



For years, the FBI could not figure-out the significance of a hollowed-out nickel coin and the coded message it contained. The coin had turned-up in Brooklyn, during 1953, when a paperboy was collecting from his customers.

What was its source?

How did the nickel get into the money supply in Brooklyn?

Who hollowed it out?

The [FBI tells us the story](#) of the Hollowed-Out Nickel:

On the evening of Monday, June 22, 1953, a delivery boy for the "Brooklyn Eagle" knocked on the door of one of his customers in the apartment building at 3403 Foster Avenue in Brooklyn. It was "collecting time" again. A lady answered the door. She disappeared for a moment, then returned with a purse in her hand.

"Sorry, Jimmy," she said. "I don't have any change. Can you break this dollar bill for me?"

The newsboy quickly counted the coins in his pocket. There were not enough. "I'll ask the people across the hall," he said.

There were two ladies in the apartment across from the one occupied by Jimmy's customer. By pooling the coins in their pocketbooks, they were able to give the newsboy change for a dollar.

After he collected for the newspaper, Jimmy left the apartment house jingling several coins in his left hand. One of the coins seemed to have a peculiar ring. The newsboy rested this coin, a nickel, on the middle finger of his hand. It felt lighter than an ordinary nickel.

He dropped this coin to the floor. It fell apart! Inside was a tiny photograph—apparently a picture of a series of numbers.

Two days later (Wednesday, June 24, 1953) during a discussion of another investigation, a detective of the New York City Police Department told an FBI agent about the strange hollow nickel which, he had heard, was discovered by a Brooklyn youth. The detective had received his information from another police officer whose daughter was acquainted with the newsboy.

When the New York detective contacted him, Jimmy handed over the hollow nickel and the photograph it contained. The detective, in turn, gave the coin to the FBI.

In examining the nickel, agents of the FBI's New York Office noted that the microphotograph appeared to portray nothing more than ten columns of typewritten numbers. There was five digits in each number and 21 numbers in most columns. The agents immediately suspected that they had found a coded espionage message. They carefully wrapped the nickel and microphotograph for shipment to the FBI Laboratory.

Upon its receipt in Washington on June 26, 1953, the nickel was subjected to the thorough scrutiny of a team of FBI scientific experts. Hollow coins, though rarely seen by the ordinary citizen, are occasionally used in magic acts and come to the attention of federal law enforcement agencies from time to time. This was the first time, however, that the FBI had ever encountered a nickel quite like this one.

The face of the coin was a 1948 Jefferson nickel. In the "R" of the word "TRUST", there was a tiny hole—obviously drilled there so that a fine needle or other small instrument could be inserted to force the nickel open.

The reverse side had been made from another nickel—one minted sometime during the period of 1942 to 1945. It was composed of copper-silver alloy, there being a shortage of nickel during World War II.

Years went by without anyone deciphering the coded message.

Then ... in June of 1957, after the arrest of Rudolf Abel (a Soviet spy, living in America, whose real name was William "Willy" Fisher), the FBI got a break. They were able to decipher the coded message.

- 1. We congratulate you on a safe arrival. We confirm the receipt of your letter to the address "V Repeat V" and the reading of letter Number 1.*
- 2. For organization of cover, we gave instructions to transmit to you three thousand in local (currency). Consult with us prior to investing it in any kind of business, advising the character of this business.*
- 3. According to your request, we will transmit the formula for the preparation of soft film and news separately, together with (your) Mother's letter.*
- 4. It is too early to send you the gammas. Encipher short letters, but the longer ones make with insertions. All the data about yourself, place of work, address, etc., must not be transmitted in one cipher message. Transmit insertions separately.*
- 5. The package was delivered to your wife personally. Everything is all right with the family. We wish you success. Greetings from the Comrades. Number 1, 3rd of December.*

The use of the word "Comrades" reveals that the message was likely written by someone from the USSR. Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image of the hollow nickel discovered in 1953, [online via the FBI](#). Public Domain.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Soviet-Spies-and-the-Hollowed-Out-Nickel>

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