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The Berlin Spy Tunnel - Part II

Lead: In 1954 the Central Intelligence Agency dug a 1400 foot tunnel under the border of East Berlin to spy on Soviet military messages. It was an engineering triumph, but there was one hitch. The Soviets knew it was there.

Intro.: "A Moment In Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: George Blake was a member of the British Secret Intelligence Service. During the early days of the Korean War he was captured by the North Koreans and

held for three years. Sometime during his prison stay he went over to the other side. In 1954, when the spy tunnel was first discussed by the CIA and its British counterpart, MI6, Blake was in the meeting, took extensive notes, and passed the sketches and drawings to his KGB control officer within two days.

All during the construction phase of the \$25,000,000 tunnel, the Soviets were aware of what was taking place and permitted it to continue. They simply diverted really important data from the telephone and telegraph lines tapped as a result of the project and the six hundred tape recorders used by the CIA to record conversations filled up with such exciting gossip as the fact

Soviet military officials were engaged in smuggling luxury items back to Russia, hardly in itself an intelligence gold mine.

In the spring of 1956, an East German repairman discovered the tunnel searching for a fault in one of the cables. Moisture had gotten in and the line went dead. The Soviets had a propaganda field day complete with guided tours of the Soviet end of the tunnel. At first the United States denied responsibility, but the presence of a water pump made in Seneca Falls, N.Y., tended to put the lie to this evasion. Most of the western press treated the story with great amusement, as if to say, 'well, those intelligence boys will be boys.'

Blake was caught in 1961 and under questioning confessed and after a time in jail escaped to Moscow. His arrest called into question the value of the enormous quantity of material collected but its sheer volume tended to make the CIA conclude that a disinformation program was impossible. The Soviets routed their important data elsewhere and that left the CIA to collect useless material by the hour every day. Why did they leave it so long? CIA personnel reasoned that the Russians let it go on for so long to protect Blake from suspicion since he would have been one of the logical suspects. Also, the prospect of tying up hundreds of Allied intelligence operatives,

recording, translating and reading the seemingly endless and virtually useless material must have been very appealing.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Huntington, Thomas. "The Berlin Spy Tunnel Affair," American Heritage of Invention and Technology 10 (4, Spring, 1995), 44-52.

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