



When American agents arrested Willy Fisher / Rudolf Abel at the Hotel Latham, in New York City, no one knew whether he had transmitted atomic-bomb secrets to Russia.

We still can't be totally sure, one way or the other.

Lieutenant-General Vadim Kirpichenkov was acquainted with Abel, although he didn't know him well. After Fisher/Abel's death, in 1971, Kirpichenkov had a new intelligence job in Moscow. That new job allowed him to investigate Abel and his career as a Soviet spy.

Kirpichenkov concluded that there were many things about Abel's career—and the man himself—which the Soviets did not know. There were three important events, however, which—for Kirpichenkov—highlighted Abel's efforts on behalf of the Soviet Union. One of those highlights involved the atomic bomb.

In Sergei Nechamkin's [interview of Kirpichenkov](#), published in Russia's equivalent of "People, the General says (in Russian-to-English translation):

Then - Abel participated in the hunt for the American atomic secrets. Perhaps our scientists would create a bomb without the help of the scouts [spies]. But scientific research - is the expenditure of energy, time, money ... Thanks to people like Abel, [we] managed to avoid dead-end research, the desired result was obtained in a very short time, we just saved the devastated country [Russia] a lot of money.

This input, from Kirpichenkov, is interesting since it remains disputed whether Abel—who illegally entered the United States in late 1948—actually participated in transferring atomic-bomb information to Soviet officials.

Abel refused to testify at trial, and never gave-up information to interrogating officials, so we do not know the story from his perspective. We do know, however, that the U.S. offered potential deals to Abel if he talked.

Kirpichenkov addresses one of those proposed deals which Allen Dulles—then head of America's CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)—offered Abel. It was among the offers which Abel rejected as he refused to cooperate with the U.S. government:

And of course - the whole epic of the arrest of Abel in the US court [which led] to [Abel's] imprisonment. Rudolf Ivanovich then really risked his life while, in terms of [his] professional [requirements, he] behaved impeccably. Word [from Allen] Dulles that he would like to have three or four of the same [type of] people as the Russian [Abel] in Moscow, do not require comments.

According to Kirpichenkov, documents about the work which Abel accomplished, during his years of spying, are not held together in a single place. Instead, they are scattered throughout multiple folders in multiple archives.

No one has had the time, or apparently the need, to undertake the labor-intensive process of pulling everything together into one cohesive story.

Abel was very talented in multiple areas. Not only did he paint canvases—he had at least 50 by the time of his arrest—he played several instruments, solved complex mathematical problems in his free time and could build a radio on his own. He was, according to Kirpichenkov, “fantastically gifted.”

Why didn't Fisher/Abel use those talents for another career? Speaking personally, Kirpichenkov says that the life of a spy is more interesting:

But, in my opinion, the job of a scout [spy] is much more interesting. The same creativity [as that of an artist], plus the adrenaline, plus the stress of the mind ... It is a special condition that is very difficult to explain in words.

Put differently, from a spy's viewpoint, the greatest thing about being a spy for one's country is ... just about everything!

Credits:

Quotes about Rudolf Abel, in this story, are from a [Russian-language biography](#) written by Sergei Nechamkin (retrieved on September 24, 2015).

The Russian-to-English translated quotes, above, are based on the following passages of Nechamkin's interview with Lt. General Vadim Kirpichenkov.

First quoted passage:

Дальше - участие Абеля в охоте за американскими атомными секретами. Возможно, наши ученые создали бы бомбу и без помощи разведчиков. Но научный поиск - это затрата сил, времени, денег... Благодаря таким людям, как Абель, удалось избежать тупиковых исследований, нужный результат был получен в кратчайшее время, мы просто сберегли разоренной стране немалые средства.

Second quoted passage:

Ну и конечно, - вся эпопея с арестом Абеля в США, судом, тюремным заключением. Рудольф Иванович тогда реально рисковал жизнью, при этом с точки зрения профессиональной держался безупречно. Слова Даллеса, что он хотел бы иметь в Москве трех-четырёх таких же людей, как этот русский, комментариев не требуют.

Third quoted passage:

Но, по-моему, работа разведчика гораздо интереснее. Такое же творчество, плюс адреналин, плюс напряжение ума... Это особое состояние, которое очень трудно объяснить словами.

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Media Stream



Rudolf Abel - Russian Spy

Willy Fisher was a Soviet spy who lived in America, for about eight years, before he was arrested by federal agents. Fisher is much-better known as "Rudolf Abel."

This image depicts Fisher / Abel at about the time he returned to Russia in 1962.

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