

The Company They Kept

DECEPTION: The Invisible War Between the KGB and the CIA

By Edward Jay Epstein
Simon and Schuster. 335 pp. \$19.95

By David Wise

IN HIS BOOK, *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*, published more than a decade ago, author Edward Jay Epstein was the first to bring to the surface the astonishing warfare inside the Central Intelligence Agency that had swirled around the mysterious—some preferred the term sinister—figure of James Angleton, chief of counterintelligence for 20 years.

At the time the book appeared, it was widely assumed in intelligence circles that much of its information about the battle over two defectors, whose information clashed, had been leaked by Angleton. Now in his new book, Epstein confirms that speculation. He had interviews with Angleton, he says, "from 1977 to 1987."

Fortunately, he saved his notes. The first half of *Deception* goes over the now-familiar territory of the war of the defectors, but with considerable new information. This time, Angleton is quoted directly. "Whatever inhibitions I had about

David Wise is the author of "The Spy Who Got Away," a book about Edward Lee Howard, the first CIA defector to the Soviet Union.

publishing this material while he was alive were lifted when he died in April 1987," Epstein writes. (Dead sources don't complain.)

Since the book is based, at least in part, on these interviews, it will provide a mother lode of material for Angleton's biographers, who are already hard at work. The familiar, mythic figure of Angleton is sketched here once again—the patient trout fisherman, cultivator of orchids, Yale poet, and OSS operative; the frail, chain-smoking, stooped figure in the black homburg—in short, Central Casting's idea of what a CIA counterintelligence chief should look like.

The CIA's troubles began when a KGB defector, Yuri Nosenko, turned up in Geneva early in 1964 and was spirited out of Switzerland by the CIA. Nosenko said he had handled Oswald's KGB file, and that the Soviet spy agency had no interest in, or links to, President Kennedy's assassin. Angleton did not believe him, about Oswald or anything else. He placed his chips on Anatoly Golitsyn, another KGB officer, who had defected in Helsinki in 1961. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had Soviet sources in New York who seemed

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to support Nosenko, so the plot got rather interesting.

Epstein leaves no doubt that he subscribes to Angleton's view of the world as a labyrinth of deception. In one of the more entertaining, if stagey, passages, Angleton takes Epstein and the reader on a tour of Kensington Orchids, a greenhouse in Maryland. Here is a flower of the genus *Epidendrum* that simulates the nectar that mosquitoes feed on, tricking the insects into pollinating the orchids. Another, "The Tricerus" (Epstein undoubtedly means *Trichoceros*), uses "pseudocopulation." The orchid "has on its flower a three-dimensional replica of the underside of a female fly." The male fly attempts to have sex with the orchid, but succeeds only in getting covered with pollen that he delivers to the next deceitful orchid.

Angleton, Epstein realizes, was not just talking orchids. "They were a metaphor for a world in which he saw deception as a norm rather than an aberration."

Translated into political terms, Angleton's (and Epstein's) *Weltanschauung* is one of constant Soviet deception. Moscow sends out false defectors to tie the CIA into pretzels.

The simpletons in Langley fall for it every time; let a Nosenko or a Vitaliy Yurchenko show a little ankle and the Soviet division of the Clandestine Services falls in love. Only Angleton's CI staff could act as a counterweight to all this, but then in 1974 William Colby fired Angleton, and the place went to hell in a handbasket.

Shorthand, perhaps, but not a wholly inaccurate summary of the Angletonian world view. There is, of course, a germ of truth in all this; the Soviets *are* tricky folks—wasn't Ronald Reagan always telling us to "trust but verify"—and case officers do tend to believe in the marvelous sources, defectors, and double agents they have developed, whose information may help advance their careers to supergrade. The difficulty is that the truth is always elusive, the more so in intelligence, and Angleton in the end appeared to have gotten hopelessly lost in his "Wilderness of Mirrors," as David C. Martin entitled his superb book on the subject several years ago.

The deception of which Epstein writes is not limited to counterintelligence. The Russians sent out false telemetry from their missiles, Epstein says, the National Security Agency's eavesdroppers picked up the signals and the CIA was misled into thinking Soviet missiles were much less accurate than

they turned out to be. And so on.

In the second half of his book, Epstein traces the history of deception in World War II, winding up with the conclusion that Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* is the sixth time in this century that the Soviet leopard has changed its spots for an ever-gullible American public.

Epstein seemingly believes that the Russians are 10 feet tall and able at will to hornswoggle the nation's intelligence establishment and its policy makers. It is a safe view that has the advantage that, if the Soviets do behave badly after embracing détente, the skeptic can always say, "I told you so." But if the view is wrong, who will know?

ONE DOES not have to be a believer in the Angleton-Epstein philosophy, however, to find the book engrossing. For example, most U.S. counterintelligence experts believe, on balance, that Yurchenko, the Soviet double defector, was a turncoat who changed his mind and went home for the kind of black bread and blini that you just can't find in McLean. Epstein lays out the most carefully reasoned case to date for the view, whether true or not, that Yurchenko was just another guileful KGB-nik all along.

There are a disturbing number of errors in *Deception*. Edward Lee Howard, the CIA defector to the Soviet Union, was not spotted by the FBI at the Soviet embassy in Wash-

ington. (Had that happened, he might have been caught.) But there is a much more serious error: Epstein argues Howard may not have been in a position to betray Adolf Tolkachev, an important Soviet asset for the CIA, because Tolkachev "had not yet been recruited when Howard left the CIA in 1983." Stansfield Turner has said that as CIA director under Jimmy Carter, he was well aware that Tolkachev was a major agency source in Moscow. Nicholas Daniloff, in his absorbing book, *Two Lives, One Russia*, reports that Tolkachev's contacts with the CIA date back even earlier, to the Nixon administration.

There are other bloopers. "Vincent Marchetti," is presumably Victor Marchetti but he was never a deputy director of CIA, as Epstein identifies him. Nor was David Blee ever head of "the clandestine part of the CIA," a term that usually refers to the Directorate of Operations. These are not all minor matters, but it would be unfair to conclude that they undermine the credibility of the entire book, as cantankerous reviewers sometimes like to say.

Deception is a fact of life, beyond doubt, among nations no less than individuals. Governments lie, to each other and to their own people. Yet, if there is any hope for humanity it is in moving beyond deception to some form of trust, before it is too late. If fear of deception blocks control of strategic arms, for example, the final con game will be played on ourselves. ■