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Shevchenko Defends Memoir

Defector Assails Critics And Says Book Is True

By David Remnick
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Soviet defector and former diplomat Arkady Shevchenko yesterday denied recent reports that he made up or embellished episodes in his bestselling memoir, "Breaking With Moscow." Shevchenko said that he may have gotten certain minor details wrong, but "the book is entirely true."

An article in The Washington Post had reported that sources in both the publishing and intelligence fields were suspicious of Shevchenko's account. The story also quoted sources who said that Shevchenko initially had help from the CIA in writing the book and that he embellished certain episodes to make them more "commercial." Shevchenko, who defected in 1978, said yesterday that the only help he got was from his wife and his editors.

A lengthy article by Edward Jay Epstein in the July 15 edition of The New Republic went much further than the initial Post story, doubting Shevchenko's claim that while still an undersecretary general at the United Nations he worked as a spy for the U.S. government. Epstein also wrote that certain "cinematic details" in the book "never happened."

"I always have had a great respect for freedom of the press in the western

world," Shevchenko said, "But it's amazing . . . the way that freedom is abused, and I am amazed by what some people in the press can do. It's what I call terroristic journalism." Shevchenko said he was describing the "phenomenon" of American journalism in general.

Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of The New Republic, said yesterday, "Somebody who has benefited so immensely from the attention of the American press should probably be more careful with his characterizations of it."

Said Wieseltier, "I've heard nothing that dissuades me from Ed Epstein's view of ['Breaking With Moscow']."

Shevchenko had refused interview requests for the articles in The Washington Post and The New Republic.

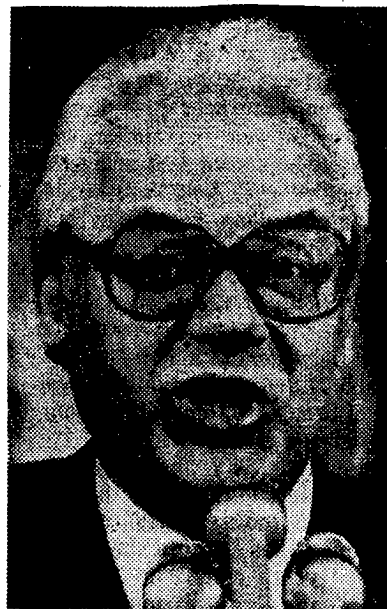
Yesterday's press conference was organized by Shevchenko and his editor at Knopf, Ashbel Green. With Green sitting at his side at the National Press Building, Shevchenko said, "Initially I wanted to let [the articles] go but I was convinced I should answer these things."

Epstein, who has written extensively on the assassination of John F. Kennedy and on other Soviet defectors such as Yuri Nosenko, charged that Shevchenko's work for the CIA was "demonstrably fictitious." The Post article quoted sources supporting Shevchenko's assertion that he did in fact work as an informant for the CIA while still a Soviet diplomat; Epstein charged that Shevchenko fabricated dates, motivations, conversations and espionage activities.

Shevchenko called Epstein's detailed litany of alleged falsehoods "ridiculous."

"It seems he didn't read my book," Shevchenko said. "There were so many people in the government and in Congress who knew my story and now someone is saying there is no story at all."

Shevchenko also accused the Soviets of trying to undermine him. "They are doing something to compromise me," he said. "I have no doubt they are behind some of this."



ARKADY SHEVCHENKO

Shevchenko did acknowledge mistakes in the dates of a dinner party with a key KGB official in New York and his first discussion of defection with U.S. contacts. "In some places, I was a little bit mistaken," he said. "The human memory is not a perfect instrument."

One of Shevchenko's harshest critics in The Washington Post article was Simon & Schuster editor Michael Korda, who accused Shevchenko of trying to "juice up" certain episodes in the final, published version of the book. Shevchenko originally sold the manuscript to Simon & Schuster. But his manuscript was rejected and he went to Knopf.

"The truth is, Michael Korda was partly responsible that I was not successful at Simon & Schuster," Shevchenko said. "He was no help at all. He was so busy that he never contacted me for months at a time."

Sources in both articles were suspicious that Shevchenko would be able to remember accurately conversations that took place decades ago. And yet he quotes them verbatim.

Shevchenko said he was told by editors at Knopf to use direct quotation rather than paraphrase "to give the book a little more life. I was advised to put things in a conversational way . . . I think it's pretty accurate."

Shevchenko said he had no intention of suing anyone. "I learned that in the United States you should not go to court unless it is life-threatening or there is no other way," he said.