

# The fall of the Walker spy ring

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The seamy and dark corridors of espionage attracted some of America's best over the years. The motives for such involvement at the expense of the United States and the security of its citizens reflected often an extension of perceived needs.

Occasionally, a strong commitment to an ideology motivated entry into espionage. Recruiters for future spies throughout the Cold War routinely tried to play upon one's weaknesses or one's ego. Fear of your employer or family learning something sordid about you offered an excellent motive for recruitment. Once ensnared, this sword of Damocles guaranteed prescribed behavioral patterns.

The person who would become the KGB's most important spy in America in the 1970s responded to possible financial payments.

While a chief warrant officer in the U.S. Navy, John Walker had sustained several moderate business failures. To recuperate from these failures Walker needed money. He envisioned a rapid reversal of fortunes with ready cash.

He made his first contact with the Soviet Union during a visit to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1968. Walker showed Soviet representatives a month of key settings from the American KL-47 cipher machine.

Personnel in the Navy's command center used the cipher machine with the Atlantic submarine forces. As Walker worked in the center, he had daily and ready access to the machine and the products it produced.

Walker wanted 1,000 dollars a week but settled for a cash advance paid at the Soviet Embassy. At a later meeting he received 5,000 dollars for additional information about the cipher machine. KGB recruiters had just hooked Walker.

To carry out his new assignment as a KGB employee and spy, Walker used a Riga Minox camera. Walter Zapp, a Latvian engineer, created the four and a half ounce camera in 1938 to fit into the palm of one's hand and take up to 50 exposures in rapid succession. The camera's film, about one fourth the size of 35mm film, could be loaded quickly by the operator using a cassette. The easy-to-use and efficient Minox became a favorite tool of spies during the Cold War.

For seventeen years, Walker provided the Soviet Union with information about the internal workings of U.S. Navy equipment and related technical manuals.

Walker received training on how to use a device called a rotor reader to disclose the internal wiring of American cipher rotors. He transferred precise wiring schematics to the KGB.

The Soviets used this information to decipher some of the U.S. Navy's radio messages. As Walker's usefulness to the Soviet KGB grew, he received additional training in a series of secret sessions held in Austria.

All of Walker's additional income promised to come to an abrupt halt when retirement became a reality. Unwilling to accept diminished economic circumstances, he decided to take a big risk. He recruited his son

Michael who was serving an active duty tour in the Navy and his older brother Arthur. Walker then recruited his friend Jerry Whitworth who worked as a Navy communications expert. He now had an organization to carry on his espionage activities once he retired.

Once Walker became established as an agent, the KGB exercised the greatest care in handling him. Above all, the KGB wished to avoid any direct meetings with Walker, especially in the United States. Therefore, he often received instructions from the KGB to travel abroad.

Soviet handlers usually met Walker in Vienna. Here the international backdrop of the city posed a significant advantage. Supplied with maps and explicit directions, Walker would take circuitous routes to his rendezvous points, shadowed all the while by Soviet agents.

In the event Allied representatives followed him, his KGB instructions included alternate meeting locations, times and other information. During a trip to Vienna in 1978 Walker received money and instructions from Soviet agents in exchange for secrets stolen by his friend Jerry Whitworth.

For much of the time he worked as a spy, Walker's wife remained silent. She opted to stop her silence in 1985. After she divorced her husband, Mrs. Walker reported her husband's activities to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

May 17, 1985, under FBI surveillance, Walker went to a pre-arranged site on a country road in rural Maryland, about 25 miles from Washing-

ton, D.C. He had agreed to drop off information in exchange for money. The instructions told him to place an empty soda can at the foot of a utility pole on the side of the road. This would signal a Soviet agent to go by the site.

In this instance, Walker had wrapped up a cache of secret documents in a garbage bag. One of the FBI agents picked up the soda can. The Soviet agent on this occasion returned immediately to the Soviet Embassy in Washington after failing to see the soda can.

The FBI retrieved the garbage bag containing secret materials clandes-

tinely acquired by Walker's son. Later that evening FBI agents arrested Walker and secured the classified information he had attempted to pass to the Soviets. Once in FBI hands, Walker negotiated a plea bargain for himself and his son in exchange for disclosing other members of his spy ring. Federal agents picked up Whitworth and the elder brother shortly after the disclosure and the conclusion of the plea bargain.

John Walker, his brother, his son and Whitworth all went to federal prison. John Walker received a life sentence.

The Walker spy ring ended as

unceremoniously as it began but not after John Walker received over one million dollars in cash, the most any spy had ever received up to that time.

What happened to all of the money? Michael Walker testified he had received only about one thousand dollars. His father had managed all of the funds.

With the Walker spy ring the KGB scored its greatest American success. The damage to American security remained substantial, but by 1990, the collapse of the Soviet Union severely limited any long-term and extensive use of the information purchased from the Walkers. ■

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## family news

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# Folic acid to prevent neural tube birth defects

*courtesy of the Texas Department of Health*

**T**housands of babies with a life-threatening neural tube defect are born in the U.S. each year. A new federal Food and Drug Administration requirement for a B vitamin in grain products may help change that, but it's not enough.

American consumers will begin seeing enriched grain products with added folic acid this year as the new FDA requirement goes into effect. U.S. food manufacturers will be required to add up to 140 micrograms of the B vitamin per 100 grams of product, including most enriched bread, flour, corn meal, pasta, rice and other grain products.

Folic acid reduces the risk of neural tube birth defects such as anencephaly and spina bifida when it is consumed in adequate amounts by women before pregnancy and around the time of conception.

Spina bifida and anencephaly are neural tube defects, common birth defects that affect thousands of babies each year in the United States.

Spina bifida results from the failure of the spinal column to close.

Persons with spina bifida usually have serious disabilities. Legs and feet are often paralyzed, and there are problems with bowel and bladder control. Learning disabilities are common and mental retardation sometimes occurs.

Anencephaly is marked by the incomplete development of the skull bones and a partially or completely absent brain. Babies with anencephaly die before birth or shortly thereafter.

"The catch is that these defects can occur in an embryo before a woman realizes she's pregnant," said Mark Canfield, director of Texas Department of Health's Birth Defects Monitoring Division. "That's why it's important that all women of child-bearing age get enough folic acid every day."

The FDA-required amount alone will not be enough to significantly reduce birth defects. Research has shown that 400 micrograms daily is needed to prevent neural tube birth defects.

With the new fortification, the average woman will get about 100 mi-

crograms more folic acid per day in her diet. This amount is 25 percent of the recommended daily allowance.

The new FDA requirement is designed to keep daily intake of folic acid from grain products below 1000 micrograms, because too much folic acid may mask symptoms of pernicious anemia, a form of B12 deficiency that primarily affects older people.

However, this amount will prevent as little as four percent of the folic acid-preventable birth defects when a higher amount could prevent up to 50 percent, according to recent studies published in the British medical journal *Lancet*.

To prevent neural tube defects, health officials advise women between 15 and 45 years old to get 400 micrograms of folic acid daily by: eating natural sources such as fruits (especially orange juice), dark green leafy vegetables, dried beans and peas; eating folic acid-fortified breakfast cereals; and taking a vitamin supplement containing folic acid every day. ■