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BOB CONSIDINE

Rudolf Abel, 'Master Spy'

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What did "master spy" Rudolf Abel, who died last week in Moscow, spy upon during his nine years in America? He drew a whopping 30-year sentence, twice the penalty imposed on David Greenglass for betraying (for \$500) the innermost secret of the A-Bomb, the lens-trigger.

But Abel's harvest was never detailed during his trial, except that it had to do with snooping around "military secrets." When the FBI marched in on him he was living in a cheap New York 28th Street hotel with a lot of radio receiving equipment. It did not seem quite elaborate enough for a "master spy." Yet the CIA director, Allen Dulles, said at the time of Abel's conviction, "I wish we had three or four like him in Moscow."

The FBI was pretty certain that he was a full colonel in the KGB, the Soviet Union's secret police, and that during World War II he might have infiltrated circles close to Hitler. Abel was a superior linguist. He could even speak Brooklynesse by the time he was nailed.

AT THE TIME of his apprehension and trial the Russians announced that they had never heard of the man. But three years after Abel returned to Moscow — having been swapped for our airborne spy, Francis Gary Powers — he was lauded in Pravda by none other than the KGB director. And in 1936 the popular Soviet magazine "Young Communist" had a big spread on him. It praised his "courage, valor and boundless devotion," and even quoted him on his perilous profession:

"Intelligence work is not a series of rip-roaring adventures, a string of tricks or an entertaining trip abroad. It is, above all, arduous, painstaking work that calls for an intense effort, perseverance, stamina, fortitude, will power, serious knowledge, and great mastery."

He may have been building himself up. Spying against the U. S. is something like spying on Times Square. As the last citadel of the free press we relieve a spy of most of traditional chores. We print or televise or expose in scientific journals just about everything any foreign power wants to know about us. We give it away before a spy can steal it, generally.

WHETHER ABEL was all that he was cracked up to be will never be known nor will he have the

satisfaction now that he is dead, of reading his memoirs and learning from him just what it was that he spied on. He personally couldn't have seen much from that frowsy hotel room, though, of course, it might have been the KGB's hot-line terminal in this country.

When we gave him up in 1962 to get back Gary Powers it was said in Washington that it was a bad deal as trading a 20-game winner for a bat-boy. Abel, by that time, was labeled "master spy," credentials not quite clear. Powers was a plane jockey, albeit an unusual one. He worked for the CIA and his job was to get into a U-2 in a friendly country, fly it very high over the restricted airspace of the Soviet Union and, working from a pre-set plan, take pictures, record military messages, and sniff out radioactive particles and positions of heat-producing installations, such as steel plants. One camera alone cost \$1 million.

He was shot down at 68,000 feet over Sverdlovsk by what must have been one of the earlier versions of the SAM, the air-to-ground missile that was launched extensively from North Vietnam bases during the U.S. bombing of the North.

ABEL WAS GIVEN a medal for whatever it was he did for his bosses. Powers was given the boot out of the CIA flying job, returned to test-fly for Lockheed, which built the high-flying plane in a restricted plant known to the employees as the "Skunk Works," and finally drifted off to write a book. He wouldn't urge that you think of it as your life's work.

The actual swap of the "master spy" and the pathetic pilot — who had served two years of his 10-year sentence by a military tribunal — was something right out of "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold." Under guard, they walked to the middle of a bridge linking East Berlin with West Berlin. It was a fog-shrouded day. Dialogue was unnecessary. Curiously, the mechanics of the deal had been arranged by Abel's trial lawyer, Jim Donovan, and he was present at the exchange.

Now Abel is gone, without telling us what he stole. It must have bemused him, as he died, to realize that despite all that talk, you CAN take it with you.