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Shevchenko story called CIA fiction

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Soviet defector Arkady N. Shevchenko made best-seller lists and the cover of Time magazine with his sensational account of a career as a CIA supermole. But The New Republic magazine says the memoirs are fiction.

"What is fabricated here are not just car chases, meetings, conversations, reports, dates, motives and espionage activities, but a spy who never was," Edward Jay Epstein writes in a New Republic cover story scheduled to appear on newsstands next week.

"Shevchenko himself did not concoct the mole story," adds Mr. Epstein, author of investigative books challenging the Warren Commission conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted without accomplices when he assassinated John F. Kennedy.

He says the defector's supermole image first arose in a 1983 book by John Barron, "The KGB Today: The Hidden Hand." The story, he says, was released to Barron by the CIA.

Thus did the CIA, after reportedly viewing Mr. Shevchenko as being of little value, retroactively establish "a thoroughly successful spy for itself. It elevated Shevchenko to a spy so important that he was capable, among other things, of keeping the CIA informed of the Soviets' real intentions in the sensitive SALT negotiations," Mr. Epstein writes.

Mr. Shevchenko's book, "Breaking With Moscow," details his life as a CIA spy while serving as an under secretary general in the United Nations Secretariat. The book, published by Knopf, sold 180,000 copies and was serialized in Time.

Ashbel Green, a senior editor at Knopf who edited the Shevchenko book, said Mr. Epstein had "gone extremely wrong. My connections in the intelligence community have always confirmed Shevchenko's role. There's no question in my mind that he was a CIA informant."

"I have to be skeptical right from

the beginning because of the person who wrote the article," Mr. Green said. "He's a well-known conspiracy theorist."

Mr. Green said Mr. Shevchenko was "out of the country and on vacation" and could not be reached for comment on the forthcoming article.

A corporate spokesman at Time said there would be no immediate response to the Epstein article. The CIA had no comment either.

In galley proofs distributed by The New Republic, Mr. Epstein traced the following evolution of the Shevchenko autobiography:

Simon and Shuster, the book publishers, signed a \$600,000 contract with Mr. Shevchenko in 1978 but decided when the manuscript was received in 1979 that it did not contain enough new information to warrant publication. It had no firsthand conversations with Soviet leaders and no mention of espionage activities. Simon and Shuster successfully sued Mr. Shevchenko for the return of a \$146,875 advance.

Readers Digest Press also concluded the manuscript lacked substance and personal vignettes, Mr. Epstein says. An investigative reporter interviewed Mr. Shevchenko for 20 hours before the book was rejected and concluded, according to Mr. Epstein, that "Shevchenko's reminiscences were far too vague for a successful book."

Three years later, says Mr. Epstein, a completely different manuscript arrived at Knopf — and this one "had all the elements of a spy thriller... cinematic car chases, CIA case officers in safe houses, meetings with the KGB resident, recall telegrams and escapes from danger."

In addition, Mr. Epstein writes, the book had "dramatic verbatim conversations with Soviet leaders," including Nikita Khrushchev, which supposedly occurred when Shevchenko was in his 20s and at the bottom rung of the power ladder at the Foreign Ministry.

Mr. Epstein says his research



Glogau Studio

Arkady N. Shevchenko

revealed numerous discrepancies in the book, among them:

- It opens with a 1975 car chase during which Mr. Shevchenko says he received a traffic ticket. But police records show he did not receive a ticket that year and did not even have a driver's license until late 1977.

- Mr. Shevchenko tells of spying in 1976 on the chief of the KGB in New York, Boris Aleksandrovich Solomatin, and gives a verbatim account of a dinner party at the Solomatin apartment. But Mr. Epstein says Mr. Solomatin returned to the Soviet Union in July 1975.

- The book closes with Mr. Shevchenko leaving his sleeping wife, running down 20 flights of stairs because the service elevator didn't run after midnight and emerging through a service door. But Mr. Epstein says the apartment building has five 24-hour-a-day elevators and the service door is sealed every night at 7:30 p.m. He also says door-men on duty that night told him Mr. Shevchenko's wife was not at home and he had moved in a "dishy brunette."

Asked about the discrepancies, Mr. Green replied, "I just don't know. These errors to me are very minor, but I can't explain them without talking to the author."