

# The Brahmin of Dubious Distinction

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For a young man just finishing his teens, the four years from 1929 to 1933 in England, represented a frustrating time. An unexpected United States stock market crash in October, 1929, warned that western democracies might soon face economic difficulties.

By 1932, reality replaced speculation as worldwide depression exacted its toll. The rise of fascism in Germany posed another challenge to western capitalism as did Soviet-style communism. Together, they contributed to an era of international economic and political uncertainty.

Harold Adrian Russell (Kim) Philby, was born New Year's Day in India in 1912. His father, a civil servant to the British Raja, secured his son's access to Trinity College at Cambridge University. Like many in this era, Philby became disillusioned with the English parliamentary system and joined the Cambridge University Socialist Society.

In October, 1931, the smashing victory of Ramsay MacDonald's National Government over the British Labour Party prompted Philby to think about alternatives to the Labour Party. A trip in March 1933 to Berlin allowed him to witness firsthand Adolph Hitler's establishment of the Nazi police state. He returned to England determined to take part in the fight against fascism.

Influenced by Maurice Dobb, one of the Cambridge economics dons and an avowed communist, Philby became convinced that his life must be devoted to Communism.

Other political and economic alternatives offered little to Philby of

being able to resolve the world's problems. Through Dobb, he found himself in Vienna living with Israel and Gisella Kohlmann. He joined with them as members of a communist underground organization.

Philby quickly began work on his first assignment as a freelance journalist, highlighting his distaste for German fascism. In this super-charged political and emotion-laden atmosphere, he soon fell in love with Kohlmann's daughter, Litzzi Friedmann, already a Comintern agent. They married in February 1934.

Philby did not have to wait long for an assignment more in keeping with his status as a communist agent. In February 1934, he acted as a courier between the outlawed Austrian Communist Party and communist cells in Hungary, Paris and Prague.

As the political battle in Austria grew, Philby's trips assumed greater importance. Soviet officials recognized his potential for more important work as a spy.

In May 1934, he was sent back to England with instructions to penetrate British intelligence. His first attempt to secure a civil service position ended in failure. His extreme political views while a student at Cambridge stood in the way.

By July 1936, Philby's communist handlers gave him an entirely new assignment. He received orders to go to Spain and report on fascist activities in the Spanish Civil War. This only represented a cover. His real assignment focused on helping with



Harold (Kim) Philby

a plot to assassinate Gen. Francisco Franco.

Surviving several narrow escapes from detection, he achieved notable success in writing stories of the war from fascist-held areas of Spain. For these activities and others that cleverly showed a commitment to Spanish

fascism, Philby received the Red Cross of Military Merit from none other than Franco himself. Philby had proven himself highly adept at deception and the plot was abandoned.

Employment with the British Intelligence Service eluded Philby until after the fall of France and the British evacuation from Dunkirk in June 1940. As the British hurriedly prepared to deal with the defense of the homeland and a possible German attack, Philby entered the SIS.

His first assignment in the SIS involved the organization of a school to train British agents. Both Philby and another Cambridge graduate, Guy Burgess, became instructors in the new school. By 1943, Philby had advanced through the ranks of the SIS quickly and his job required him to have weekly contact with many senior officials within the organization.

Philby's activities for the next 18 years paid dividends. The KGB's investment in him proved worthwhile. From 1947 to 1949 when he served as SIS station chief in Turkey, he was able to betray agents who crossed the border into the Soviet Union. From 1949 to 1951, he functioned as an SIS representative in Washington and thus passed along important details of both SIS and CIA plans and activities. Philby's use of misinformation



Anthony Blunt

in 1951 brought considerable confusion to British and American attempts to coordinate intelligence operations in the Baltic states.

When Philby became a Russian agent, others eventually joined him. Together with Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt and John Caincross formed what the Soviets called the "Magnificent Five." As a group, the former pro-Communist Cambridge University students, successfully managed to do significant harm to MI5, the British Secret Service.

The first years in the Cold War took a serious toll on some of the "Magnificent Five." The pressure of working as double agents in the Cold War environment was significantly more severe than it had been during World War II. Then Great Britain and Russia were allies and access to useful information was a routine matter.

Burgess and Maclean began to crack and sought to lessen their stress by drinking heavily. British intelligence placed both of them under surveillance. By May, 1951, Burgess and Maclean escaped together to the Soviet Union. No longer of any use to the Soviets, both faced charges of espionage and treason.

John Caincross also ceased to exist as an active Soviet agent when he confessed his espionage activities to British investigators.

Philby's close friendship with Burgess soon brought MI5's attention to him as a possible spy. Not wishing to risk further compromises of information, the SIS dismissed him in the summer of 1951. An official inquiry by MI5 in December 1951 convinced investigating officers that Philby was guilty of espionage.

Philby's public defense of his innocence later in 1955 did not detract suspicion of his involvement in espionage. The British government did not file formal charges because there was not enough evidence to convict

him in a British court. Philby defected to Moscow in 1963.

Philby discovered too late in his life that the KGB never trusted its western agents. Burgess, his closest friend among the "Magnificent Five," was dying from alcoholism, but Philby was under close watch by Soviet agents and was not allowed to see him.



*Guy Burgess*

Once the KGB had finished their debriefing of Philby, he fell into deep depression. He roamed Russia during this period and engaged in nearly suicidal drinking bouts.

A Russian woman named "Rufa" prevented his early demise. They married in 1971, Philby's third marriage. His former spouses had left him. A series of adulterous events ended any chance of a peaceful home life with "Rufa."

While allowed to live a privileged existence in the Soviet Union, Philby was kept at arm's length. The 1980s left Philby a disappointed and frustrated individual who sensed fulfillment was not achievable. His compatriots Burgess and Maclean had both been dead for years.

Philby's death in 1988 largely ended an unpleasant chapter in the history of MI5. At his funeral in Moscow the Soviets only identified him by his code name, Agent Tom.

The "Magnificent Five" contributed significantly to Soviet knowledge of British and American intelligence operations and activities. In later years, the KGB acknowledged that the "Magnificent Five" were their most efficient foreign operatives.

Perhaps the most significant human tragedy for the "Magnificent Five" was that they all began adulthood with ample promise, but didn't achieve greatness. Instead, they dishonored the country they so ardently protested their faith in and allegiance to as college students and young adults. ♣



*Donald Maclean*

## Reflections

### AIA

**Jan. 7, 1970**

A small ceremony attended by representatives of the United States and Pakistani Air Forces closed out the 6937th Communications Group at Peshawar, Pakistan, thereby ending 15 years of valuable intelligence support at the site.

**Jan. 1, 1974**

The USAFSS implemented the main operating base/forward operating base concept. Under this USAFSS/SAC concept, 12 Rivet Joint ASRP RC-135 aircraft and crews were based at the main operating base (Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.) where they received the bulk of their support, but flew many of their missions from the forward operating base (Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska and Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom where they received only mission essential support.

### USAF

**Jan. 16, 1951**

The Air Force's first B-36 flight to England took place when six B-36Ds from the 7th Bombardment Wing, Carswell Air Force Base, Texas, landed at Lakenheath RAF Station. Having staged through Limestone Air Force Base, Maine. The six planes returned to Carswell on Jan. 20, 1951.

**Jan. 16-18, 1957**

Three B-52Bs of the 93rd Bombardment Wing made a nonstop, round-the-world flight. Led by Maj. Gen. Archie J. Old, Jr., 15th Air Force commander, rode aboard the plane, Lucky Lady III.

### Cold War

**Jan. 12, 1954**

U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles introduced the defense doctrine that later became known as massive retaliation.

**Jan. 17, 1961**

In his farewell address President Dwight Eisenhower told the American people to "guard against unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." Contrary to many comments, the warning expressed Ike's long-held awareness that "the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."