

aka Rudolf Ivanovich Abel

A STONE FOR WILLY FISHER



On 11 July 1903 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, a son was born to Henry M. Fischer and his wife, Lyubov. The child was named William August; the family name was anglicized to Fisher.

Genrikh Matveyevich Fischer and his bride, Lyubov Vasilevna Karneyeva, a midwife, had emigrated to England from Baltic Russia in 1900, joining the more than 30,000 Russian emigres already in London. Henry (as he called himself) settled in Newcastle and began to work intensely on behalf of Lenin and the Bolsheviks by smuggling copies of the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* into Russia aboard Russian ships that called at Newcastle as well as nearby Blyth and Sunderland. The Fishers quickly integrated into local life and their son Willy grew up in Newcastle as a typical local schoolboy except for his involvement with the senior Fisher's underground party work. At school, Willy excelled in mathematics and was enthusiastic about sports, but his greatest delight was helping his father in the distribution of anti-war leaflets to factory and dockworkers. The leaflets carried a message urging workers to refuse to bear arms and turn against the imperialist, colonialist powers fighting for foreign territory. Willy was 12 years old when World War I broke out. The Fisher family was perceived by the British government and neighbors to be Germans and they suffered a good deal of the animosity directed against Germans and other "enemy aliens" during the war years. (Both of Henry Fisher's parents were descended from German settlers in the Baltic as were some of Lyubov's family; however, the family considered itself to be Russian). After the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917 and were faced with Allied disapproval and a threat of military intervention, a "Hands Off Russia" movement was established. Willy was soon helping his father distribute leaflets and organize street corner meetings for this new movement.

In 1921, Henry Fisher yielded to persuasion from Moscow and decided to return to Russia. In Moscow, the Fishers were given temporary quarters in the Kremlin until permanent arrangements could be made. The important position Henry Fisher hoped for in the new government failed to materialize. Henry Fisher reluctantly accepted the fact that he was destined to remain on the fringe of the new Soviet government, but his idealistic enthusiasm for communism never flagged.

Young Willy was sent to a special school for English-speakers which followed a regular Soviet curriculum but included a daily period of Russian language instruction. He experienced great difficulty with Russian and never attained native fluency and, although he ultimately learned to speak, read, and write Russian quite well, he always retained his noticeable foreign accent.

Willy was moved into a student dormitory. Together with some other students, he acquired an enthusiasm for the new marvel of radio communications. This enthusiasm led him to become a radio amateur and his new hobby would alter the course of his life. In a 1966 magazine article, he recalled:

In our free time many of us diverted ourselves as radio amateurs. That was the time of detector receivers, spark transmitters—we only heard of radiotelephony as something that was in its infancy. It would be hard for today's youth to conceive of the inventiveness of amateurs of that time. We obtained the wire for coils by removing it from old apartment doorbells that did not work. We found the crystals used for detectors in rocks or in geological collections. The condensers for tuning were of all sizes and shapes. I remember how I managed in 1923 to obtain an R-5 lamp that took an incredible amount of energy to heat up. I remember how we had to improvise to make the wet cells feed this lamp, which shone while in use no worse than any good burner.

In 1922, Willy Fisher was accepted for membership in Komsomol, the Communist Party youth organization. At the same time, he decided to become a radio engineer. When he had completed his technical schooling and passed the qualifying examination he was able to obtain employment in a radio components factory. He also enrolled in an evening study course concentrating on science, physics, and mathematics.

In 1924 he was called up for military service and was assigned to a Soviet Army independent radiotelegraph battalion. He was demobilized during the winter of 1926 and had to decide what his future employment would be. According to his recollection, "I had two offers—a scientific research institute and the OGPU's Foreign Department. I was attracted by radio technology as well as by the romance of espionage. Comrades argued that my knowledge of foreign languages must be used in the service of the motherland. Finally the decision was made, and I became a Chekist on May 2, 1927."¹

Training

The reasons why the organs of state security would have an interest in young Willy Fisher are clear:

- His background indicated political reliability;
- He was native-fluent in English; adequate in French and German;
- He was a radio communications expert;
- He had a genuine British passport.

William August Fisher, like all other new recruits, went through an intensive training course. His instructors gave him high evaluations and noted, in

¹ There is reason to believe that Willy's decision was more difficult for him than it was later made to appear. He was under pressure by recruiters from the OGPU, his friends and, most importantly, his father, to accept the offer from state security. Major General V. Drozdov of the KGB observed, "It must be said that Abel himself reacted to this without any enthusiasm, as he was interested above all in radio technology and dreamed of a scientific career. But, like a disciplined Komsomol member, he did not refuse the new appointment."

Fisher/Abel

particular, his unusual manual dexterity; he could do anything with his hands. While at the KGB training school, Fisher became friendly with another student, an open and forthright young man named Rudolf Ivanovich Abel. They would remain close friends and colleagues for life.

Upon completion of training, Fisher was assigned to KGB headquarters in Moscow for work in the Illegals Administration. In Moscow, he met an attractive young music conservatory student, Yelena Stepanovna Lebedeva, and they were married during the next year. Not long after the wedding, he received orders for his first foreign assignment as an "illegal." Willy Fisher was assigned to work in Great Britain and was supervised by Alexander Orlov, who operated from the rezidentura in Paris. (Although Fisher entered Britain under his own name with his British passport and his presence there was technically "legal," the KGB considered him to be an illegal.) He worked in Britain until 1931, then returned to the Soviet Union. Willy and Yelena's only child, a daughter named Evalina, was born the following year. Shortly after Evalina's birth, Willy was alerted for his next assignment: Copenhagen. When he arrived in Denmark, Fisher learned that all intelligence networks in Nazi Germany that had survived the Gestapo had been removed. Only individual agents, able to continue to work alone, were left in place.²

Fisher's superiors told him that the nets had been relocated to nearby countries such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, but that he was not to become involved in German operations. In the event of war, Moscow expected that most of the small countries of Europe would fall under Nazi occupation. Willy Fisher's mission was to organize stay-behind networks; to train Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes as radio operators for the nets that would be activated when a German occupation took place. For the next several years, he was kept busy traveling throughout Scandinavia in this work.

In 1937, Fisher was ordered to return to Moscow immediately. The Soviet Union was in the middle of the "Great Purge." Fisher had reasons to be nervous. His status as the son of an "Old Bolshevik" no longer offered him any protection; many "Old Bolsheviks" had already disappeared. His foreign birth and former assignment to work under Alexander Orlov (who had recently defected) were additional black marks against him. Soon after his return, he was called into the head office and dismissed from the service without explanation. Yelena was furious and wanted to initiate an intensive campaign for reinstatement. Willy was more sanguine; he calmed Yelena down and explained that such an effort was bound to have negative effects. He told an old friend in conversation, "The organs of state security may leave you, but you do not leave the organs." He and Yelena agonized because dismissal was usually followed by arrest. Fisher, however, was allowed to remain at liberty and he obtained employment as a radio engineer.

After Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941, Fisher expected recall into active military service. Instead he found himself recalled to the KGB and assigned to the Fourth Administration to conduct partisan warfare against the

² Stalin ordered removal of the nets in Germany because he feared Hitler would use evidence of their existence as an excuse for an attack on the Soviet Union.

Germans. Fisher and his old friend Abel worked together training radio operators who were infiltrated behind German lines to work with partisan groups.³ They also trained "stay-behind" agents and ran a "funkspiel" operation in which German agents were doubled back to German intelligence.

After World War II ended, Soviet-American relations deteriorated and in 1948 the leadership in Moscow became more concerned about the possibility of war with the United States. Soviet-trained and equipped military forces in North Korea were planning for the invasion of South Korea and a Soviet nuclear weapon was in the final stage of development prior to detonation. Against this background, the Soviet intelligence services began planning for new contingencies.

In the event of a war with the United States, the KGB's legal residencies would be closed and espionage activities would have to employ the "illegal" residencies and some possible limited help from "friendly" embassies in Washington. The KGB's Illegals Administration assumed a more important role in planning future espionage activities targeted against the United States. Willy Fisher's extensive capabilities and experience made him an obvious candidate for his next assignment. He was a trained engineer with studies in nuclear physics and had a broad base of practical experience in organizing and planning stay-behind operations and clandestine communications. The Illegals Administration was planning for activities which could make use of all of his skills.

On 14 November 1948 the ship *Scythia*, which had sailed from Hamburg, arrived in Quebec and a man with identification as Andrew Kayotis, a naturalized US citizen, debarked and entered the United States several days later. The real Andrew Kayotis had been a Latvian immigrant who lived and worked in Detroit for many years. After World War II, Kayotis returned to Latvia to seek out and visit relatives still living there. In Latvia, he fell ill and died in a local hospital. Kayotis' passport was used by Fisher for his entry into the United States. Before settling in New York City, he traveled around the country for almost a year. In New York, he normally used the name Emil R. Goldfus and, occasionally, the name Martin Collins. (The real Emil Goldfus was born on 2 August 1902 and died several months later; the birth certificate for Goldfus used by Fisher was genuine. There was no Martin Collins; the Collins birth certificate carried by Fisher was a forgery.)

Fisher worked diligently to meet the agents for whom he was responsible and apparently worked to develop some new agents.⁴ After settling in New York City where he assumed a cover as an artist and photographer, Fisher was informed that Moscow was sending an officer to assist him in his work.

Assistant

The Moscow Center selected an individual of Finnish background and equipped him with a cover establishing that he was born of Finnish immigrant parents in Enaville, Idaho on 30 May 1919 and named Eugene Nicoli Maki. (The

³ One of the young radio operators trained by Fisher was Konon Molody, later to become well known as a spy using the name of Gordon Lonsdale.

⁴ Among Fisher's agents were the Rosenbergs and the Krogers (Morris and Lona Cohen, later to become famous in the Portland Naval Base spy case in Britain).

Fisher/Abel

Maki family returned to Finland in 1927 and their eventual fate is unknown.) Upon arrival in New York on 20 October 1950, the assistant (whose real name was Reino Hayhanen) made his initial contact with Mikhail N. Svirin, first secretary of the Soviet UN delegation. (This contact by an "illegal" with a "legal" resident violated longstanding operational procedures. It is believed that the instructions were based upon the rationale that Hayhanen, a novice, would need money and communications and these could be provided through the "legal" rezidentura.) Hayhanen located himself in Brooklyn and performed his assigned duties as a contact officer or courier and also serviced dead drops for Svirin. He spent most of his time, however, drinking in Brooklyn bars in Finnish neighborhoods and his KGB masters began to be disenchanted with him. Toward the end of 1953, Hayhanen's behavior began to attract the attention of local authorities and in April 1954, he found it necessary to leave the United States. Upon his return, he had his first operational meeting with Fisher sometime in July or August 1954 in the men's room of a Flushing movie theater.

During 1954 and 1955, Hayhanen tried to satisfy the demanding Fisher, but without success. Fisher was completely dismayed by the inept and alcoholic Hayhanen. The more pressure Fisher put on Hayhanen, the more Hayhanen drank. In June 1955, while on a visit to Moscow, Fisher complained to Moscow Center about his assistant. Moscow agreed that Hayhanen should be relieved but instructed Fisher to exercise care. Fisher returned to New York in December and learned that during his absence Hayhanen had embezzled \$5,000 that was supposed to have been delivered to an agent. Hayhanen also had shrouded the windows of the photographic shop he was supposed to be operating as a cover, thus drawing attention to the place. Hayhanen and his wife drank such quantities of whiskey that the garbage collectors threatened to stop picking up the empty bottles.

Fisher met Hayhanen in July 1956 and told his assistant that because he had been working under a strain and since his store had not been opened, he ought to take a vacation. Several months later, Hayhanen received a message from Moscow notifying him that home leave had been approved and that he had been promoted to lieutenant colonel. Hayhanen, while incompetent, was not stupid. He concluded that his trip to Moscow was probably not going to be a vacation and he was unenthusiastic about the promotion. He had heard about individuals who were promoted just prior to a trip home and who were never heard from again. He stalled and made excuses about his departure but Fisher was persistent and Hayhanen finally sailed for France on 24 April 1957. In Paris, Hayhanen met a KGB officer and received additional funds and instructions to travel to Moscow via Frankfurt on the following day. The next day, instead, he went to the American embassy and defected. The embassy made arrangements to turn Hayhanen over to the FBI.

Hayhanen gave the FBI a physical description of Fisher and information concerning his activities. While he did not know the precise location of the studio loft that Fisher had rented for his cover as an artist-photographer, he provided enough details for the FBI to find the building and establish surveillance. Fisher had taken a short trip to Daytona Beach, Florida and on his return 11 May, the FBI surveillance picked him up. (The FBI was able to spot Fisher because, as

Hayhanen had told them, the bald Fisher habitually wore a unique dark snap-brim fedora with a distinctive white band.) Apparently Moscow had alerted Fisher to Hayhanen's disappearance, and Fisher made plans to depart for the USSR by way of Mexico.

Arrest

On 20 June Fisher was sleeping in a New York hotel when FBI agents knocked on the door. Three agents burst into the room and told him that they believed he was involved in espionage and if he refused to cooperate he would be placed under arrest. The agents referred to him only as "Colonel" and Fisher concluded that Hayhanen must have defected because, aside from his rank, Hayhanen knew him only as "Mark." Fisher told his interrogators there was nothing for him to cooperate about. At the time of his arrest, the FBI agents searched his apartment and studio and found a radio communications receiver, instructions for a clandestine meeting in Mexico City, \$6,500 in small bills, a bankbook showing a balance of \$1,386.22, and



a sandpaper block which had been hollowed out and which contained a transmission schedule for Moscow Central as well as hollowed pencils containing microfilms. They also found the key to a safe-deposit box which was later found to contain \$15,000 in cash, birth certificates for Emil Goldfus and a smallpox vaccination certificate for Goldfus, and a forged birth certificate for Martin Collins.

After several days Fisher was transported to the Alien Detention Facility in McAllen, Texas where his interrogation continued. Fisher revealed nothing for about a week and then, suddenly, said that his name was Rudolf Ivanovich Abel and that he was a Russian citizen. Fisher's admission surprised the FBI. If he was, in fact, an illegal resident it was expected that he would deny any connection with the Soviet Union. The FBI reasoned that Fisher decided that while he could continue to insist he was Emil R. Goldfus, he knew that the US government could prove beyond question that the real Emil R. Goldfus was long deceased. The authorities could also prove that there was no Martin Collins and it would also be easy to produce people from the Detroit area who had known the real Andrew Kayotis. If he remained silent, the Department of Justice could prosecute an alien known as Mark with the aliases of Goldfus, Collins and Kayotis. FBI investigators concluded that by claiming the identity of Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, Fisher communicated to Moscow that he had not and would not cooperate with the FBI; at the same time, the US government had no way to

Fisher/Abel

refute his claim that he was Abel. Informed that there would be a hearing in his case, Fisher selected a local lawyer. Fisher apparently hoped that since the FBI had transported him to Texas, close to the Mexican border, and because he had admitted to be an illegal alien, the US might simply deport him as it had many other illegal entrants. At his hearing, he provided many details (all false) concerning his background. The only correct information he gave was his mother's name and birthplace and that he had departed Moscow in May 1948. In response to the hearing examiner's question; "To what country do you desire to be deported?" he replied, "to the USSR."

On 7 August, Fisher was served with a criminal warrant for his arrest and, after waiving extradition to New York, was designated for trial as a spy amidst a blare of media publicity. After his arraignment, James B. Donovan, a distinguished member of the New York Bar, was appointed by the court as his defense attorney. Donovan, a World War II naval officer who had served with distinction in the Office of Strategic Services, noted at a press conference the difference between the Abel case and the trial of such individuals as the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss. Donovan said, "If the allegations are true, it means that instead of dealing with Americans who have betrayed their country, we are dealing with a Russian citizen, in a quasi-military capacity, who has served his country on an extraordinarily dangerous mission." Donovan's comment set the tone of mutual professional respect between the lawyer and his client.

The Justice Department prosecuted "Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel" on multiple counts of espionage in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York and on 25 October 1957 the jury found him guilty on three counts. His sentencing was scheduled for 15 November and Attorney Donovan argued against the death penalty by saying:

It is my contention that the interest of justice and the national interests of the United States dictate that the death penalty should not be considered because:

(1) No evidence was introduced by the government to show that the defendant actually gathered or transmitted any information pertaining to the national defense;

(2) Normal justification of the death penalty is its possible effect as a deterrent; it is absurd to believe that the execution of this man would deter the Russian military;

(3) The effect of imposing the death penalty upon a foreign national for a peacetime conspiracy to commit espionage should be weighed by the government with respect to the activities of our own citizens abroad;

(4) To date the government has not received from the defendant what it would regard as cooperation; however, it of course remains possible that in the event of various contingencies this situation would be altered in the future and accordingly it would appear to be in the national interest to keep the man available for a reasonable period of time;

(5) It is possible that in the foreseeable future an American of equivalent rank will be captured by Soviet Russia or an ally; at such time an exchange of prisoners through diplomatic channels could be considered to be in the best interest of the United States.

Donovan also argued with respect to a term of imprisonment that, in similar circumstances dating from the 1920s, France had imposed an average sentence of three years. He pointed out that in Britain, prosecution under the Official Secrets Act (the sole statute dealing with such matters) the maximum sentence was 14 years. He closed his argument by saying, "The defendant Abel is a man 55 years old. He has faithfully served his country. Whether right or wrong, it is his country, and I ask only that the court consider that we are legally at peace with that country. I ask that the judgment of the court be based on logic, and justice tempered with mercy."

The court sentenced Abel to 30, 10, and 5 years on the respective counts as well as fines totaling \$3,000. Thus, Abel was to serve 30 years, less time off for good behavior. Donovan appealed the case. The appeals were unsuccessful and Abel was sent to the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta to serve his term.⁵

On 1 May 1960 Francis Gary Powers, piloting a U-2 aircraft over the Soviet Union, was shot down near Sverdlovsk. Powers was subsequently tried and convicted. After protracted and involved negotiations, Donovan arranged an exchange of Abel for Powers, and on 10 February 1962 at the Glienicke Bridge in Berlin, Abel was turned over to the Soviets and Powers accompanied Donovan back to freedom.

About the Man

William August Fisher, alias Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, survived a lengthy career in a clandestine service, successfully for the major part, largely because he left no footprints where he walked. Willy Fisher was impatient with his first boss, Alexander Orlov, because Fisher believed that Orlov was too careless and indifferent to basic tradecraft. The dissolute Hayhanen must have driven Fisher to distraction. James Donovan, his court-appointed (and unpaid) attorney, said, "For the Colonel's court-assigned lawyer, the long hours were more than compensated by the fascination of the case. Part of this was the nature of the legal issues and their challenge, but most of it was the man Abel." Many of the insights into the character of Fisher are found in the detailed diary Donovan kept. For example, his disciplined character is illustrated by detailed instructions for appeal given to his attorney. Donovan remarked, "Rudolf, I concluded, must have been a hard man to please when on the job." To have been a second lieutenant under Colonel Abel in his heyday must have required self-discipline and meticulous attention to every detail. Hayhanen had never made the grade.

⁵ Abel was aggravated at the severity of his sentence because Master Sergeant Roy Adair Rhodes, USA, who had testified against him on a collateral matter, had received a sentence of only three years on a conviction of multiple counts of espionage. Rhodes had been compromised by the KGB while serving with the US Embassy in Moscow and later provided the Soviets with data from NSA and other sources in return for considerable sums of money.

Fisher/Abel

Fisher was demonstrably a man of many talents and adaptable to many situations. While detained in the Federal Detention Facility in New York, he noted many deficiencies in the prison and drew up a set of plans for rehabilitation of the facility by which better use could be made of space and cost savings could be realized. The warden, impressed by the drawings, sent them to the Federal Prisons Bureau in Washington where they were well received and approved. Unfortunately, there was no money to do the work.⁶

When Abel learned that Donovan was on the Board of an art museum in New York, he wrote an essay on modern art for him. On a more professional note, Abel read in the newspapers that Donovan, on a committee supporting the organization of the Central Intelligence Agency, had testified before Congress, made speeches to civic groups, and had written articles on the subject. Abel gave Donovan a critique of one of the speeches:

I think you did a good job considering space limitations; I might quibble that some aspects were emphasized more than they need have been (i.e., Soviet lead in rocketry being due to overt intelligence . . .).

The aspect that seems to me to be least developed relative to the others is that of evaluation. As a lawyer you know how difficult it is to obtain a true picture from evidence given by eyewitnesses to an occurrence. How much more difficult must it be to evaluate political situations when the sources are human beings, with their own political opinions coloring their statements. One of the dangers in the assessment of information lies in the possibility that the men responsible will themselves slant the evaluation in response to their own opinions and prejudices. This demand for objectiveness in evaluation, i.e., restraining the evaluation to the question of the factual correctness of the information, is paramount.

The determination of policy is not the function of intelligence, although some—particularly the Germans during World Wars I and II—may try to influence policymaking by biasing their information. This is one of the greatest mistakes an intelligence organization can make.

Not long before his release from prison and the exchange, Fisher remarked to Donovan, "I am no longer of much use to my service. I can never again be used outside my country." This comment shows that Fisher had a realistic view of his future employment. Even so, he did expect to be received as befitted an officer with long and honorable service. (Trusting a returned spy is something that has never been a hallmark of the KGB.) In the case of Fisher, the treatment was downright shabby. When he returned to Moscow, he found that his family

⁶ On another occasion, the warden received a complaint from the attorney of another prisoner who had been assigned to Abel's cell. The lawyer said, "It's cruel and unusual punishment, and downright un-American to compel my client to share a cell with a convicted Russian spy. People might say my client is a Commie." The client was Vincent J. Squillante, a Mafia king of the garbage hauling racket in New York. Abel calmed Squillante down by getting him to scrub the cell and clean it up. In return, Abel gave Squillante French lessons. Later, Abel was put out because Squillante was moved to another prison before he progressed beyond the regular verbs. When Squillante was released from prison in 1963, he was murdered in Connecticut by a rival gang.

no longer occupied their two-room apartment on the Second Lavrskiy Pereulok but had been moved to a smaller unit (27 square meters) on Prospekt Mira. He was further disappointed in not receiving the award, "Hero of the Soviet Union," particularly since this honor had been awarded to Ramon Mercader, Trotsky's assassin.

Fisher continued to work at the KGB headquarters in Moscow. Mainly, he gave lectures to trainees or visited East European capitals for ceremonies (such as dedication of a monument to Richard Sorge in East Berlin) or, on one occasion, meeting a high ranking Catholic Church dignitary in Budapest. "I'm just a museum exhibit," he told a friend.

After Fisher returned to Moscow from his American imprisonment, he confided to friends his dissatisfaction with the headquarters mentality as well as with the newer leadership in the KGB. This did not represent a sudden change in his outlook because of disappointment.

In 1955, when he was on home leave trying to rid himself of Hayhanen, he had spoken, according to one friend, about his confusion concerning organizational changes: Beria was now gone; Abakumov had been arrested and executed, and Molotov was headed for oblivion. Fisher had been particularly critical of changes in the First Main Administration as being vastly overstaffed. "It took two hundred people today," he said, "to do work that had been done by five people in the old days. The inclusion of a single paragraph in an enciphered message required the signature of a department chief." After his experiences in World War II, Willy Fisher expressed to a colleague the feelings of a field man who never had much esteem for his bosses in Moscow. In earlier years, he observed, the bosses had at least been individuals with lengthy personal experience and possessed of the revolutionary ideals that made them serve the cause. The new bosses, he said, "were an altogether different breed of self-centered careerists with no aims other than to advance themselves and move into privileged positions."

The final blow came during the summer of 1971. Fisher applied for leave, intending to continue some work on the dacha he had inherited from his parents. A secretary on the administrative staff asked him why he was going to take leave since she was typing his retirement papers. "Once you're retired, you can rest all you want," she said. After so many years of devoted service, to learn of a forced retirement from a secretary was a blow to Fisher's pride. His health failed and he died of cancer on 15 November 1971. His body lay in state for several days in a building behind the Lubyanka headquarters of the KGB, then, after cremation, his remains were buried in the Cemetery of the Monastery of the Don under a tombstone which identified him as Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel. This was too much for the devoted Yelena Stepanovna. Enraged, she conducted a vigorous campaign for most of the next year. Finally successful, on the anniversary of his death, family and friends attended a dedication of a new tombstone correctly identifying him as William Genrikhovich Fisher (and in smaller letters, as Abel).

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Fisher/Abel

Krasnaya Zvezda, Moscow, 17 November 1971

Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, one of the oldest Chekists, a well-known Soviet Intelligence officer, distinguished employee of the organs of State Security, and member of the CPSU since 1931, died after a serious illness in his 69th year.

R.I. Abel was assigned to work in the organs of the OGPU in accordance with a Komsomol levy in 1927. From then on, for a period of nearly 45 years, he faultlessly carried out complex tasks in the maintenance of our Motherland's security in various sectors of Chekist activity. Rudolf Ivanovich proved to be a daring, experienced intelligence officer and capable leader. He was always distinguished by love of the Motherland, a high sense of duty, party principle, impartiality, and honor.

Being abroad, working there in complicated and difficult circumstances, R.I. Abel displayed exceptional patriotism, tenacity, and steadfastness. His high moral character and manly conduct are widely known, evoking a deep response and arousing sympathy through-out the world.

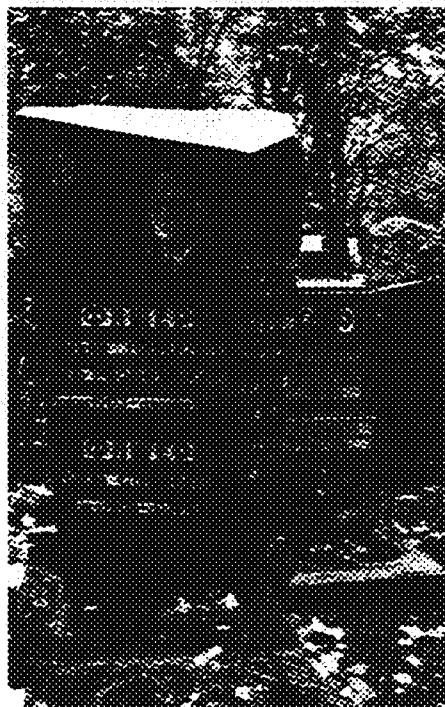
The Communist Party and the Soviet government highly esteemed the services of R.I. Abel, conferring upon him the Order of Lenin, three Orders of the Red Banner, two Orders of the Red Banner of Labor, and the order of the Red Star, and many medals.

Rudolf Ivanovich remained at his combat post until the very last days. He contributed all his strength and knowledge to that honorable cause to which he had dedicated all his magnificent life. He devoted considerable attention to the training of a younger generation of Chekists, transmitting to them his rich experience and indicating the qualities inherent in the first Chekist-Leninist F.E. Dzerzhinski.

Great personal charm, modesty, simplicity, and a sympathetic nature won Rudolf Ivanovich universal esteem and well-deserved authority.

The bright memory of Rudolf Ivanovich will be preserved forever in our hearts.

A Group of Comrades



In 1960, James B. Donovan met with Director of Central Intelligence Allen W. Dulles and CIA General Counsel Lawrence Houston to discuss the implications of exchanging Abel for Powers. During their conversation, Donovan observed, "While I admire Rudolf as an individual, I don't forget that he's KGB. Bars and prison are not going to change his allegiance." Dulles puffed on his pipe and responded, "I wish we had three or four just like him inside Moscow, right now. . ." The Dulles comment would have been a suitable epitaph inscribed on the stone for Willy Fisher.

For Further Reading

Strangers On A Bridge, James B. Donovan, Athenem House, New York (1964).

James Donovan kept a detailed diary from which this book was prepared. Together with his own notes, Donovan extracted items from court and other official records. The book gives characterizations and insights into Rudolf Abel's personality.

Okhotnik Verrkh Nogami (The Hunter, Hunted), Kyrill Khenkin, Kossev Verlag, Frankfurt a/M, (1979).

Khenkin, an emigre living in Germany, has written a comprehensive biography of Abel. Because Khenkin was personally acquainted with the subject for a long time, knew the family and had access to otherwise unavailable material, his book is useful. It is available only in the Russian language.

The Shadow Network-Espionage as an Instrument of Soviet Policy, Edward Van Der Rhoer, Scribner's, New York (1983).

In this rather ponderous tome which covers a broad view of Soviet espionage activities, Van Der Rhoer made use of much of Knenkin's book. The Shadow Network contains some detailed descriptions of Abel's life and work.