

SUNDAY TIMES

Release 2001/07/27 RDP75 00149R000600330047-



Weekly Review



SECRET TRIAL OF KIM PHILBY

AT 9.30 a.m. on his last day in England, May 25, 1961, Donald Maclean was walking discreetly from Charing Cross Station to his room in the Foreign Office. Guy Burgess, never a devotee of early rising, had only just got out of bed in his New Bond Street flat by Aspreys. He was reading the Times and drinking tea made by his friend Jack Hewit. Everything was relaxed and unhurried.

By 10.30 everything had changed. Irrevocably, Burgess warned, through Kim Philby in Washington that Donald Maclean was about to be interrogated, made a vital decision. By that evening Maclean had gone in a cloud of mystery—and Burgess had gone with him.

But for Burgess's excited and unnecessary flight, things might have been very different for Kim Philby. Conceivably, the most remarkable Soviet spy ever to penetrate the Western intelligence community might have remained undetected for another ten years. Certainly, it is most great that it was only his almost fortuitous double link—with both Burgess and Maclean—which turned suspicion on him.

Had the odd, untrusting Philby been only a normal man in 1941 by the bonds of Burgess's superior friendship, it would have been all some time. But the damage Burgess did to him was more than compensated by the inflexible loyalty of his friends in the Secret Intelligence Service. Insight's inquiries have now established, in detail, that Philby, publicly sacked from the Foreign Service in 1951, was in fact secretly employed as a British agent by the SIS—even during the shadowy period before he became an Observer foreign correspondent at the request of the Foreign Office.

This did not merely mean that Philby, the Soviet spy, had a second chance to penetrate British intelligence. It meant that the impression gained from Parliamentary statements on two occasions was false.

The story of how all this happened is in part the story of a clandestine battle between the two principal secret departments of the British Administration: the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Security Service (MI 5). A major turning-point in this struggle was a strange "secret trial" in which Philby

successfully defended himself against the charge that he was a Communist agent. The result of the struggle was victory for MI 5: the discrediting of the SIS. Finally became an agent that Sir Dick White was promoted from being head of MI 5 to take over as head of the rival SIS, which he remains today.

That radical break with Secret Service tradition is generally reckoned to have been a great success. Under Sir Dick, an urbane civilian with considerably more administrative ability than the soldiers and sailors who went before him, the SIS works smoothly and is reckoned—especially by Americans to have regained the high reputation that it had begun to lose.

How Burgess and Maclean vanished

THE CAREER of Kim Philby went through two main phases. The first phase, described in our two previous articles, was one of penetration into British intelligence, and of steady rise through its ranks. The landmark can be swiftly noted: 1940 joins a branch of SIS; 1941 becomes a subsection chief; 1944 put in charge of counter-Soviet operations; 1946, goes to Turkey to organise operations against the Russians; 1949 goes to Washington as liaison man between SIS and the Central Intelligence Agency.

The second phase, despite a stubborn rearguard action by Philby, is essentially one of decline, detection and ultimate defeat: the destruction of the unique position Philby had built up at the heart of the Western intelligence system.

The dividing point between the two phases was the day of the Burgess-Maclean defection. The events of May 25, 1951, can be reconstructed in detail.

Burgess's relaxed mood that morning was understandable. He did not have to go to the office as in previous instalments, we have referred to. Dick White as he was the widespread publication of his name in the daily press had now removed the argument for disguising his identity.

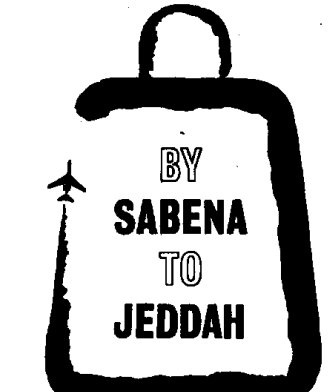


LONDON, NOVEMBER, 1955: Philby, smiling and confident after his name was cleared in the Commons by Harold Macmillan, boldly holds a Press conference. A film of the conference from the B B C archives shows a complete lack of his usual hesitations and stutter as he rattles off denials. This is a transcript of what he said:

QUESTION: If there was a third man, were you in fact the third man? PHILBY: No, I was not. Do you think there was one? No comment. Mr Philby, you yourself were asked to resign from the Foreign Office a few months after Burgess and Maclean disappeared. The Foreign Secretary said in the past you had had Communist associations. That is why you were asked to resign? I was asked to resign because of an imprudent association. That is your association with Burgess? Correct. What about the alleged Communist associations? Can you say anything about them? The last time I spoke to a Communist, known to me to be a Communist, was some time in 1954. That rather implies that you have also spoken to Communists in the past and now know about it. Well, I spoke to Burgess last in April or May, 1961. He gave me no idea that he was a Communist at all? Never.

MOSCOW, SEPTEMBER, 1957: Philby (left) sits on a park bench to be photographed for the Sunday Times by his son, John. His quizzical smile and his Russian clothes make a sharp contrast to the suave diplomatic figure who twelve years earlier had fooled the British Press.

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was under suspension. He had just been ordered back from a minor post in the information department of the Foreign Office for a number of indiscretions involving immorality, drink, driving offences and inattention to duty.

Burgess's P.O. career was clearly over at the age of forty.

Maclean, outwardly, looked in much better shape. Only thirty-seven, he had been Head of Casercy in Cairo. A set of dentures escaped in Cairo had been a setback but now, after five off for psycho-analytical treatment, he was in charge of a high official of MI 5, the Foreign Office in London, where work was not onerous, but his position was always available. He was, however, in worse trouble than Burgess: he had been passing massive amounts of information to the Russians, and the two direct men who followed him along Whitehall were MI 5 men.

Reached his desk, a brief and important meeting took place in the same building—in the sparsely elegant of the Foreign Secretary's room. The head of the P.O. Security Branch and a high official of MI 5, the Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison. Morrison gave the authority to interrogate Donald Maclean about the transmission of information to the Russians which the British security men had been investigating for more than a year.

His brief, high-level exchange was the result of a longer and more agonised session the day before at lower level. Two officials each from the three departments involved—SIS, MI 5 and the Foreign Office—had met to discuss whether the time was ripe to interrogate Maclean. The SIS and MI 5 men argued for a little more delay, but the P.O. men said that the time had come to jump Maclean. They said that Maclean, who had been gone for some time that he was followed and said was being cut from top-secret telegrams, was puffy and ready to crack.

That was the last part of an investigation which had begun early in 1949 when the American Central Intelligence Agency discovered that certain British intelligence information had reached the Russians. The source was established as the British Embassy in Washington, and the nature of the case involved both MI 5 possibilities for British counter-espionage generally and SIS possibilities for the investigation of the source.

with the CIA. However the case of 1949, Kim Philby took over as SIS man in Washington, and so he was swiftly embroiled in the spy-hunt.

The crucial fact before the half-dozen officials was that exhaustive analysis of the Washington Embassy files made Maclean the best prospect as a Russian spy—but that there was no way to get legal evidence unless Maclean could be persuaded to confess. Everything, therefore, hung on a successful interrogation. The conviction of the P.O. man who Maclean was "ripe" carried the meeting.

Philby would have known of the interrogation decision within hours: he would have known from his own part in the SIS investigation. It was an important Soviet spy Maclean was. And now the time for a getaway had been sharply reduced.

There was, however, still time: because the decision did not mean immediate interrogation. May 25 was the last day the decision was ratified by Morrison, was a Friday, and this meant that the interrogation would not begin until Monday morning. It would almost certainly have nailed Maclean. MI 5 had prepared their best man, William Skardon: the relentless, courteous ex-Murder Squad detective who had cracked the case against Klaus Fuchs. Maclean, haunted by guilts about both espionage and homosexuality, was just the sort of man who, analysis, and should have been a helpless target.

But Skardon never got to his man. Just about the time that Morrison was giving his assent on Friday morning, Guy Burgess was taking the first concrete step towards getting Donald Maclean out of the country.

By chance, Burgess had two tickets for the steamer Edeira, leaving Southampton that night for Brittany. They had been intended for a holiday with a young American man whom Burgess had met earlier in the month on the Queen Mary. Now Burgess went to Green Park to meet the young man and tell him the trip might have to be called off.

He explained he would not know for sure until later in the day. Burgess did venture an explanation—a young friend in the Foreign Office was in terrible trouble, and just the only one who could help him—who could come like an unprovoked letter but on this occasion Burgess was telling the literal truth.

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A feud breaks out in the secret world

For a spy, as for a politician, the essential requisite is the slightest luck. And it seems that Philby's luck ran out when Burgess, for reasons that he could never quite explain to people in Moscow, chose to go all the way with Maclean.

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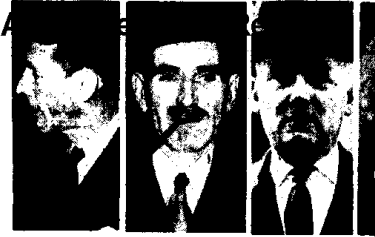
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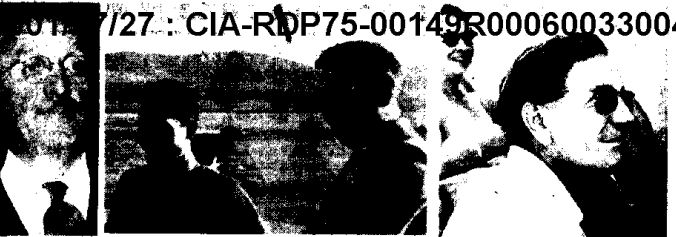
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Dick Brooman-White, pilot testing SIS operative and Terry Hill for Richardson. Helmut Wilson, the kindly interrogator who broke Klaus Fuchs. Marcus Lipton, M.P. Above: Kim Philby enjoys a joke with HM King Hussein of Jordan in 1958. Right: Philby with Eleanor Pope-Brewer later his third wife in Beirut, 1958.



Kim Philby enjoys a joke with HM King Hussein of Jordan in 1958. Right: Philby with Eleanor Pope-Brewer later his third wife in Beirut, 1958.

Philby's old friends arranged it, knowing that the lack of proof would leave the Government no choice but to clear Philby.

The truth is more prosaic. The whole thing was planned by Mr Jack Fishman, the resourceful news editor of the Empire News, a Sunday paper now defunct. Lipton's direct informant was the Empire News crime reporter Johnny Hunt-Crowley.

It was a textbook example of an ancient journalistic device to evade the laws of libel, which hinges upon the privilege a newspaper has of reporting what is said in a Parliament with no fear of a libel action.

Fishman was a connoisseur of this technique and he decided to prime two Labour M.P.s—both noted for the catholicity of their parliamentary questions—Mr Marcus Lipton and the late Norman Dicks.

But how had the Empire News heard about Philby in the first place? The answer, it is alleged, came from a former contact, the German journalist, Eric Gorman.

Another man who worked on the story has a rather different recollection. Henry Maul, the London editor of the New York Sunday News, used to work for the Empire News one day a week, and he says:

"The details came from a man Johnny Hunt-Crowley used to work on the Iran up from East Grinstead."

To retrospect, it looks as if Hunt-Crowley's man had been an M.I. contact who had been on the fringe of the inquiry into the defection.

It is remarkable how the details he adduced jumbled highly-secure and ignorant gossip.

Dodds got cold feet about asking a question after getting a cutting from George Wigg, his spy-minded back-bench colleague. Wigg was again a blunt instrument as a Parliamentary question.

Nobody behind this exercise, however, could have foreseen the consequences the question would have. In public, the only man who drew was a categorical assurance from the Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan.

Macmillan's attitude to the secret services was not canny to a degree. "I do not expect the gamekeeper to come and tell me every time he catches a fox," he once said. He adhered to the code that politicians should know little and inquire less about their intelligence networks.

Indeed, civil servants affirm that Macmillan—unlike, say, Wilson—had no very high regard for intelligence gleanings, except on what he called "nuts and bolts" (technical information about missiles and such). One of Macmillan's closest colleagues expressed the attitude pithily: "God thing if the Russians did see our Cabinet minutes twice a week. Stop all that bloody dangerous guesswork."

So the brief on Philby that handed on Macmillan's desk at the Foreign Office in the latter half of October, 1953, prompted Macmillan's probing situation. The Philby affair, he declared, was a domestic scandal which had a founding services character. Instead, it had blown up into a major international scandal to the Government. And now he had to arbitrate.

Not that he had presided to him help much. It had been compiled by the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir

the time, Sir Patrick Dean (now Ambassador in Washington). And it was, according to one excellently-placed source, a document remarkable for what it did not say.

At this political level, the reconstruction of events is naturally a delicate matter. But the F.O. apparently felt that his job was to play safe. The brief therefore detailed only what little was known against Philby: a Communist past and an "imprudent association," as the jargon had it, with Burgess.

At this time there was certainly a some powerful lobbying for Philby, headed by the influential Conservative M.P. and former SIS man Richard Cross-White. But there is no evidence that this decided Macmillan.

Macmillan found a compromise. Publicly, what weighed with him was his familiar prosecution with the power of the State. He decided to refer to the Commons and clear Philby—because there was no private verdict.

But privately his verdict was blunt. Philby must go. To questions about libel suits in the House of Commons, he said: "I'm not shooting him, just firing him." The SIS view at this time was in line with Macmillan's public statement. If more was known of his activities, he would be sent to work on SIS cover from now on, with no fear of that.

While was said to have been extremely angry. But he did not care much. He was in the line of political intelligence that he did not seem to him Philby could do any harm at all sitting in Beirut.

In April, Philby had begun negotiations to establish a cover in Beirut. A senior Foreign Office man had made an official approach to the

Philby himself approached the Economist through a third party. It has always been a sore point with Donald Tymmer, the editor of the Economist, that although he checked on Philby with Harold Carcia at the F.O., he never told either by the Office or by the Observer that Philby's initial entrée had been strictly an official one.

There is considerable evidence that the F.O. was interested specifically in placing Philby in Beirut. He had family qualifications, and the position in Beirut was a constant attraction for the F.O. and SIS.

When Sir Dick took over negotiations, were virtually complete. This had a single, decisive impact on the status of Philby's relations with SIS thereafter. However uncertain the degree of suspicion may have been in April or September, when he left for the Middle East, it was absolutely firm in the eyes of C himself. For practical purposes he was at last definitely "blown."

Philby cracks—and disappears. KIM PHILBY was easily the most popular man in the British-American community in Beirut. The English-speakers there are a small little village, packed like all exile groups by feuds and quarrels. Kim was drunk a lot of the time, often passed out at parties or behaved outrageously if he managed to stay on his feet. And he had begun his social career in Beirut by stealing another man's wife.

Yet even in the last months when he finally began to crack up under an intolerable burden of deceit, he was always invited back. Drunk or sober—more often drunk—Philby was one of those rare men who make women feel protected while keeping the respect and liking of men. He did not have any enemies in Lebanon.

There had, briefly, been some reserve when he arrived in Beirut in September, 1956, with a slight taint of the Third Man debate still clinging to him. But his soon melted away. Philby was so obviously a man down on his hands, and so ready to play the competitive trade of a foreign

years away from journalism; a man who had made mistakes (and admitted them), confided that he took the whole operation as "a personal affront."

Sinclair promptly retired, and Williams, the unfortunate P.O.A. was moved to another job. Even though Sinclair's successor was already virtually decided, a three-month wait followed before his formal appointment.

The name which emerged as the secret world, not least the C.I.A. The name of the new C had been the priority target for the C.I.A.'s top man in London for weeks, but it was not surprising that in this particular mission he

As far as his work—or cover—as a journalist was concerned he began with certain advantages. He knew some Arabic; he had a commendable knowledge of the Middle East and of course, he was the son of the eminent Arabist Sir John (few people have read St. John's books—"Just one damn wadi after another," one weary reader said); but St. John's fans gave Kim an impeccable percentage in Arab eyes. His son had friends everywhere, mainly by Harold Macmillan, the Foreign Secretary and Lord Normanbrook, secretary of the Cabinet, and a self-inflicted punishment, one would think, for someone as reportedly against the Arabs as was Sir John. After Philby left Beirut, Fister,

like all of Philby's Beirut friends, combed his recollection for clues which might have indicated that Philby was concealing strong Left-wing political views. He could recall only two very slight straw in the wind indeed.

One night Fister was arguing with a group of Arab nationalists on a well-worn theme: were the fundamental aims of American democracy and Russian Communism the same? Yes, said the Arabs. Of course not, said Fister. Philby, who managed to stammer out that he thought the fundamental aims were the same. "I always assumed Kim was for the Free World," Fister recalled recently. "I could not understand how he could equate Communism and the American Way."

Meanwhile Philby continued to expand his official contacts. He spent a great deal of time, more than any other correspondent, with people from the British and American Embassies. He was a constant caller on the SIS station chief, an old friend, and very friendly with Miles Copeland, well known to be a retired CIA man.

He since repeated several times, "Knowing what I did about him, I have done anything else."

Now Philby began to crack. He seemed to be undergoing the same collapse under the same pressure as Macmillan since Philby's return to Britain under any circumstances would result in a messy trial and demands for an enquiry into the running of the Services. Macmillan had ever possessed a man who was a thorough professional, a difficult business of keeping up a long-term cover.

His work for his two papers dried almost to a few drips. His drinking began to embarrass even his most tolerant friends. After a few cocktails he would be incoherently drunk and social evenings often lasted only long enough to get Kim into a taxi.

Who did the British Government do nothing about him? It seems that Sir Dick White was offered four choices. Philby could be eliminated. (Sir Dick immediately rejected this choice as abhorrent.) The Lebanese Security Police could be taken at their word ("There is no reason why we should interfere with the removal of a wanted British subject to his homeland") and Philby brought forcibly back to Britain and justice. The SIS could try to persuade Philby to return and face charges. Or there could be an attempt to "frighen Philby into defecting."

To Harold Macmillan, now Prime Minister, it was a matter of small importance — it was not then thought Philby was doing damage as he was under such suspicion by "C."

But to the SIS Philby's early Bohemian survival in Beirut after betrayal was more than they could bear. If Philby could not be brought back to England, for unproductive questioning by informed police, he could at least be sent into exile. For the sake of the SIS morale, it was therefore finally decided to confront him with the evidence and break him down—break him down in a way which could never be done in England.

This was acceptable also to Macmillan since Philby's return to Britain under any circumstances would result in a messy trial and demands for an enquiry into the running of the Services. Macmillan had ever possessed a man who was a thorough professional, a difficult business of keeping up a long-term cover.

The C.I.A., less worried about public opinion, wanted more direct action and at one point were considering a swift attempt to snatch Philby. When he disappeared on his way to keep a dinner engagement at the house of Hugh Balfour Paul, first secretary at the British Embassy, they became so Third Man conscious themselves that they gruffed Balfour Paul at length to try to find out if he had given the warning.

After the disappearance came the pattern of cryptic letters now so familiar from the Burgess-Maclean case. Even then none of his friends had the slightest suspicion that he was going to Russia. Indeed, even after reports that he had arrived in Moscow most of Philby's Beirut friends remained unconvinced until one of them, an Indian journalist called Geoffrey Lawson, wrote to Philby addressing the letter "Kim Philby, Esq., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow."

In two weeks, he got a reply. The letter emanated mostly of vague generalities but one phrase stood out: "My tongue is looser now." But did this mean that free from the tensions of a "big-time" his sluttish had gone? Or that he could more freely express the political views that had been his main motive for thirty years. It is typical of Harold Macmillan that he did not see?

280 (Newspaper Ltd., 1967)

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Moscow suburb: Melinda and Philby

PHILBY
The first pictures of him with Melinda in Moscow
 Kim Philby and his fourth wife, Melinda, formerly married to defector Donald Maclean, whom she followed to Moscow after the Burgess-Maclean flight. Pictures taken in Moscow by Josephine, Philby's eldest daughter by his second marriage.

The Third Man Scandal—Page 45



Melinda, Philby and son-in-law, Geoffrey Abbott

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8,000 army defends