of the Cold War, the CIA did not set up a station in Moscow and had no case officers on the streets in the capital of the world's largest and most secretive party-state. It could not identify and recruit Soviet agents, as it did elsewhere. The Soviet secret

police, which after 1954 was named the KGB, or Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti, was seasoned, proficient, omnipotent, and ruthless. By the 1950s, the KGB had been hardened by three decades of experience in carrying out the Stalin purges, in eliminating threats to Soviet rule during and after the war, and in stealing America's atom bomb secrets. It was not even possible for a foreigner to strike up a conversation in Moscow without arousing suspicion.

The CIA was still getting its feet wet, a young organization, optimistic, naive, and determined to get things done--a reflection of America's character.⁵ In 1954, the pioneering aviator General James Doolittle warned that the United States needed to be more hard-nosed and cold-blooded. "We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us," he said in a top secret report to President Eisenhower.⁶

The CIA faced intense and constant pressure for intelligence on the Soviet Union and its satellites. In Washington, policy makers were on edge over possible war in Europe--and anxious for early warning. Much information was available from open sources, but that wasn't the same as genuine, penetrating intelligence. "The pressure for results ranged from repeated instructions to do 'something' to exasperated demands to try 'anything,?'" recalled Richard Helms, who was responsible for clandestine operations in the 1950s.⁷

Outside the Soviet Union, the CIA diligently collected intelligence from refugees, defectors, and émigrés. Soviet diplomats, soldiers, and intelligence officers were approached around the world. From refugee camps in Europe, the CIA's covert action unit recruited a secret army. Some five thousand volunteers were trained as a "post-nuclear guerilla force" to invade the Soviet Union after an atomic attack. Separately, the United States dropped lone parachutists into the Soviet bloc to spy or link up with resistance groups. Most of them were caught and killed. The chief of the covert action unit, Frank G. Wisner, dreamed of penetrating the Eastern bloc and breaking it to pieces. Wisner hoped that through psychological warfare and underground aid--arms caches, radios, propaganda--the peoples of Eastern Europe might be persuaded to throw off their communist oppressors. But almost all of these attempts to get behind enemy lines with covert action were a flop. The intelligence produced was scanty, and the Soviet Union was unshaken.⁸

The CIA's sources were still on the outside looking in. "The only way to fulfill our mission was to develop inside sources--spies who could sit beside the policymakers, listen to their debates, and read their mail," Helms recalled. But the possibility of recruiting and running agents in Moscow who could warn of decisions made by the Soviet leadership "was as improbable as placing resident spies on the planet Mars," Helms said.⁹ A comprehensive assessment of the CIA's intelligence on the Soviet bloc, completed in 1953, was grim. "We have no reliable inside intelligence on thinking in the Kremlin," it acknowledged. About the military, it added, "Reliable intelligence of the enemy's long-range plans and intentions is practically non-existent." The assessment cautioned, "In the event of a surprise attack, we could not hope to obtain any detailed information of the Soviet military intentions."¹⁰ In the early years of the agency, the CIA found it "impossibly difficult to penetrate Stalin's paranoid police state with agents."¹¹

"In those days," said Helms, "our information about the Soviet Union was very sparse indeed."¹²

For all the difficulties, the CIA scored two breakthroughs in the 1950s and early 1960s. Pyotr Popov and Oleg Penkovsky, both officers of Soviet military intelligence, began to spy for the United States. They were volunteers, not recruited, who came forward separately, spilling secrets to the CIA largely outside Moscow, each demonstrating the immense advantages of a clandestine agent.

On New Year's Day 1953 in Vienna, a short and stocky Russian handed an envelope to a U.S. diplomat who was getting into his car in the international zone. At the time, Vienna was under occupation of the American, British, French, and Soviet forces, a city tense with suspicion. The envelope carried a letter, dated December 28, 1952, written in Russian, which said, "I am a Soviet officer. I wish to meet with an American officer with the object of offering certain services." The letter specified a place and time to meet. Such offers were common in Vienna in those years; a horde of tricksters tried to make money from fabricated intelligence reports. The CIA had trouble sifting them all, but this time the letter seemed real. On the following Saturday evening, the Russian was waiting where he promised to be--standing in the shadows of a doorway, alone, in a hat and bulky overcoat. He was Pyotr Popov, a twenty-nine-year-old major in Soviet military intelligence, the Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye, or GRU, a smaller cousin of the KGB. Popov became the CIA's first and, at the time, most valuable clandestine military source on the inner workings of the Soviet army and security services. He met sixty-six times with the CIA in Vienna between January 1953 and August 1955. His CIA case officer, George Kisevalter, was a rumpled bear of a man, born in Russia to a prominent family in St. Petersburg, who had immigrated to the United States as a young boy. Over time, Popov revealed to Kisevalter that he was the son of peasants, grew up on the dirt floor of a hut, and had not owned a proper pair of leather shoes until he was thirteen years old. He seethed with hatred at what Stalin had done to destroy the Russian peasantry through forced collectivization and famine. His spying was driven by a desire to avenge the injustice inflicted on his parents and his small village near the Volga River. In the CIA safe house in Vienna, Kisevalter kept some magazines spread out, such as *Life* and *Look*, but Popov was fascinated by only one, *American Farm Journal*.¹³

The CIA helped Popov forge a key that allowed him to open classified drawers at the GRU rezidentura, or station, in Vienna. Popov fingered the identity of all the Soviet intelligence officers in Vienna, delivered information on a broad array of Warsaw Pact units, and handed Kisevalter gems such as a 1954 Soviet military field service manual for the use of atomic weapons.¹⁴ When Popov was reassigned to Moscow in 1955, CIA headquarters sent an officer to the city, undercover, to scout for dead drops, or concealed locations, where Popov could leave messages. But the CIA man performed poorly, was snared in a KGB "honeypot" trap, and was later fired.¹⁵ The CIA's first attempt to establish an outpost in Moscow had ended badly.

1. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 48–49. Also see Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, "Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack," U.S. Senate, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., Report no. 244, July 20, 1946, 257–58. In his memoirs, Truman wrote that he had "often thought that if there had been something like coordination of information in the government it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Japanese to succeed in the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor." Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 56.

2. Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1997), 1, 3.

3. The agency toppled leaders in Iran and Guatemala, carried out the abortive landing at the Bay of Pigs, warned of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and was drawn deeply into the Vietnam War, eventually managing a full-scale ground war in Laos. U.S. Senate, "Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities," 94th Cong., 2nd sess., bk. 1, "Foreign and Military Intelligence," pt. 6, "History of the Central Intelligence Agency," April 26, 1976, Report 94-755, 109.

4. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, trans. Harold Shukman (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 502–24.
5. David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), ix.
6. “Report on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency,” Special Study Group, J. H. Doolittle, chairman, Washington, D.C., Sept. 30, 1954, 7.
7. Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, with William Hood (New York: Random House, 2003), 124.
8. Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 25, 30, 36, 142–52. Also, U.S. Senate, “Final Report,” pt. 6, “History of the Central Intelligence Agency.” Richard Immerman, “A Brief History of the CIA,” in *The Central Intelligence Agency: Security Under Scrutiny*, ed. Athan Theoharis et al. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 21.
9. Helms, *Look over My Shoulder*, 124, 127.
10. Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, eds., *CIA’s Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947–1991: A Documentary Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), 35–41.
11. Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 12.
12. Richard Helms, interview with Robert M. Hathaway, May 30, 1984, released by CIA in 2004. Hathaway is co-author of an internal monograph on Helms as director.
13. This account of the Popov case is based on five sources. William Hood, *Mole: The True Story of the First Russian Intelligence Officer Recruited by the CIA* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), is descriptive. Hood was an operations officer in Vienna at the time, but his account is fuzzy about some details. Clarence Ashley, *CIA Spymaster* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2004), is based on recorded interviews with George Kisevalter, and the author is a former CIA analyst. John Limond Hart, *The CIA’s Russians* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003) includes a chapter on Popov. More can also be found in Murphy, Kondrashev, and Bailey, *Battleground Berlin*. Lastly, for examples of the positive intelligence and its significance, see Joan Bird and John Bird, “CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces: The Importance of Clandestine Reporting,” a monograph and document collection, Central Intelligence Agency, Historical Review Program, 2013. On the farm journal, see Hood, *Mole*, 123.
14. Intelligence reports based on Popov’s reporting are contained in Bird and Bird, “CIA Analysis.”
15. He was Edward Ellis Smith, then thirty-two, who had served in Moscow as a military attaché during World War II. He went to Moscow posing as a low-level State Department official. His choices of dead drop sites were deemed unsatisfactory by Popov. See Richard Harris Smith, “The First Moscow Station: An Espionage Footnote to Cold War History,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 3, no. 3 (1989): 333–46. This article is based on an interview with Edward Smith, who died in an auto accident in 1982, and on his papers. There are conflicting accounts about Smith’s role in the Popov case and whether Popov passed useful intelligence to the CIA while in Moscow. According to Hood in *Mole*, the CIA decided not to run Popov at all while in Moscow because of the risks. In contrast, Richard Harris Smith says Popov while in Moscow tipped off the CIA to the most momentous political event of the decade, Khrushchev’s

secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin on February 25, 1956. Ashley reports that Smith never met Popov. That doesn't preclude operations, however; if he was just servicing dead drops, there would be no need for a meeting. Smith had an affair with his Russian maid, who was working for the KGB and who made surreptitious photographs. The KGB then showed Smith the photographs and tried to blackmail him into working for them. Smith refused and confessed to the U.S. ambassador, Charles "Chip" Bohlen. Smith was recalled to CIA headquarters in July 1956 and fired.

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From the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning history *The Dead Hand* comes the riveting story of a spy who cracked open the Soviet military research establishment and a penetrating portrait of the CIA's Moscow station, an outpost of daring espionage in the last years of the Cold War

While driving out of the American embassy in Moscow on the evening of February 16, 1978, the chief of the CIA's Moscow station heard a knock on his car window. A man on the curb handed him an envelope whose contents stunned U.S. intelligence: details of top-secret Soviet research and developments in military technology that were totally unknown to the United States. In the years that followed, the man, Adolf Tolkachev, an engineer in a Soviet military design bureau, used his high-level access to hand over tens of thousands of pages of technical secrets. His revelations allowed America to reshape its weapons systems to defeat Soviet radar on the ground and in the air, giving the United States near total superiority in the skies over Europe.

One of the most valuable spies to work for the United States in the four decades of global confrontation with the Soviet Union, Tolkachev took enormous personal risks—but so did the Americans. The CIA had long struggled to recruit and run agents in Moscow, and Tolkachev was a singular breakthrough. Using spy cameras and secret codes as well as face-to-face meetings in parks and on street corners, Tolkachev and his handlers succeeded for years in eluding the feared KGB in its own backyard, until the day came when a shocking betrayal put them all at risk.

Drawing on previously secret documents obtained from the CIA and on interviews with participants, David Hoffman has created an unprecedented and poignant portrait of Tolkachev, a man motivated by the depredations of the Soviet state to master the craft of spying against his own country. Stirring, unpredictable, and at times unbearably tense, *The Billion Dollar Spy* is a brilliant feat of reporting that unfolds like an espionage thriller.

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- Binding: Hardcover
- 336 pages

Review

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painstaking historical research that's paced like a thriller."

—Departures

"Hoffman [proves] that nonfiction can read like a John le Carré thriller ... This real-life tale of espionage will hook readers from the get-go."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

"Hoffman carefully sets the scene with both cautious and free-wheeling CIA directors and staff and also provides intimate details that prove fascinating and give human faces to these brave participants, including spies often known by code names and encountered in 'fast drops.' The book's hero—who gave the U.S. technological information worth billions, with the technology still in use today—is Adolf Tolkachev, a Russian engineer, and Hoffman's revealing of him as a person and a spy is brilliantly done, making this mesmerizing true story scary and thrilling."

—Booklist, starred review

"Gripping and informative ... Focusing on Adolf Tolkachev, who served as a spy inside the Soviet Union for more than 20 years before being betrayed, the author sets out to write the story of a spy and in so doing, chronicles Cold War espionage and an overall compelling tale that draws on secret documents from the CIA as well as interviews with surviving participants. Hoffman succeeds on both accounts."

—Library Journal

"This painstakingly researched tale reads like le Carré"

—Details

"David Hoffman has written one of the best real-life spy stories ever told. This is a breakthrough book in intelligence writing, drawing on CIA operational cables—the holy grail of the spy world—to narrate each astonishing move. Hoffman reveals CIA tradecraft tricks that are more delicious than anything in a spy novel, and his command of the Soviet landscape is masterful. Full of twists so amazing you couldn't make them up, this is spy fact that really is better than fiction."

—David Ignatius, Washington Post columnist and author of *The Director*

"A fabulous read that also provides chilling insights into the Cold War spy game between Washington and Moscow that has erupted anew under Vladimir Putin. *The Billion Dollar Spy* is an espionage thriller worthy of John Le Carré but much more than that. It is also an evocative portrait of everyday life in the crumbling Soviet Union and a meticulously researched guide to CIA sources and methods. I devoured every word, including the footnotes."

—Michael Dobbs, author of *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*

"A scrupulously researched work of history that is also a gripping thriller, *The Billion Dollar Spy* by David E. Hoffman is an unforgettable journey into Cold War espionage. This spellbinding story pulses with the dramatic tension of running an agent in Soviet-era Moscow—where the KGB is ubiquitous and CIA officers and Russian assets are prey. I was enthralled from the first instance of a CIA officer 'going dark' all the way to the terrible, tragic climax."

—Peter Finn, co-author of *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book*

"*The Billion Dollar Spy* reads like the very best spy fiction yet is meticulously drawn from real life. It is a gripping story of courage, professionalism, and betrayal in the secret world."

—Rodric Braithwaite, British Ambassador in Moscow, 1988-1992

About the Author

David E. Hoffman is a contributing editor at The Washington Post and a correspondent for PBS's flagship investigative series, FRONTLINE. He is the author of *The Dead Hand*, about the end of the Cold War arms race, and winner of a 2010 Pulitzer Prize. He lives with his wife in Maryland.

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1

Out of the Wilderness

In the early years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Central Intelligence Agency harbored an uncomfortable secret about itself. The CIA had never really gained an espionage foothold on the streets of Moscow. The agency didn't recruit in Moscow, because it was just too dangerous--"immensely dangerous," recalled one officer--for any Soviet citizen or official they might enlist. The recruitment process itself, from the first moment a possible spy was identified and approached, was filled with risk of discovery by the KGB, and if caught spying, an agent would face certain death. A few agents who volunteered or were recruited by the CIA outside the Soviet Union continued to report securely once they returned home. But for the most part, the CIA did not lure agents into spying in the heart of darkness.

This is the story of an espionage operation that turned the tide. At the center of it is an engineer in a top secret design laboratory, a specialist in airborne radar who worked deep inside the Soviet military establishment. Driven by anger and vengeance, he passed thousands of pages of secret documents to the United States, even though he had never set foot in America and knew little about it. He met with CIA officers twenty-one times over six years on the streets of Moscow, a city swarming with KGB surveillance, and was never detected. The engineer was one of the CIA's most productive agents of the Cold War, providing the United States with intelligence no other spy had ever obtained.

The operation was a coming-of-age for the CIA, a moment when it accomplished what was long thought unattainable: personally meeting with a spy right under the nose of the KGB.

Then the operation was destroyed, not by the KGB, but by betrayal from within.

To understand the significance of the operation, one must look back at the CIA's long, difficult struggle to penetrate the Soviet Union.

The CIA was born out of the disaster at Pearl Harbor. Despite warning signals, Japan achieved complete and overwhelming surprise in the December 7, 1941, attack that took the lives of more than twenty-four hundred Americans, sunk or damaged twenty-one ships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and thrust the United States into war. Intelligence was splintered among different agencies, and no one pulled all the pieces together; a congressional investigation concluded the fragmented process "was seriously at fault." The creation of the CIA in 1947 reflected more than anything else the determination of Congress and President Truman that Pearl Harbor should never happen again. Truman wanted the CIA to provide high-quality, objective analysis.¹ It was to be the first centralized, civilian intelligence agency in American history.²

But the early plans for the CIA soon changed, largely because of the growing Soviet threat, including the blockade of Berlin, Stalin's tightening grip on Eastern Europe, and Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. The CIA rapidly expanded far beyond just intelligence analysis into espionage and covert action. Pursuing a

policy of containment, first outlined in George Kennan's long telegram of 1946 from Moscow and later significantly expanded, the United States attempted to counter Soviet efforts to penetrate and subvert governments all over the world. The Cold War began as a rivalry over war-ravaged Europe but spread far and wide, a contest of ideology, politics, culture, economics, geography, and military might. The CIA was on the front lines. The battle against communism never escalated into direct combat between the superpowers; it was fought in the shadows between war and peace. It played out in what Secretary of State Dean Rusk once called the "back alleys of the world."³

There was one back alley that was too dangerous to tread--the Soviet Union itself. Stalin was convinced the World War II victory over the Nazis demonstrated the unshakability of the Soviet state. After the war, he resolutely and consciously deepened the brutal, closed system he had perfected in the 1930s, creating perpetual tension in society, constant struggle against "enemies of the people," "spies," "doubters," "cosmopolitans," and "degenerates." It was prohibited to receive a book from abroad or listen to a foreign radio broadcast. Travel overseas was nearly impossible for most people, and unauthorized contacts with foreigners were severely punished. Phones were tapped, mail opened, and informers encouraged. The secret police were in every factory and office. It was dangerous for anyone to speak frankly, even in intimate circles.⁴

This was a forbidding environment for spying. In the early years of the Cold War, the CIA did not set up a station in Moscow and had no case officers on the streets in the capital of the world's largest and most secretive party-state. It could not identify and recruit Soviet agents, as it did elsewhere. The Soviet secret police, which after 1954 was named the KGB, or Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti, was seasoned, proficient, omnipotent, and ruthless. By the 1950s, the KGB had been hardened by three decades of experience in carrying out the Stalin purges, in eliminating threats to Soviet rule during and after the war, and in stealing America's atom bomb secrets. It was not even possible for a foreigner to strike up a conversation in Moscow without arousing suspicion.

The CIA was still getting its feet wet, a young organization, optimistic, naive, and determined to get things done--a reflection of America's character.⁵ In 1954, the pioneering aviator General James Doolittle warned that the United States needed to be more hard-nosed and cold-blooded. "We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us," he said in a top secret report to President Eisenhower.⁶

The CIA faced intense and constant pressure for intelligence on the Soviet Union and its satellites. In Washington, policy makers were on edge over possible war in Europe--and anxious for early warning. Much information was available from open sources, but that wasn't the same as genuine, penetrating intelligence. "The pressure for results ranged from repeated instructions to do 'something' to exasperated demands to try 'anything,?'" recalled Richard Helms, who was responsible for clandestine operations in the 1950s.⁷

Outside the Soviet Union, the CIA diligently collected intelligence from refugees, defectors, and émigrés. Soviet diplomats, soldiers, and intelligence officers were approached around the world. From refugee camps in Europe, the CIA's covert action unit recruited a secret army. Some five thousand volunteers were trained as a "post-nuclear guerilla force" to invade the Soviet Union after an atomic attack. Separately, the United States dropped lone parachutists into the Soviet bloc to spy or link up with resistance groups. Most of them were caught and killed. The chief of the covert action unit, Frank G. Wisner, dreamed of penetrating the Eastern bloc and breaking it to pieces. Wisner hoped that through psychological warfare and underground aid--arms caches, radios, propaganda--the peoples of Eastern Europe might be persuaded to throw off their communist oppressors. But almost all of these attempts to get behind enemy lines with covert action were a

flop. The intelligence produced was scanty, and the Soviet Union was unshaken.⁸

The CIA's sources were still on the outside looking in. "The only way to fulfill our mission was to develop inside sources--spies who could sit beside the policymakers, listen to their debates, and read their mail," Helms recalled. But the possibility of recruiting and running agents in Moscow who could warn of decisions made by the Soviet leadership "was as improbable as placing resident spies on the planet Mars," Helms said.⁹ A comprehensive assessment of the CIA's intelligence on the Soviet bloc, completed in 1953, was grim. "We have no reliable inside intelligence on thinking in the Kremlin," it acknowledged. About the military, it added, "Reliable intelligence of the enemy's long-range plans and intentions is practically non-existent." The assessment cautioned, "In the event of a surprise attack, we could not hope to obtain any detailed information of the Soviet military intentions."¹⁰ In the early years of the agency, the CIA found it "impossibly difficult to penetrate Stalin's paranoid police state with agents."¹¹

"In those days," said Helms, "our information about the Soviet Union was very sparse indeed."¹²

For all the difficulties, the CIA scored two breakthroughs in the 1950s and early 1960s. Pyotr Popov and Oleg Penkovsky, both officers of Soviet military intelligence, began to spy for the United States. They were volunteers, not recruited, who came forward separately, spilling secrets to the CIA largely outside Moscow, each demonstrating the immense advantages of a clandestine agent.

On New Year's Day 1953 in Vienna, a short and stocky Russian handed an envelope to a U.S. diplomat who was getting into his car in the international zone. At the time, Vienna was under occupation of the American, British, French, and Soviet forces, a city tense with suspicion. The envelope carried a letter, dated December 28, 1952, written in Russian, which said, "I am a Soviet officer. I wish to meet with an American officer with the object of offering certain services." The letter specified a place and time to meet. Such offers were common in Vienna in those years; a horde of tricksters tried to make money from fabricated intelligence reports. The CIA had trouble sifting them all, but this time the letter seemed real. On the following Saturday evening, the Russian was waiting where he promised to be--standing in the shadows of a doorway, alone, in a hat and bulky overcoat. He was Pyotr Popov, a twenty-nine-year-old major in Soviet military intelligence, the Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye, or GRU, a smaller cousin of the KGB. Popov became the CIA's first and, at the time, most valuable clandestine military source on the inner workings of the Soviet army and security services. He met sixty-six times with the CIA in Vienna between January 1953 and August 1955. His CIA case officer, George Kisevalter, was a rumped bear of a man, born in Russia to a prominent family in St. Petersburg, who had immigrated to the United States as a young boy. Over time, Popov revealed to Kisevalter that he was the son of peasants, grew up on the dirt floor of a hut, and had not owned a proper pair of leather shoes until he was thirteen years old. He seethed with hatred at what Stalin had done to destroy the Russian peasantry through forced collectivization and famine. His spying was driven by a desire to avenge the injustice inflicted on his parents and his small village near the Volga River. In the CIA safe house in Vienna, Kisevalter kept some magazines spread out, such as *Life* and *Look*, but Popov was fascinated by only one, *American Farm Journal*.¹³

The CIA helped Popov forge a key that allowed him to open classified drawers at the GRU rezidentura, or station, in Vienna. Popov fingered the identity of all the Soviet intelligence officers in Vienna, delivered information on a broad array of Warsaw Pact units, and handed Kisevalter gems such as a 1954 Soviet military field service manual for the use of atomic weapons.¹⁴ When Popov was reassigned to Moscow in 1955, CIA headquarters sent an officer to the city, undercover, to scout for dead drops, or concealed locations, where Popov could leave messages. But the CIA man performed poorly, was snared in a KGB

“honeypot” trap, and was later fired.¹⁵ The CIA’s first attempt to establish an outpost in Moscow had ended badly.

1. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 48–49. Also see Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, “Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack,” U.S. Senate, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., Report no. 244, July 20, 1946, 257–58. In his memoirs, Truman wrote that he had “often thought that if there had been something like coordination of information in the government it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Japanese to succeed in the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor.” Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 56.

2. Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1997), 1, 3.

3. The agency toppled leaders in Iran and Guatemala, carried out the abortive landing at the Bay of Pigs, warned of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and was drawn deeply into the Vietnam War, eventually managing a full-scale ground war in Laos. U.S. Senate, “Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities,” 94th Cong., 2nd sess., bk. 1, “Foreign and Military Intelligence,” pt. 6, “History of the Central Intelligence Agency,” April 26, 1976, Report 94-755, 109.

4. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, trans. Harold Shukman (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 502–24.

5. David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), ix.

6. “Report on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency,” Special Study Group, J. H. Doolittle, chairman, Washington, D.C., Sept. 30, 1954, 7.

7. Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, with William Hood (New York: Random House, 2003), 124.

8. Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 25, 30, 36, 142–52. Also, U.S. Senate, “Final Report,” pt. 6, “History of the Central Intelligence Agency.” Richard Immerman, “A Brief History of the CIA,” in *The Central Intelligence Agency: Security Under Scrutiny*, ed. Athan Theoharis et al. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 21.

9. Helms, *Look over My Shoulder*, 124, 127.

10. Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, eds., *CIA’s Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947–1991: A Documentary Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), 35–41.

11. Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 12.

12. Richard Helms, interview with Robert M. Hathaway, May 30, 1984, released by CIA in 2004. Hathaway is co-author of an internal monograph on Helms as director.

13. This account of the Popov case is based on five sources. William Hood, *Mole: The True Story of the First Russian Intelligence Officer Recruited by the CIA* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), is descriptive. Hood was an operations officer in Vienna at the time, but his account is fuzzy about some details. Clarence Ashley, *CIA Spymaster* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2004), is based on recorded interviews with George Kisevalter, and the author is a former CIA analyst. John Limond Hart, *The CIA's Russians* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003) includes a chapter on Popov. More can also be found in Murphy, Kondrashev, and Bailey, *Battleground Berlin*. Lastly, for examples of the positive intelligence and its significance, see Joan Bird and John Bird, "CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces: The Importance of Clandestine Reporting," a monograph and document collection, Central Intelligence Agency, Historical Review Program, 2013. On the farm journal, see Hood, *Mole*, 123.

14. Intelligence reports based on Popov's reporting are contained in Bird and Bird, "CIA Analysis."

15. He was Edward Ellis Smith, then thirty-two, who had served in Moscow as a military attaché during World War II. He went to Moscow posing as a low-level State Department official. His choices of dead drop sites were deemed unsatisfactory by Popov. See Richard Harris Smith, "The First Moscow Station: An Espionage Footnote to Cold War History," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 3, no. 3 (1989): 333–46. This article is based on an interview with Edward Smith, who died in an auto accident in 1982, and on his papers. There are conflicting accounts about Smith's role in the Popov case and whether Popov passed useful intelligence to the CIA while in Moscow. According to Hood in *Mole*, the CIA decided not to run Popov at all while in Moscow because of the risks. In contrast, Richard Harris Smith says Popov while in Moscow tipped off the CIA to the most momentous political event of the decade, Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin on February 25, 1956. Ashley reports that Smith never met Popov. That doesn't preclude operations, however; if he was just servicing dead drops, there would be no need for a meeting. Smith had an affair with his Russian maid, who was working for the KGB and who made surreptitious photographs. The KGB then showed Smith the photographs and tried to blackmail him into working for them. Smith refused and confessed to the U.S. ambassador, Charles "Chip" Bohlen. Smith was recalled to CIA headquarters in July 1956 and fired.

Most helpful customer reviews

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Unsung But Invaluable Men And Women

By John D. Cofield

Here is a spell-binding story of the late Cold War. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in an apparently permanent deadlock in which neither side was able to gain a decisive advantage. Then one evening in Moscow a man knocked on the window of an American diplomat at a filling station and handed him an envelope. That momentary encounter was to lead to a years long and highly productive relationship which gave the US crucial access to Soviet planning and technological developments. It is not overstating things to say that that meeting was one of the turning points of twentieth century history. David E Hoffman is the ideal writer for this riveting tale, with long experience at the Washington Post and PBS and as the Pulitzer Prize winning author of several histories of the Cold War and of Russia.

In the 1960s and early 1970s US espionage within the Soviet Union was almost non-existent, thanks primarily to the influence of the brilliant but paranoid James J. Angleton, head of Counter-Intelligence at the CIA. Angleton believed that no Russian defector and no offer of intelligence from Russians could be trusted because they were all part of a complex Soviet plot to mislead the West. It was not until after Angleton was forced to retire in 1974 that the CIA began to develop contacts within the Soviet system, including military and KGB officials who were willing to provide intelligence. The most valuable of these contacts, the so-

called billion dollar spy, was the man who rapped on the diplomat's car window. Adolf Tolkachev was an engineer with high security clearances who willingly provided enormous amounts of information over a period of several years.

Tolkachev's story makes up the bulk of *The Billion Dollar Spy*, but there is also plenty of material about other Soviet spies and about the CIA operatives who worked with them. Hoffman does a fine job of recreating the nerve-wracking tension of being on duty at the Moscow station, working for months to plan a meeting with a contact which might last only a few minutes or might not even come off at all. Always there was the threat that the KGB was watching and waiting, which would mean certain arrest and eventual execution for the Soviet spy and exposure and expulsion for the American agents working with him or her. Hoffman does just as good a job of describing the lives of Tolkachev and other Soviet spies, the constant tension and fear under which they labored, the tedious and highly dangerous methods of collecting and copying information for the West, and the effect the stress had on them and their families. I found Hoffman's descriptions of the evasions and tricks played by US agents attempting to evade the KGB fascinating, as was Hoffman's story of the disaffected American who eventually betrayed Tolkachev to the Soviets.

This book is almost unputdownable, a fascinating chronicle of the last years of the Cold War. Those of us who lived through the 1970s and 1980s knew of the changes in US and Soviet leadership and of the ups and downs of superpower relationships during that era, but very few would have had any idea of the dangerous careers so many men and women led in those years. *The Billion Dollar Spy* does much to illuminate the dedication and hard work of some whose names may never be widely known, but who nevertheless played crucial roles at a momentous time in history.

63 of 68 people found the following review helpful.

John Le Carre got it wrong

By Mal Warwick

If you think you have a strong sense of how espionage was conducted during the Cold War, you're probably wrong. Histories, and the crowded shelves of spy novels set during the era, offer a cursory and misleading view of the day-to-day reality as it was lived by the men and women who worked for the CIA and the KGB. David E. Hoffman's outstanding tale about one extraordinary Russian spy for the US and his CIA handlers is truly eye-opening. You won't be able to look at spycraft in what is called humint — human intelligence — the same way ever again.

The Billion Dollar Spy was a Soviet engineer named Adolf Tokachev who provided the US with a prodigious volume of technical data about the USSR's military capabilities from 1977 to 1985. He served as chief engineer of one of several research and development institutes serving the Soviet air force. Under the noses of his bosses and the KGB alike, he brazenly supplied photographs of many thousands of pages of top-secret data to the CIA, enabling the US to counteract every technical advantage achieved by the USSR in its most advanced combat aircraft. An assessment by the US government of Tokachev's "production" placed the value at two billion dollars, and that was undoubtedly a conservative estimate. There seems to be little question that Adolf Tokachev was the CIA's biggest success story ever in human intelligence — at least among those the agency has revealed to researchers. His portrait hangs in CIA headquarters to this day.

Hoffman tells this amazing story with great skill and in minute detail. The book reads like a top-flight spy novel, reeking of suspense. But what is most surprising (at least to me) is the insiders' picture of CIA operations. To call the agency bureaucratic would be a gross understatement: every single action taken by Tokachev's handlers and every single word they communicated to him was first painstakingly reviewed not just by the head of the Moscow station but also by his boss, the head of the agency's Soviet division — and often by the Director of the CIA himself. More often than not, the agency big-wigs second-guessed their

field staff, denying multiple requests for money to compensate Tokachev, for the cyanide pill he demanded in case he was discovered by the KGB, and for the spyware he needed to photograph top-secret material he had spirited away from his office at the risk of his life. Yet, as Hoffman writes, “Tokachev’s material was so valuable back at Langley that he was literally ‘paying the rent’ — justifying the CIA’s operational budget — and helping the agency satisfy the military customers.”

That bureaucratic meddling was the first surprise. The second was the picture of tedium and frustration suffered by Tokachev’s handlers. Pulling off a single exchange of material at a dead drop might require weeks, with the effort aborted several times for fear of KGB surveillance. Face-to-face meetings with the engineer were often even more fraught with fear. Months went by between meetings, sometimes by design, sometimes by misadventure. On a couple of occasions, Tokachev’s wife inadvertently opened the attic window he used to signal for a meeting, creating confusion and anxiety within the CIA station. And the technology designed by the agency’s answer to James Bond’s “Q” sometimes malfunctioned.

Third, though by no means a surprise, is the picture Hoffman paints of the damage suffered by the CIA at the hands of its long-time director of counterintelligence, James Jesus Angleton. When his close personal friend, Kim Philby, defected to the Soviet Union after decades of extraordinarily high-level spying, Angleton apparently went off the deep end into paranoia. (Many of his coworkers thought he was nuts.) As Hoffman writes, “Angleton’s suspicions permeated the culture and fabric of the CIA’s Soviet operations division during the 1960s, with disastrous results . . . If no one could be trusted, there could be no spies.” Hoffman adds that, for Angleton, “everything was labeled suspicious or compromised . . .”

It’s not a stretch to imagine that the CIA opened up its records on the Tokachev affair as a public relations move to counter all the dreadful publicity it has suffered over the past decade and more. After all, such records are normally classified for fifty years, and Tokachev’s career for the CIA ended only thirty years ago.

It’s also sobering to consider the agency’s success with Tokachev in a larger context. As Marc Goodman revealed in his recent book, *Future Crimes*, Chinese government hackers succeeded in stealing top-secret US military data worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

David E. Hoffman is a Pulitzer-Prize-winning contributing editor to the *Washington Post*.

55 of 63 people found the following review helpful.

Stealing secrets under the eyes of the KGB

By S. McGee

Over the course of more than 20 meetings with his CIA handlers, Adolf Tokachev passed on thousands of pages' worth of military secrets -- information that gave the United States a decisive lead in the final stages of the Cold War arms race that would last right into the 1990s, and that saved the Defense Department and its contractors in excess of \$2 billion dollars. In exchange, Tokachev got -- well, I won't spoil this tale of Cold War espionage for you; you'll simply have to read it for yourself.

Compared to some of the other stories of its kind -- from the atomic bomb spies to Kim Philby and his circle; Aldrich Ames and Robert Hansen, and so on -- this is a remarkable tale. Tokachev, a scientist deep inside the Soviet Union's military industrial complex, yet never a devoted member of the Communist Party, had decided long before he began his espionage activities that he couldn't support the Soviet regime. Simply supporting dissidents wasn't enough; he calmly set about making contact with the CIA in Moscow at a time when the latter were ill-equipped to run agents of any kind -- much less of his importance -- in the heart of the "denied zone". The tale of his persistence, the CIA's recognition of the treasure that had walked into their

embrace, and the unfolding of their relationship is the kind of stuff of which great fiction is made -- but this is a true story. It's a tribute to David Hoffman's research abilities and writing skill that he's made it feel like a un-putdownable novel; I simply couldn't get to sleep until I found out what happened to Tolkachev and his CIA handlers.

It's hard to say much while still avoiding spoilers, or revealing too many details that, if not actual spoilers, would affect your enjoyment: you'll want to discover this yourself. It's stuffed full of tradecraft details -- what was it like to work as a CIA spook on the streets of Moscow, circa 1979 or 1982? -- and also the agony of Tolkachev's handlers, as they balance anxiety over his fate as the eager spy takes more and more risks to deliver information, with the knowledge of just how valuable that information is proving to be. An absolutely compelling, fast-paced tale; ideal for fans of the genre and those with an interest in this era of history, in particular.

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THE BILLION DOLLAR SPY: A TRUE STORY OF COLD WAR ESPIONAGE AND BETRAYAL BY DAVID E. HOFFMAN PDF

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Review

"In an era of suicide bombers and ISIS beheadings, the spy dramas of the Cold War can seem tame, almost polite affairs. Central Intelligence Agency officers who worked in the Soviet capital complained about operating under "Moscow rules," meaning the relentless scrutiny of the K.G.B. And they knew that any Soviet citizen caught spying faced certain execution. Still, there were rules. Those rules may actually be a reason that David Hoffman's The Billion Dollar Spy, about Adolf Tolkachev, a Soviet radar expert who spied for the C.I.A., is such an engrossing tale. The story played out over several years, almost entirely on the streets of Moscow, in a twilight chess game that pitted American intelligence officers against their Soviet counterparts."

—New York Times

"The Billion Dollar Spy is one of the best spy stories to come out of the Cold War and all the more riveting, and finally dismaying, for being true. It hits the sweet spot between page-turning thriller and solidly researched history (even the footnotes are informative) and then becomes something more, a shrewd character study of spies and the spies who run them, the mixed motives, the risks, the almost inevitable bad end."

—Washington Post

"[A] dramatic spy vs. spy story, complete with a trove of trade-craft tricks, is the grist for Pulitzer Prize-winning author David E. Hoffman's scrupulously reported The Billion Dollar Spy, a true-life tale so gripping at times it reads like spy fiction ... Hoffman interviewed key players and gained access to more than 900 pages of long-secret CIA files and operational cables to fill in a crucial gap in the Cold War espionage canon."

—Los Angeles Times

"[The Billion Dollar Spy] packs valuable insights into the final decade of the cloak-and-dagger rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union, which came undone in 1989. It is a must-read for historians and buffs of that era, as well as aficionados of espionage ... Hoffman draws on extensive declassified CIA and FBI files and myriad other sources to chronicle how the United States gained and lost one of the elite spies of the Cold War."

—Christian Science Monitor

"Gripping and nerve-wracking ... Human tension hangs over every page of The Billion Dollar Spy like the smell of leaded gasoline ... Hoffman knows the intelligence world well and has expertly used recently declassified documents to tell this unsettling and suspenseful story. It is an old cliché that any true story

about espionage resembles the best of John Le Carré's fiction. That's especially true here. *The Billion Dollar Spy* reads like the most taut and suspenseful parts of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* or *Smiley's People*. It's worth the clenched jaw and upset stomach it creates."

—USA Today

"*The Billion Dollar Spy* not only chronicles the life and motives of [Soviet engineer Adolph] Tolkachev but also provides a rare look at the dangerous, intricately choreographed tradecraft behind old-school intelligence gathering ... What [Hoffman]'s accomplished here isn't just a remarkable example of journalistic talent but also an ability to weave an absolutely gripping nonfiction narrative."

—Dallas Morning News

"Hoffman excels at conveying both the tradecraft and the human vulnerabilities involved in spying."

—The New Yorker

"David Hoffman is a scrupulous, meticulous writer whose pages of footnotes and references attest to how carefully he sticks to his sources ... His book's value is in its true-life adventure story and the window it offers into a once-closed world."

—Columbus Dispatch

"The fine first sentence of *The Billion Dollar Spy* could almost have been written with an icicle. A work of painstaking historical research that's paced like a thriller."

—Departures

"Hoffman [proves] that nonfiction can read like a John le Carré thriller ... This real-life tale of espionage will hook readers from the get-go."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

"Hoffman carefully sets the scene with both cautious and free-wheeling CIA directors and staff and also provides intimate details that prove fascinating and give human faces to these brave participants, including spies often known by code names and encountered in 'fast drops.' The book's hero—who gave the U.S. technological information worth billions, with the technology still in use today—is Adolf Tolkachev, a Russian engineer, and Hoffman's revealing of him as a person and a spy is brilliantly done, making this mesmerizing true story scary and thrilling."

—Booklist, starred review

"Gripping and informative ... Focusing on Adolf Tolkachev, who served as a spy inside the Soviet Union for more than 20 years before being betrayed, the author sets out to write the story of a spy and in so doing, chronicles Cold War espionage and an overall compelling tale that draws on secret documents from the CIA as well as interviews with surviving participants. Hoffman succeeds on both accounts."

—Library Journal

"This painstakingly researched tale reads like le Carré"

—Details

"David Hoffman has written one of the best real-life spy stories ever told. This is a breakthrough book in intelligence writing, drawing on CIA operational cables—the holy grail of the spy world—to narrate each astonishing move. Hoffman reveals CIA tradecraft tricks that are more delicious than anything in a spy novel, and his command of the Soviet landscape is masterful. Full of twists so amazing you couldn't make them up, this is spy fact that really is better than fiction."

—David Ignatius, Washington Post columnist and author of *The Director*

“A fabulous read that also provides chilling insights into the Cold War spy game between Washington and Moscow that has erupted anew under Vladimir Putin. *The Billion Dollar Spy* is an espionage thriller worthy of John Le Carré but much more than that. It is also an evocative portrait of everyday life in the crumbling Soviet Union and a meticulously researched guide to CIA sources and methods. I devoured every word, including the footnotes.”

—Michael Dobbs, author of *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*

“A scrupulously researched work of history that is also a gripping thriller, *The Billion Dollar Spy* by David E. Hoffman is an unforgettable journey into Cold War espionage. This spellbinding story pulses with the dramatic tension of running an agent in Soviet-era Moscow—where the KGB is ubiquitous and CIA officers and Russian assets are prey. I was enthralled from the first instance of a CIA officer ‘going dark’ all the way to the terrible, tragic climax.”

—Peter Finn, co-author of *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book*

“*The Billion Dollar Spy* reads like the very best spy fiction yet is meticulously drawn from real life. It is a gripping story of courage, professionalism, and betrayal in the secret world.”

—Rodric Braithwaite, British Ambassador in Moscow, 1988-1992

About the Author

David E. Hoffman is a contributing editor at *The Washington Post* and a correspondent for PBS's flagship investigative series, *FRONTLINE*. He is the author of *The Dead Hand*, about the end of the Cold War arms race, and winner of a 2010 Pulitzer Prize. He lives with his wife in Maryland.

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Out of the Wilderness

In the early years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Central Intelligence Agency harbored an uncomfortable secret about itself. The CIA had never really gained an espionage foothold on the streets of Moscow. The agency didn't recruit in Moscow, because it was just too dangerous--“immensely dangerous,” recalled one officer--for any Soviet citizen or official they might enlist. The recruitment process itself, from the first moment a possible spy was identified and approached, was filled with risk of discovery by the KGB, and if caught spying, an agent would face certain death. A few agents who volunteered or were recruited by the CIA outside the Soviet Union continued to report securely once they returned home. But for the most part, the CIA did not lure agents into spying in the heart of darkness.

This is the story of an espionage operation that turned the tide. At the center of it is an engineer in a top secret design laboratory, a specialist in airborne radar who worked deep inside the Soviet military establishment. Driven by anger and vengeance, he passed thousands of pages of secret documents to the United States, even though he had never set foot in America and knew little about it. He met with CIA officers twenty-one times over six years on the streets of Moscow, a city swarming with KGB surveillance, and was never detected. The engineer was one of the CIA's most productive agents of the Cold War, providing the United States with intelligence no other spy had ever obtained.

The operation was a coming-of-age for the CIA, a moment when it accomplished what was long thought

unattainable: personally meeting with a spy right under the nose of the KGB.

Then the operation was destroyed, not by the KGB, but by betrayal from within.

To understand the significance of the operation, one must look back at the CIA's long, difficult struggle to penetrate the Soviet Union.

The CIA was born out of the disaster at Pearl Harbor. Despite warning signals, Japan achieved complete and overwhelming surprise in the December 7, 1941, attack that took the lives of more than twenty-four hundred Americans, sunk or damaged twenty-one ships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and thrust the United States into war. Intelligence was splintered among different agencies, and no one pulled all the pieces together; a congressional investigation concluded the fragmented process "was seriously at fault." The creation of the CIA in 1947 reflected more than anything else the determination of Congress and President Truman that Pearl Harbor should never happen again. Truman wanted the CIA to provide high-quality, objective analysis.¹ It was to be the first centralized, civilian intelligence agency in American history.²

But the early plans for the CIA soon changed, largely because of the growing Soviet threat, including the blockade of Berlin, Stalin's tightening grip on Eastern Europe, and Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. The CIA rapidly expanded far beyond just intelligence analysis into espionage and covert action. Pursuing a policy of containment, first outlined in George Kennan's long telegram of 1946 from Moscow and later significantly expanded, the United States attempted to counter Soviet efforts to penetrate and subvert governments all over the world. The Cold War began as a rivalry over war-ravaged Europe but spread far and wide, a contest of ideology, politics, culture, economics, geography, and military might. The CIA was on the front lines. The battle against communism never escalated into direct combat between the superpowers; it was fought in the shadows between war and peace. It played out in what Secretary of State Dean Rusk once called the "back alleys of the world."³

There was one back alley that was too dangerous to tread--the Soviet Union itself. Stalin was convinced the World War II victory over the Nazis demonstrated the unshakability of the Soviet state. After the war, he resolutely and consciously deepened the brutal, closed system he had perfected in the 1930s, creating perpetual tension in society, constant struggle against "enemies of the people," "spies," "doubters," "cosmopolitans," and "degenerates." It was prohibited to receive a book from abroad or listen to a foreign radio broadcast. Travel overseas was nearly impossible for most people, and unauthorized contacts with foreigners were severely punished. Phones were tapped, mail opened, and informers encouraged. The secret police were in every factory and office. It was dangerous for anyone to speak frankly, even in intimate circles.⁴

This was a forbidding environment for spying. In the early years of the Cold War, the CIA did not set up a station in Moscow and had no case officers on the streets in the capital of the world's largest and most secretive party-state. It could not identify and recruit Soviet agents, as it did elsewhere. The Soviet secret police, which after 1954 was named the KGB, or *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*, was seasoned, proficient, omnipotent, and ruthless. By the 1950s, the KGB had been hardened by three decades of experience in carrying out the Stalin purges, in eliminating threats to Soviet rule during and after the war, and in stealing America's atom bomb secrets. It was not even possible for a foreigner to strike up a conversation in Moscow without arousing suspicion.

The CIA was still getting its feet wet, a young organization, optimistic, naive, and determined to get things

done--a reflection of America's character.⁵ In 1954, the pioneering aviator General James Doolittle warned that the United States needed to be more hard-nosed and cold-blooded. "We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us," he said in a top secret report to President Eisenhower.⁶

The CIA faced intense and constant pressure for intelligence on the Soviet Union and its satellites. In Washington, policy makers were on edge over possible war in Europe--and anxious for early warning. Much information was available from open sources, but that wasn't the same as genuine, penetrating intelligence. "The pressure for results ranged from repeated instructions to do 'something' to exasperated demands to try 'anything,'?" recalled Richard Helms, who was responsible for clandestine operations in the 1950s.⁷

Outside the Soviet Union, the CIA diligently collected intelligence from refugees, defectors, and émigrés. Soviet diplomats, soldiers, and intelligence officers were approached around the world. From refugee camps in Europe, the CIA's covert action unit recruited a secret army. Some five thousand volunteers were trained as a "post-nuclear guerilla force" to invade the Soviet Union after an atomic attack. Separately, the United States dropped lone parachutists into the Soviet bloc to spy or link up with resistance groups. Most of them were caught and killed. The chief of the covert action unit, Frank G. Wisner, dreamed of penetrating the Eastern bloc and breaking it to pieces. Wisner hoped that through psychological warfare and underground aid--arms caches, radios, propaganda--the peoples of Eastern Europe might be persuaded to throw off their communist oppressors. But almost all of these attempts to get behind enemy lines with covert action were a flop. The intelligence produced was scanty, and the Soviet Union was unshaken.⁸

The CIA's sources were still on the outside looking in. "The only way to fulfill our mission was to develop inside sources--spies who could sit beside the policymakers, listen to their debates, and read their mail," Helms recalled. But the possibility of recruiting and running agents in Moscow who could warn of decisions made by the Soviet leadership "was as improbable as placing resident spies on the planet Mars," Helms said.⁹ A comprehensive assessment of the CIA's intelligence on the Soviet bloc, completed in 1953, was grim. "We have no reliable inside intelligence on thinking in the Kremlin," it acknowledged. About the military, it added, "Reliable intelligence of the enemy's long-range plans and intentions is practically non-existent." The assessment cautioned, "In the event of a surprise attack, we could not hope to obtain any detailed information of the Soviet military intentions."¹⁰ In the early years of the agency, the CIA found it "impossibly difficult to penetrate Stalin's paranoid police state with agents."¹¹

"In those days," said Helms, "our information about the Soviet Union was very sparse indeed."¹²

For all the difficulties, the CIA scored two breakthroughs in the 1950s and early 1960s. Pyotr Popov and Oleg Penkovsky, both officers of Soviet military intelligence, began to spy for the United States. They were volunteers, not recruited, who came forward separately, spilling secrets to the CIA largely outside Moscow, each demonstrating the immense advantages of a clandestine agent.

On New Year's Day 1953 in Vienna, a short and stocky Russian handed an envelope to a U.S. diplomat who was getting into his car in the international zone. At the time, Vienna was under occupation of the American, British, French, and Soviet forces, a city tense with suspicion. The envelope carried a letter, dated December 28, 1952, written in Russian, which said, "I am a Soviet officer. I wish to meet with an American officer with the object of offering certain services." The letter specified a place and time to meet. Such offers were common in Vienna in those years; a horde of tricksters tried to make money from fabricated intelligence

reports. The CIA had trouble sifting them all, but this time the letter seemed real. On the following Saturday evening, the Russian was waiting where he promised to be--standing in the shadows of a doorway, alone, in a hat and bulky overcoat. He was Pyotr Popov, a twenty-nine-year-old major in Soviet military intelligence, the Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye, or GRU, a smaller cousin of the KGB. Popov became the CIA's first and, at the time, most valuable clandestine military source on the inner workings of the Soviet army and security services. He met sixty-six times with the CIA in Vienna between January 1953 and August 1955. His CIA case officer, George Kisevalter, was a rumped bear of a man, born in Russia to a prominent family in St. Petersburg, who had immigrated to the United States as a young boy. Over time, Popov revealed to Kisevalter that he was the son of peasants, grew up on the dirt floor of a hut, and had not owned a proper pair of leather shoes until he was thirteen years old. He seethed with hatred at what Stalin had done to destroy the Russian peasantry through forced collectivization and famine. His spying was driven by a desire to avenge the injustice inflicted on his parents and his small village near the Volga River. In the CIA safe house in Vienna, Kisevalter kept some magazines spread out, such as *Life* and *Look*, but Popov was fascinated by only one, *American Farm Journal*.¹³

The CIA helped Popov forge a key that allowed him to open classified drawers at the GRU rezidentura, or station, in Vienna. Popov fingered the identity of all the Soviet intelligence officers in Vienna, delivered information on a broad array of Warsaw Pact units, and handed Kisevalter gems such as a 1954 Soviet military field service manual for the use of atomic weapons.¹⁴ When Popov was reassigned to Moscow in 1955, CIA headquarters sent an officer to the city, undercover, to scout for dead drops, or concealed locations, where Popov could leave messages. But the CIA man performed poorly, was snared in a KGB "honeypot" trap, and was later fired.¹⁵ The CIA's first attempt to establish an outpost in Moscow had ended badly.

1. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 48–49. Also see Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, "Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack," U.S. Senate, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., Report no. 244, July 20, 1946, 257–58. In his memoirs, Truman wrote that he had "often thought that if there had been something like coordination of information in the government it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Japanese to succeed in the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor." Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 56.

2. Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1997), 1, 3.

3. The agency toppled leaders in Iran and Guatemala, carried out the abortive landing at the Bay of Pigs, warned of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and was drawn deeply into the Vietnam War, eventually managing a full-scale ground war in Laos. U.S. Senate, "Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities," 94th Cong., 2nd sess., bk. 1, "Foreign and Military Intelligence," pt. 6, "History of the Central Intelligence Agency," April 26, 1976, Report 94-755, 109.

4. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, trans. Harold Shukman (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 502–24.

5. David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), ix.

6. "Report on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency," Special Study Group, J. H. Doolittle, chairman, Washington, D.C., Sept. 30, 1954, 7.
7. Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, with William Hood (New York: Random House, 2003), 124.
8. Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 25, 30, 36, 142–52. Also, U.S. Senate, "Final Report," pt. 6, "History of the Central Intelligence Agency." Richard Immerman, "A Brief History of the CIA," in *The Central Intelligence Agency: Security Under Scrutiny*, ed. Athan Theoharis et al. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 21.
9. Helms, *Look over My Shoulder*, 124, 127.
10. Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, eds., *CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947–1991: A Documentary Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), 35–41.
11. Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 12.
12. Richard Helms, interview with Robert M. Hathaway, May 30, 1984, released by CIA in 2004. Hathaway is co-author of an internal monograph on Helms as director.
13. This account of the Popov case is based on five sources. William Hood, *Mole: The True Story of the First Russian Intelligence Officer Recruited by the CIA* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), is descriptive. Hood was an operations officer in Vienna at the time, but his account is fuzzy about some details. Clarence Ashley, *CIA Spymaster* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2004), is based on recorded interviews with George Kisevalter, and the author is a former CIA analyst. John Limond Hart, *The CIA's Russians* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003) includes a chapter on Popov. More can also be found in Murphy, Kondrashev, and Bailey, *Battleground Berlin*. Lastly, for examples of the positive intelligence and its significance, see Joan Bird and John Bird, "CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces: The Importance of Clandestine Reporting," a monograph and document collection, Central Intelligence Agency, Historical Review Program, 2013. On the farm journal, see Hood, *Mole*, 123.
14. Intelligence reports based on Popov's reporting are contained in Bird and Bird, "CIA Analysis."
15. He was Edward Ellis Smith, then thirty-two, who had served in Moscow as a military attaché during World War II. He went to Moscow posing as a low-level State Department official. His choices of dead drop sites were deemed unsatisfactory by Popov. See Richard Harris Smith, "The First Moscow Station: An Espionage Footnote to Cold War History," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 3, no. 3 (1989): 333–46. This article is based on an interview with Edward Smith, who died in an auto accident in 1982, and on his papers. There are conflicting accounts about Smith's role in the Popov case and whether Popov passed useful intelligence to the CIA while in Moscow. According to Hood in *Mole*, the CIA decided not to run Popov at all while in Moscow because of the risks. In contrast, Richard Harris Smith says Popov while in Moscow tipped off the CIA to the most momentous political event of the decade, Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin on February 25, 1956. Ashley reports that Smith never met Popov. That doesn't preclude operations, however; if he was just servicing dead drops, there would be no need for a meeting. Smith had an affair with his Russian maid, who was working for the KGB and who made surreptitious photographs. The KGB then showed Smith the photographs and tried to blackmail him into working for them. Smith refused and confessed to the U.S. ambassador, Charles "Chip" Bohlen. Smith was recalled to CIA headquarters in July 1956 and fired.

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