

A Letter From The CIA Limbo

Washington

Nearly eight years ago, a letter was mailed from the Soviet Union to Robert M. McElwain, a Massachusetts teacher.

It never reached its destination, but McElwain has finally received a copy of it, courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency.

McElwain wrote to the CIA several months ago, asking to see any file it might have compiled on him. He made his request under the Freedom of Information Act. He hardly expected the agency to know who he was.

But McElwain received a brief letter, noting the CIA had a "single reference" to the 38-year-old Harvard, Mass., resident who teaches French and Spanish in a Lincoln, Mass., junior high school.

The file was "classified and divulges intelligence sources and methods," the CIA letter said, and could therefore not be released.

His curiosity aroused, McElwain decided to appeal the decision and enlisted the aid of his congressman, Rep-

resentative Robert F. Drinan (Dem-Mass.).

On May 21, John F. Blake, chairman of the CIA's Information Review Committee, sent McElwain a letter informing him that the agency had decided to release the file. It contained a copy of the missing letter from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet letter was written Aug. 18, 1967, by a Russian teacher whom McElwain and his wife had met earlier while the Russian was studying at Harvard Business School.

In 64 words, including salutations and closing, the Russian said he was preparing his teaching materials and planned to spend his vacation at the Black Sea.

The CIA decided the message was worth saving on microfilm, but it says it does not know why the original letter never reached McElwain.

"We can all wonder as much as we want to, but we're not going to discuss the matter further," a CIA spokesman said.

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