

DAY LEAD POWERS

EDITOR'S NOTE: EARLY THIS YEAR, IN THE MIDDLE OF A BRIDGE LINKING WEST BERLIN WITH COMMUNIST EAST GERMANY, THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA EXCHANGED TWO COLD WAR PAWNS--U2 PILOT FRANCIS GARY POWERS AND CONVICTED SOVIET SPY COL. RUDOLF ABEL. FOLLOWING IS THE FIRST PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE DRAMATIC TRADE.

BY WILLIAM J. EATON

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

WASHINGTON, APRIL 20 (UPI)--A GATE SWUNG OPEN ONE COLD NIGHT LAST FEBRUARY AND A CAR SPED AWAY FROM THE BLEAK WALLS OF ATLANTA PRISON.

ONE OF THE PASSENGERS WAS A GAUNT, BALDING MAN IN A NEW SUIT. THE OTHERS CALLED HIM "THE PACKAGE." HALFWAY AROUND THE EARTH, MEN WERE PREPARING FOR A RENDEZVOUS WITH THIS PACKAGE.

THE SPOT WAS A WIND-SWEPT BRIDGE CONNECTING THE EAST AND THE WEST IN BERLIN. "THE PACKAGE" WAS THE HIGHEST RANKING RUSSIAN SPY EVER CAUGHT IN THE UNITED STATES.

THE DETAILS OF HOW SOVIET MASTER SPY RUDOLF ABEL WAS SMUGGLED OUT OF PRISON AND SWAPPED FOR AMERICAN U2 PILOT FRANCIS GARY POWERS LAST FEB. 10 WAS DISCLOSED TODAY BY ONE OF THE LEADING PARTICIPANTS.

THE STORY WAS TOLD BY FRED T. WILKINSON, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS AND ABEL'S CHIEF AMERICAN ESCORT ON HIS JOURNEY TO FREEDOM.

WILKINSON'S ACCOUNT IN THE PRISON BUREAU'S NEWSLETTER SAID PRESIDENT KENNEDY COMMUTED ABEL'S 30-YEAR SENTENCE ON CONDITION THAT HE NEVER RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES.

JOKES ABOUT HAT-SWAPPING AND LAWYERS' DELAYING TACTICS HELPED REDUCE TENSION ON THE BRIDGE DURING A LAST-MINUTE HITCH IN THE EXCHANGE, WILKINSON SAID.

THE POWERS-ABEL SWAP WAS HELD UP FOR SOME MINUTES UNTIL WORD WAS RECEIVED THAT A SECOND AMERICAN PRISONER--YALE STUDENT FREDERICK L. PRYOR--HAD BEEN RELEASED BY THE EAST GERMANS AT ANOTHER BORDER-CROSSING POINT.

WILKINSON RECALLED HOW THREE AMERICANS AND ABEL FACED THREE RUSSIANS AND POWERS 15 FEET AWAY:

"THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST TENSE TIMES IN THE WHOLE PROJECT, I THINK, ALTHOUGH I WAS ARMED AND IT DIDN'T SEEM TOO IMPORTANT. AT FIRST WE WERE A LITTLE FORMAL.

"BY PRE-ARRANGEMENT WE WALKED ACROSS AND THE RUSSIAN IDENTIFIER ASKED TO HAVE ABEL TAKE HIS GLASSES OFF. THE SAME THING APPLIED TO MR. POWERS. HE WAS QUICKLY IDENTIFIED.

"BUT WE WERE NOT YET READY TO MAKE THE EXCHANGE. WE WERE WAITING FOR A SIGNAL ON THE RADIO THAT OUR SECOND MAN HAD BEEN RELEASED AT CHECKPOINT CHARLIE.

"THE RUSSIANS KEPT TELLING US IT WAS OK. I FOUND ONE BIG RUSSIAN IN CHARGE HAD A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR. WE STARTED A LITTLE BY-PLAY AND FINALLY DECIDE WE WOULD LET THE MEN CHANGE SIDES.

"WE LET ABEL GO OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE AND POWERS CAME TO OUR SIDE WITH HIS IDENTIFIER BECAUSE FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW HE WAS NOT A PRISONER.

"THE SECOND RUSSIAN LOOKED AT MY HAT. HE SEEMED TO LIKE IT AND I TOLD ABEL TO TELL HIM I WANTED TO TRADE IT FOR THE FUR TURBAN THE RUSSIAN WAS WEARING BUT THE OTHER RUSSIAN WOULDN'T PERMIT IT.

"WHEN WE WERE ABOUT TO TRADE THE SECOND MAN SCOWLED DEEPLY AND SAID 'NIX, NOX!' THIS BY-PLAY WENT ON FOR QUITE A WHILE. I AM SURE THE RUSSIAN AND I BOTH WANTED TO TRADE.

"FINALLY WE GOT THE SIGNAL THAT THE OTHER EXCHANGE HAD BEEN MADE. MY GOOD-HUMORED RUSSIAN FRIEND SAID HE WOULD BET THE EXCHANGE OF PRYOR HAD BEEN HELD UP BECAUSE HIS IDENTIFIER WAS NOT GOOD.

ARGUING ABOUT HIS CAPITALIST FEES!

"I TOOK OUT THE PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENT WHICH THE RUSSIANS WANTED; WE NOTE ~~Approved For Release 2000/08/25 : CIA-RDP33-02415A000800300019-9~~ AND TURNED OVER TO ABEL. THE DOCUMENT COMMUTED HIS SENTENCE PROVIDED HE DOES NOT RE-ENTER THIS COUNTRY.

"WE LEFT THE BRIDGE AND MR. POWERS WAS PUT INTO A CAR THAT HAD BEEN WAITING AND WAS TAKEN AWAY."

WILKINSON GOT TO KNOW ABEL WHEN HE WAS WARDEN AT ATLANTA, AND SAID HE FELT HE HAD A MEASURE OF ABEL'S CONFIDENCE.

THAT MAY HAVE BEEN WHY WILKINSON WAS CHOSEN FOR THE SECRET MISSION. HE AND NOAH ALLDREDGE, SUPERVISOR OF CUSTODIAL SERVICE, ACCOMPANIED ABEL FROM THIS COUNTRY TO BERLIN FOR THE EXCHANGE.

ABEL WAS FITTED WITH NEW CLOTHES ON THE PRETEXT THAT HE WOULD CONFER WITH HIS ATTORNEY AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS IN NEW YORK, WILKINSON SAID.

THE SOVIET AGENT WAS REMOVED FROM ATLANTA PENITENTIARY SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT ON FEB. 8 AND FLOWN TO NEW YORK CITY ON A 2 A.M. JET FROM ATLANTA.

THESE PRECAUTIONS WERE TAKEN BECAUSE THE FEDERAL OFFICIALS DID NOT WANT OTHER PRISONERS--TWO IN PARTICULAR BUT WHO WERE NOT IDENTIFIED--TO KNOW THAT ABEL HAD LEFT THE PRISON.

THE SOVIET SPY WAS HELD IN NEW YORK OVERNIGHT BEFORE BEING FLOWN TO WEST BERLIN ON A SECRET AIR FORCE FLIGHT.

ABEL WAS KNOWN AS THE "PACKAGE" IN A SYSTEM OF CODES THAT HELPED TO PRESERVE AIR-TIGHT SECRECY ABOUT THE MISSION, WILKINSON SAID.

WILKINSON AND ALLDREDGE OBTAINED EMERGENCY PASSPORTS AND TOOK A TRAIN TO NEW YORK FROM WASHINGTON TO KEEP THEIR RENDEZVOUS WITH THE "PACKAGE."

DURING THIS TIME, WILKINSON SAID, HE WAS IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH ANOTHER AGENCY WHOSE EMPLOYEES CALLED EACH OTHER BY FIRST NAMES AND LAST INITIALS.

AFTER SEVERAL UNEXPLAINED DELAYS IN DEPARTURE, HE SAID, THEY LEFT TO PICK UP ABEL ON A CORNER NEAR 11TH ST. IN MANHATTAN. WILKINSON ADDED:

"ABEL LOOKED A LITTLE PUZZLED UNTIL HE SAW ME, AND THEN HE SMILED....I ASKED HIM IF HE WAS READY TO MAKE A LITTLE TRIP AND HE SAID 'YES.' THEN I TOLD HIM I WASN'T IN A POSITION TO TELL HIM WHAT THIS WAS, BUT THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP HIM. BUT HE WAS PRETTY SHARP AND CAUGHT ON. HE SAID, 'WELL, I WOULD LIKE TO GO HOME.'"

THE PARTY DROVE TO A NEW JERSEY AIR BASE AND ABEL WAS "PRETTY WELL TOLD" DURING THE TRANS-ATLANTIC FLIGHT WHY HE WAS BEING TAKEN ON THE TRIP.

BUT SECRECY WAS MAINTAINED AND DRAPES WERE DRAWN AROUND THE PASSENGER COMPARTMENT AT ONE POINT WHEN A RADIO REPAIRMAN WAS CALLED TO FIX THE PLANE'S RADIO AT WIESBADEN, GERMANY.

THEY ARRIVED IN BERLIN ON THE AFTERNOON PRECEDING THE FEB. 10 EXCHANGE AND BEGAN TALKS WITH ARMY OFFICERS ON DETAILS.

"THERE WAS STILL A LOT OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE POINT OF EXCHANGE," WILKINSON SAID. "WE WOULD HAVE IT ALL SET UP AND THEN SOMEONE WOULD CHANGE IT--PROBABLY THE RUSSIANS!"

BY MORNING, HOWEVER, THE GLEINICKER BRIDGE ON THE ROAD TO POTSDAM WAS SELECTED AS THE PLACE FOR THE EXCHANGE.

WILKINSON SAID THE AMERICAN PARTY AND ABEL MOVED OUT TO THE BRIDGE ABOUT 7:30 A.M. AND SAT ACROSS THE ROAD FROM A GROUP OF EAST GERMAN GUARDS CARRYING RIFLES.

AT 8 A.M., ON SIGNAL, WILKINSON, STATE DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVE ALLAN LIGHTNER AND ANOTHER AMERICAN WHO WAS TO IDENTIFY POWERS WALKED OUT ON THE BRIDGE WITH ABEL.

THREE RUSSIANS MARCHED FROM THE OTHER SIDE WITH POWERS AND HISTORY ~~Approved For Release 2000/08/25 : CIA-RDP33-02415A000800300019-9~~