

Riddle With One Answer

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OPERATION SPLINTER FACTOR.
By Stewart Steven. Lippincott. 249 pp.
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By TED MORGAN

I CAN GO ALONG with Stewart Steven part of the way. I can believe that a Lieutenant Colonel in the Polish secret police named Jozef Swiatlo, who wanted to defect for reasons less ideological than intramural (he was involved in a dispute with a superior), contacted British intelligence in 1948. And that the British passed him on to the CIA, or more specifically, to Allen Dulles, then a lawyer with the firm of Sullivan & Cromwell. But, says the author, Dulles was already deeply involved in espionage operations behind the iron curtain.

At this point my credulity began to strain. Dulles did not join the CIA until 1950. Why was he in charge of what was to become the most important intelligence operation of the cold war? And why would Swiatlo, "the most successful Western agent in the history of the Cold War," be persuaded to remain at his post at high personal risk, rather than defect at once?

But let us suspend disbelief and move ahead with Mr. Steven, former foreign editor of the London Daily Express, now with the Daily Mail. Allen Dulles the cold warrior, he argues, wanted to liberate the captive nations of Eastern Europe. His strategy was to cause the destruction of the liberal, nationalistic leadership in these countries and provoke a Stalinist repression that would become intolerable to the people and lead to revolt. Also, in the context of postwar Western Europe, with France and Italy threatening to go Communist, it was more dangerous to allow a Polish nationalist like Gomulka, who made Communism respectable, to remain in power, than it was to have brutal Stalinist puppet regimes that exposed the inhumanity of Communism. In the late '40s this kind of thinking made sense.

In Swiatlo, Dulles found his provocateur, and he was soon to find his bait in Noel Field, the pro-Communist State Department official who had helped countless Eastern European Communists during World War II as European director of the Unitarian Services mission. In January 1949, Field arrived in Warsaw looking for a job, a sort of unofficial defector to the East.

Swiatlo was told Approved for Release 2004/10/13 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200160010-6
American spymaster who had come to Eastern Europe to recruit agents. Again, this must be seen in the context of post-

war Stalinist paranoia, which credited the Americans with a vast spy network that did not exist. Swiatlo's reports, Steven said, went straight to Stalin, and the Russians became convinced that Field was an important spy who had infiltrated the highest levels of East European governments.

Noel Field disappeared in Prague on May 11, 1949. His wife Herta, who came looking for him, vanished in August, as did his brother Hermann. His adopted German daughter, Erica Glaser Wallach, who went to East Berlin in 1950 to look for Field, also vanished.

Once the bait was swallowed, the purges began. Anyone in Eastern Europe unfortunate enough to have had the most fleeting contact with Field was suspect. "Fieldists" were rounded up everywhere, and many of those arrested confessed and implicated their colleagues and superiors. The important liberal leaders of Eastern Europe were the victims of what Dulles chose to call "Operation Splinter Factor."

Lazlo Rajk, the Hungarian foreign minister, and Traicho Kostov, deputy prime minister of Bulgaria, were arrested, condemned to death, and hanged in 1949. Jozef Swiatlo personally arrested Gomulka in 1951. Most of the accused confessed after long and dehumanizing interrogations. The worst purge took place in Czechoslovakia, where 169,000 Communists, or 10 per cent of the party membership, including the number two man Rudolf Slansky, were arrested.

Stalin, Steven says, saw in the "Fieldists" the vanguard of a world-wide American conspiracy to separate Russia from her satellites. By 1949, he had the atom bomb, and Steven argues that he was prepared to march on West Germany and give the Americans a week to get out of Europe. Steven believes that Stalin was ready for nuclear war: "He was sure that Russia could survive it and that America could not. The American character, he believed, could not withstand a direct hit on New York City."

But before attacking in Europe, Stalin wanted to test America's will to fight, and this is what led to the Korean war. When the Russian United Nations delegate was not in his seat during the vote that set up a UN Korean force, Steven says, the absence was deliberate. Thus, according to him, Operation Splinter Factor indirectly caused the Korean war, as well as the 1956 Potsdam riots in Poland.

And this is where I can no longer go along. For it seems to me that Steven's book suffers badly from the single cause fallacy. To blame so much of the cold war on Operation Splinter Factor is like blaming the French Revolution on the weak character of King Louis XVI. It is an attempt to reduce a highly complex set of events to the orderly format of a riddle

with a single answer. And, in this case, a riddle that the author cannot document. For, as in so many espionage books, no written evidence is produced, and the sources the author talked to wish to remain anonymous.

In an exciting and well-told narrative, Mr. Steven has convinced me that there really was an Operation Splinter Factor organized by the CIA to drive a wedge between the satellites and Russia. But he has failed to convince me that it was the primary cause of Stalinist repression in the Eastern bloc, or that it led to the Korean war and the people's uprisings in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The real nature of such ill-conceived operations is that they become impossible to control, and that it becomes increasingly difficult to see who is holding the weapon's cutting edge. □

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