

The War of the Moles: Part II



Oswald The Secret Agent

An interview with Edward Jay Epstein
by Susana Duncan

“...Oswald’s Russian diary was a fake. It was written in only two sittings, just before he returned to the United States in 1962...”

A few months after John Kennedy’s assassination, Yuri Nosenko of the KGB arrived in Geneva and secretly gave American intelligence officials an important piece of information: He said that Lee Harvey Oswald had never been debriefed by the KGB during his three-year stay in the Soviet Union, nor had he been connected in any way with Soviet intelligence. The Americans wondered whether to believe this message or to consider it just another twist in a series of Soviet attempts to mislead the United States on matters of great moment.

Last week, in an interview with Edward Jay Epstein, author of the upcoming book *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald* (to be published by Reader’s Digest Press/McGraw-Hill),

New York Magazine reported on an intense intelligence war in which the Soviets had used phony defectors to pass on “disinformation” and confuse American intelligence experts. To recap briefly, we learned that in 1961 the CIA had received information that Soviet-controlled agents were operating within the CIA and the FBI. The term given to an intelligence agent who secretly works for the opposition is “mole,” and right through the 1960s the Soviets attempted to throw the CIA off the scent of their moles by using a number of disinformation agents, including an officer, code-named “Fedora,” attached to the Soviet U.N. Mission, and a “defector,” Nosenko, to set false trails and tell mutually supportive lies. The result was chaos in the American

intelligence world. On the one hand, the “old CIA,” led by James Angleton, and the heads of the Soviet Russia Division of the CIA believed Nosenko was a KGB plant, a red herring, and on the other hand, the “new CIA,” supported by J. Edgar Hoover, wanted to accept Nosenko as a bona fide defector.

So the question stood: Was Nosenko trying to throw Americans off the scent of Oswald’s true mission when he returned from the Soviet Union? The likelihood is great since, as we also learned last week, Oswald had worked with the marines at Atsugi air base in Japan, where he had access to information about the altitude of the U-2 and where he was quite probably recruited to defect to the Soviet Union. In 1959, he defected, and shortly afterward

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Francis Gary Powers was shot down in his U-2. Powers told Epstein that he thought Oswald was at least in part responsible for his downing and also behind some of the questions he was asked about the U-2 during his Soviet interrogation.

This week, in a continuation of *New York Magazine’s* interview with Epstein, the subject turns to Oswald’s connection with the KGB after his return to the United States in 1962.

Question: In your book, you say that while in Russia Oswald lived the life of Riley. He had a magnificent apartment in Minsk, with two terraces and a river view. He frequently went to the opera and dated beautiful women. He was a celebrity, he met top officials, had a living allowance from the Soviet security agency. . . . Why would he give up all this splendor to come back to the United States, where he faced prosecution and penury?

Answer: I have assumed that Oswald was ordered to return, that, having debriefed him about the U-2, the Soviets had no further use for him in Russia.

Q. But what useful function could Oswald conceivably have performed for the Russians in America?

A. I don’t know what they had in mind for him. But agents are recruited for very petty tasks. Some simply deliver messages from one hole in the wall or “dead drop” to another; others might try to get employment in a place where they would have access to useful information. If worse came to worst, Oswald could always be sacrificed as a “garbage agent”—another Russian spy in America could confirm his own *bona fides* by giving away Oswald’s story.

Q. In his diary about his three years in Russia, Oswald frequently describes his life as drab and hopeless and refers to himself as disillusioned, depressed, and even suicidal. How do you reconcile this with your description of his luxurious life-style in Minsk?

A. Oswald’s Russian diary was a fake. I submitted it to a brilliant graphologist called Dr. Thea Stein Lewinson, who, after scrutinizing it under a microscope, announced that it had been written in just two sittings, just before Oswald returned in 1962. He may have taken only a half-

hour rest between them. Moreover, I discovered independently that the diary was full of anachronisms. One of Oswald’s 1959 entries mentioned an official who was not in office until 1961.

Q. Did you find any other evidence that Oswald was masking his activities in Russia?

A. Yes. Oswald had attached fake names to many of the numbers in his address book. Under the Freedom of Information Act, I was able to get a CIA trace on the names and numbers. Many of the numbers led to Soviet ministry offices, not to the “names” he’d jotted next to them.

Q. Oswald’s diary omits any detail of life at the top in Russia. How can you be sure that he enjoyed the high life that you describe?

A. In the National Archives we found photographs of Oswald’s apartment and its view of Minsk that had been taken by Oswald and his friends. I showed these pictures to a Russian émigré living in New Jersey who had lived in Minsk in the 1960s. He identified many of the people and places shown, and commented on Oswald’s life-style: Oswald had lived in the affluent part of Minsk. He had his own apartment with a separate living room gaily decorated with flowered wallpaper, tiled floors, and modern furniture. Oswald used this apartment for entertaining friends, including Pavel Golovachev, the son of “Hero of the Soviet Union” General P. Y. Golovachev, who traveled in the highest social circles in Minsk.

Q. Oswald’s fake diary and his own description of life in Minsk were used as evidence before the Warren Commission. Why would he want to give a false impression of his years in Russia?

A. It is standard procedure in international espionage for an agent to be provided with a legend, or cover story. Oswald’s diary seems to have been part of the legend prepared for him by the Soviets to conceal the true nature of his activities while in Russia and, no doubt, to conceal the reason for his return to the United States.

Q. What did Oswald do in America after his return to the United States?

A. He spent several months in Fort Worth, Texas, and then he moved

to Dallas, where he got a job at a type-setting firm called Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall. This company was involved with highly classified work for the Army Map Service. It received long lists of names of cities in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba which were typeset and then returned to the Army Map Service, where they were affixed to maps. These maps were made by America’s spy satellites and U-2 spy planes. Oswald thus had access to lots of cities that were U.S. intelligence targets in Russia, Cuba, and China. This, you should remember, was during the Cuban missile crisis, when the focus of America’s spy satellites was of great interest to Russia.

Q. Could Oswald’s working here have been a coincidence?

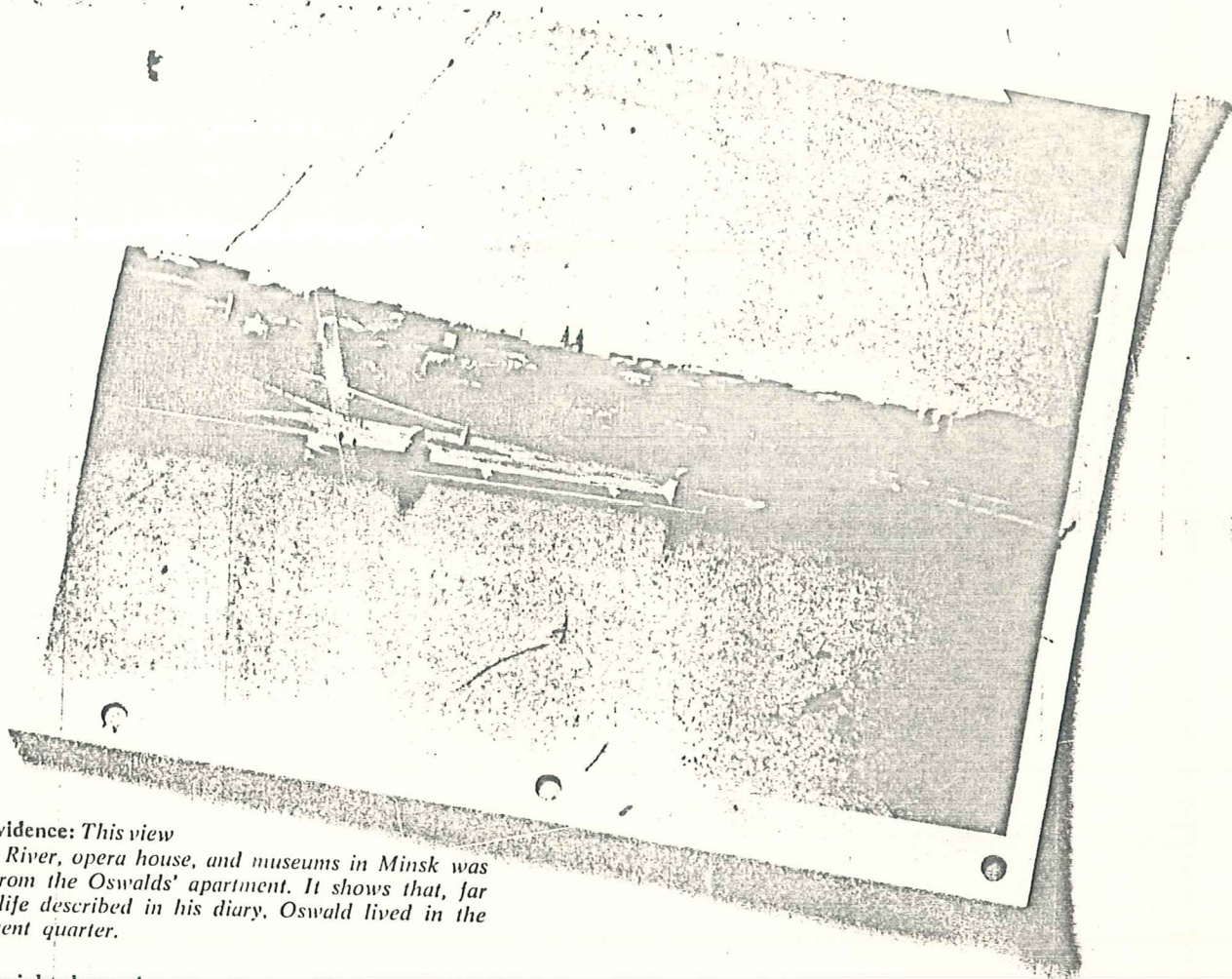
A. I don’t think so. In his address book, Oswald wrote down the words “micro dots” under the name Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall. Microdot is a basic technique of espionage in which information is miniaturized and then mailed to a contact. And you have to remember that what Oswald was doing before he went to the Soviet Union also had to do with aerial reconnaissance, that is, monitoring U-2 flights. It would seem too much of a coincidence that his job on returning to the United States involved the same kind of information.

Q. Did the Warren Commission attempt to find out anything about the nature of the work that went on at Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall?

A. The commission knew that the firm did classified work, but it accepted the testimony of the company’s president that Oswald had no access to the special section where the secret work took place. However, when I and my researchers interviewed the firm’s employees, we found that *all* workers there, including Oswald, had access to all parts of the plant. Security procedures were not strongly enforced.

Q. Are you saying that Oswald was engaged in espionage while he was working at Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall?

A. Yes. He could easily have photographed the highly classified information there. One of Oswald’s fellow employees, Leonard Calverley, whose name was written in Oswald’s address book, told me that after Oswald’s death the FBI questioned him about Oswald’s work at Jaggars, and showed him a leather pouch in which it was suspected



Contradictory evidence: *This view of the Svisloch River, opera house, and museums in Minsk was photographed from the Oswalds' apartment. It shows that, far from the drab life described in his diary, Oswald lived in the city's most affluent quarter.*

that Oswald might have kept a camera. The FBI men asked Calverley never to mention their visit.

Q. Did the Warren Commission interview Calverley?

A. No.

Q. Did Oswald have any contact with Soviet agents once he had returned to the United States?

A. After leaving Jaggar-Chiles-Stovall, Oswald had several such contacts. The FBI intercepted a letter Oswald wrote to Vitaliy A. Gerasimov at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. At the time the FBI had Gerasimov under surveillance for having participated in clandestine meetings in the United States and for having paid for intelligence information of value to the Soviets. Oswald also went to Mexico City, where he made a telephone call from the Cuban Embassy to the adjacent Soviet Embassy, and was put in touch with Valery Vladimirovich Kostikov, known to the FBI as a Soviet intelligence officer. Oswald then went over to the Soviet Embassy to speak with Kostikov in person.

Q. The CIA had the Cuban and the Soviet embassies under surveillance

with cameras. Did they not have any photographs of Oswald's movements?

A. They should have, but the CIA claimed that the camera at the Cuban Embassy was out of service. They never explained why the camera at the Soviet Embassy failed to get a picture of him. This camera was turned off only on weekends, and Oswald's visits had taken place on a Friday. The only explanation the CIA offered was that Oswald must have entered the Soviet Embassy through a back door.

Q. Did Oswald make any other Soviet contacts?

A. Yes. The FBI intercepted a letter dated November 8, only three weeks before the assassination, in which Oswald told the Soviet Embassy in Washington that he had been unable to get to Havana to conclude "business" with the Soviet Embassy there.

Q. What about Marina?

A. Less than a week after Oswald's FBI interrogation, Marina wrote to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, giving her address in Fort Worth and the number of the residency permit which had been issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow. The embassy routed

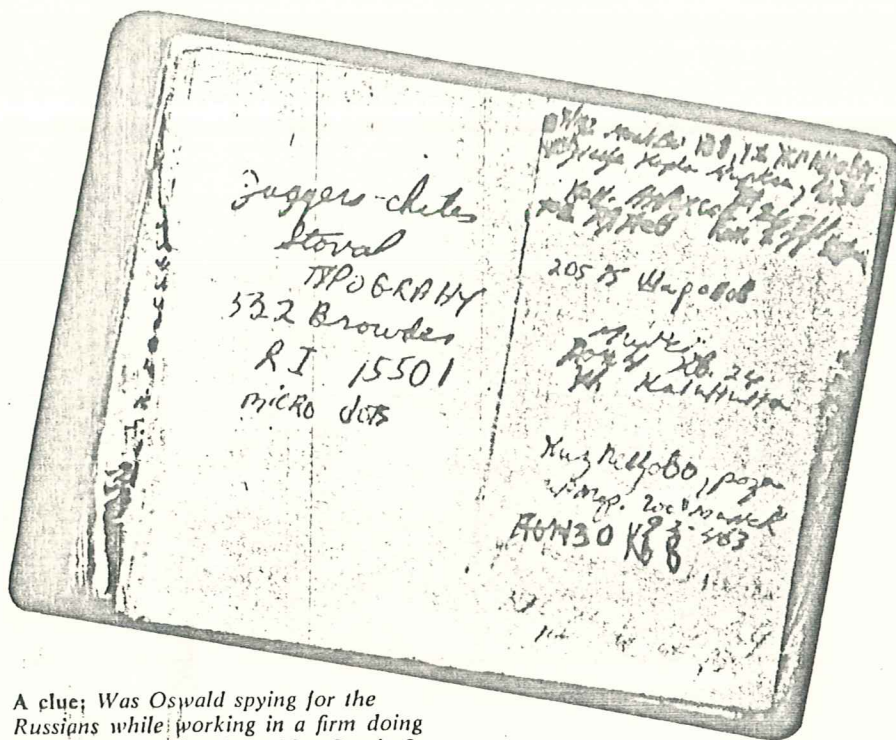
the letter to the attention of "Comrade Gerasimov," a man known to the FBI as paymaster for spies on the Eastern Seaboard. It was not clear whether the Oswalds' contact with him was merely a coincidence or whether it portended a more serious relationship.

Q. The CIA did a number of "name traces" for you. Which was the most productive?

A. Pavel Voloshin's name turned up both in Oswald's address book and on a letter [from Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow] found among Oswald's effects after his death. The CIA "trace" on Voloshin's name showed that he was a KGB officer who had been in the Far East at the same time Oswald was there with the marines, and had visited California in 1959 when Oswald was preparing to defect. He had been in Moscow when Oswald was there, and finally he had been in Amsterdam when Oswald passed through on his way back to the United States in 1962. As James Angleton commented, "When four roads lead to the same place, one concludes that there is cause, not coincidence."

Q. Why did the FBI interview Oswald only twice after he returned to

“... In his address book, Oswald wrote ‘micro dots’—an espionage technique—under a firm doing classified work for the army...”



A clue: Was Oswald spying for the Russians while working in a firm doing secret work for the Army Map Service? Perhaps his address book (above), where he wrote “micro dots”—an espionage technique—under the firm’s name, holds the answer.

the USA—and never interview Marina?

A. Oswald refused to take a lie-detector test the FBI offered. The FBI never informed the Warren Commission of this, but according to William Sullivan of the FBI, the bureau concluded Oswald was hostile—and that he would be uncooperative.

Q. Why didn’t the FBI keep closer tabs on him?

A. You have to ask the FBI. It now turns out that Oswald had written a threatening note to the FBI just weeks before the assassination, and, if Hoover knew of this note—and Sullivan was positive Hoover knew—he perjured himself before the Warren Commission when he testified that the FBI had no indication Oswald was capable of violence. In any case, as Hoover himself later noted in a handwritten memo, the FBI should have had Oswald on its security index but didn’t.

Q. Is it possible that the FBI knew Oswald was in America in order to spy, but chose not to take action?

A. Spies are seldom arrested; they would only be replaced by other spies.

Instead they are neutralized in one way or another. For example, the government on which they are spying can use them as direct information or disinformation channels to the hostile government. This way a spy can be turned around and used to manipulate the hostile agency.

Q. George De Mohrenschildt became a close friend of the Oswalds in Dallas. He told you that J. Walter Moore, the head of the CIA’s Domestic Contact Service in Dallas, was interested in Oswald. Does this mean the CIA had tabs on Oswald?

A. Not necessarily, since I don’t know whether to believe De Mohrenschildt. His connections with the intelligence community go back to the 1930s. He admitted to having worked for French counterintelligence, and had contacts in Polish, Finnish, and German intelligence agencies. He had also been approached by the Soviets. One of the remaining gaps in my research is De Mohrenschildt—I never found out whom he was really working for. He might have been being used by the CIA as part of their debriefing procedure, but he might just as easily

have been part of the Russians’ plans to use Oswald in America.

Q. De Mohrenschildt was very well connected in Dallas society. Do you think the Soviets might have been using him to give Oswald introductions to important people there?

A. I cannot speculate on how the Russians might have been using either Oswald or De Mohrenschildt.

Q. What role do you know for certain De Mohrenschildt played in Oswald’s life?

A. De Mohrenschildt had a unique role. He made three separate attempts to find Marina separate living quarters from her husband. De Mohrenschildt tried to help Oswald find a job and assisted him in moving to Dallas from Fort Worth. De Mohrenschildt did introduce Oswald to a number of very important people in Dallas, including chemical engineers, nuclear scientists, and others with access to technical information.

Q. In your book you mention that De Mohrenschildt took Oswald to Admiral Henry C. Bruton’s house in Dallas. Who was Bruton?

A. He was the former director of naval communications: He had reorganized the global systems the navy uses to control the movements of all its submarines, surface ships, missiles, and airplanes, and to pinpoint the location of enemy vessels. And at the time Oswald was in Dallas, Bruton was still involved in work related to naval communications.

Q. Did the Warren Commission ever speak to Admiral Bruton?

A. No.

Q. Why do you think De Mohrenschildt introduced Oswald to so many important people?

A. I was trying to find the answer to this when he was killed. I don’t believe his involvement with Oswald was altruistic. I believe he was handling Oswald in one way or another for some intelligence agency. I do not know which.

Q. You seem to have been on the verge of filling in a major gap in the Oswald story when De Mohrenschildt died. What was he telling you just before his death?

A. I was going over a 1959 résumé

that De Mohrenschildt had submitted to an oil company in Dallas. It listed his contacts with foreign countries—Iran, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Poland, Haiti, etc. And he began to talk about some of his connections in Haiti, Poland, and Mexico. I was especially interested in an aerial-reconnaissance company called Lundberg. De Mohrenschildt's association with this company gave him an excuse to solicit all sorts of information about oil pipelines and refineries in the United States. Just the kind of data that is highly prized in espionage.

Q. What were his last words to you?

A. He asked me if I would try to get a photograph from a lawyer in Dallas named Pat Russell. De Mohrenschildt explained that the picture was of Oswald with a rifle and was inscribed to him. What was unusual about this photograph was that it was dated April 5, 1963—just about a week before Oswald's attempt to assassinate General Walker. Moreover, Marina had scribbled a Russian phrase on the back of the photograph: "Hunter of Fascists—Ha-ha-ha!!!" which suggests to me that Marina had some foreknowledge that Oswald was about to hunt a "fascist."

Q. When did the photograph come into De Mohrenschildt's possession?

A. De Mohrenschildt said he'd only found the photo in his possession after the assassination. But it seemed to me to be highly unlikely that Marina would have given this picture with its inscription to anyone after Oswald had shot at General Walker.

Q. What do you think you might have learned from De Mohrenschildt had he remained alive?

A. I had hoped to learn who had put him in touch with Oswald, whether he was part of Oswald's debriefing, or whether he was using Oswald as part of some grander espionage scheme.

Q. Now that De Mohrenschildt is dead, should the CIA not clarify its relationship with him?

A. The CIA must explain who in the CIA asked for a "security check" on De Mohrenschildt in 1963, and why. It should also explain whether any other American intelligence agency suspected that De Mohrenschildt was a foreign agent at that time. I sent the CIA a set of interrogatories on these issues (see box), but they refused to give any answers.

Q. Could a congressional committee force the CIA to answer these questions?

A. Yes. Congress has power to over-

see the CIA, and, in my opinion, the Oswald-De Mohrenschildt connection is a legitimate area of concern.

Q. Would a congressional investigation shed any new light on who killed Kennedy?

A. It might clarify Oswald's relationship with the intelligence agencies—both domestic and foreign. I

don't think, however, that it would explain his motive in killing Kennedy.

Q. Do you think the Russians were involved in Kennedy's assassination?

A. No. I think that the fact that Oswald traces so clearly back to the Russians makes it extremely unlikely that they would have recruited him as an assassin.

Four Questions for Admiral Turner

In a final attempt to crack open the Oswald case once and for all, Epstein posed nineteen questions to the CIA director of Central Intelligence. The response came back: "We have reviewed your questions carefully and have determined that they do not constitute a request for reasonably described records as prescribed in the Freedom of Information Act. . . ." Oswald's connections with intelligence agencies will remain a mystery until these questions are answered. Below are excerpts from the appendix to *Legend*, where Epstein lists the unanswered interrogatories:

1. George Sergius De Mohrenschildt told me in an interview a few hours before he committed suicide in 1977 that he had been encouraged to maintain his contacts with Lee Harvey Oswald by J. Walter Moore, an employee of the CIA's Domestic Contact Service in Dallas, in 1962. Did De Mohrenschildt, in fact, discuss Oswald with Moore? If so, was it for the purpose of gaining information for the CIA? Did the CIA's inspector general or other investigative element conduct an investigation into the Dallas office of the Domestic Contact Service to ascertain whether there were any direct or indirect contacts with Oswald?

Implication: The answer to this question would establish whether De Mohrenschildt was working on behalf of the CIA or whether he was lying to obscure and confuse his relationship with Lee Harvey Oswald and/or hide a relationship with another intelligence service.

2. According to CIA document 431-154B, obtained under a Freedom of Information action in 1976, the Office of Security of the CIA was requested by a CIA case officer to perform an "expedite check" on De Mohrenschildt, which it furnished on April 29, 1963. Is it common for the CIA to request an "expedite check" on a United States citizen still residing in the United States? If not, what were the circumstances requiring a check of De Mohrenschildt? Was he an employee at any time of the CIA? Was he suspected of being involved in espionage activities?

Implication: The answers to this interrogatory would establish once and for all which component of the CIA had an interest in De Mohrenschildt at the time he was involved with Lee Harvey Oswald, and particularly whether De Mohrenschildt was considered a friendly or hostile agent.

3. In a CIA memorandum written on November 25, 1963, a CIA staff employee reports that he had suggested that Oswald be interviewed on his return from Russia by the Domestic Contact Service or other "suitable channels" so as to provide possible data for the biographic and foreign-personality dossiers the CIA maintains. Was this request ever forwarded to the Domestic Contact Service? If so, which field office? Was Oswald ever contacted? If not, why not? Was he considered "hostile" or possibly in the employ of another intelligence service?

4. If Oswald was not contacted because he was considered "hostile," what other "suitable channels" were considered? Were any surreptitious means used? Was any individual asked to speak to Oswald about his experiences in Russia?

Implication: If Oswald was suspected of being "hostile," or under Soviet control, the CIA may have placed a friendly source in Oswald's path so he could be unwittingly debriefed. (Any more direct method of debriefing a "hostile" agent would only expose the CIA's methods and procedures to a foreign government.) Was this, in fact, what happened? —EJE