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JAMES ANGLETON: The Spy Forced in from the Cold



One summer evening several years ago, five men stood casting for trout in a secluded Midwestern river. Four were Americans; all practiced anglers. The fifth was a Russian, obviously an amateur. His line kept snagging on boughs, yet he enjoyed himself hugely, standing rubber-boated in the swirling water and nipping vodka from a flask.

The host was James Angleton, who recently resigned after 31 years as chief of counter-espionage for the Central Intelligence Agency. The Russian was a high official of the KGB (Soviet secret service), who had defected to the US. The others were CIA.

In such tranquil spots Angleton, a keen student of human

psychology, often has reaped his richest rewards. Defectors are fearful of pursuit and assassination, torn by conflicting loyalties. Angleton, a soft-spoken yet firm man, spends months helping them unwind, winning their confidence—and eventually extracting valuable information. It was through defectors that he uncovered such top-grade British KGB spies as Kim Philby and George Blake.

"Jim's forte is patience," said a veteran colleague. "I've seen him in a river at dusk, the rain coming down, casting slowly hour after hour, trying different flies until the trout strikes. He outwits and outwaits them—as he does with spies."

A few weeks ago Angleton and his three top deputies—representing among them 120 years of combined counter-espionage experience—were forced out following *New York Times* charges that the CIA had staged "massive" and "illegal" intelligence operations against American anti-war dissidents during the early Nixon years. More than 10,000 files on Americans were compiled, the paper claimed. Angleton's counter-espionage branch was singled out as the culprit.

Angleton has steadfastly denied that his relatively small staff had any reason—let alone the manpower—for the time-consuming, onerous task of running surveillance on Americans inside the US. Under the law, he has told friends, only the FBI has the authority and the resources for such work. "He could have cared less about the kids protesting the Vietnam war," one CIA watcher said.

However the CIA, in accordance with its statutory responsibilities, did keep an eye abroad on dissident groups, such as the Black Panthers, who were tracked from Algiers to Moscow to North Korea, where they took demolitions training before filtering back into the US and going underground. Such Americans were reported to the FBI, Angleton has insisted.

As to the charge of compiling 10,000 files, CIA colleagues have pointed out that the agency has automatic access to all FBI files—more than 100 million—and would have voluminous files on all Americans who have ever had contacts abroad with enemy or friendly intelligence services.

The identification of Angleton's unit in the original *New York Times* story of December 22 had the earmarks of authoritative guidance from highly placed sources within the CIA. Since then, however, the *Times* appears to have shifted the focus of its charges to another CIA unit—the Domestic Operations Division—with which Angleton and the counter-espionage staff have no connection.

There are grounds for believing that Angleton's dismissal caps 18 months of growing tension between him and new CIA director William E. Colby. Colby's CIA career has been spent primarily in covert labor activities and in the Far East. He has told his staff that he must devote 95 percent of his time to briefing the White House, Congress, and the news media. He is said to have little time for or interest in the complexities of counter-espionage.

Congress, in creating the CIA in 1947, specifically barred it from "police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal-security functions." These were reserved for the FBI. But at the same time, with characteristic imprecision, Congress ordered the CIA to "protect" intelligence sources and methods and to perform at the National Security Council's request additional services of "common concern" and "such other functions and duties" as the NSC might require. The gray areas here are obvious.

Since spies and other subversives are travelling increasingly in and out of the US, the system works only when CIA-FBI liaison is good. For 20 years Angleton worked closely with his friend Sam Papich, the FBI liaison officer. But in 1969 the late J. Edgar Hoover, incensed that President Lyndon B. Johnson had failed to defend him from charges by Senator Edward V. Long of Missouri that the FBI was tapping his phone, preemptively ended virtually all FBI liaison—not only with the CIA but with all other US intelligence agencies.

"It was a disgrace," said a knowledgeable intelligence source. "Nixon found out about it on taking office but he didn't dare tangle with Hoover, who was popular in the country and on the Hill. Besides, Nixon was more uptight about anti-war militants and rioters in the cities than about foreign spies."

Angleton, the eye of the current storm, is a most unlikely spy-catcher. Six feet tall, stooped, his thick, grizzled hair parted almost in the middle, he gazes out through his bifocals with the courtly, faintly quizzical charm of a New England professor. He dresses conservatively. His voice is quiet, meticulous, but assumes a faint rasp when he's angry.

His character is one of sharp contrasts. Children and animals seem to instinctively love him, but by profession he had to be suspicious of the adult world around him. He was obsessed with the KGB and with preventing any penetration of the CIA by a "mole"—the spy who works his way into an intelligence agency, as described so vividly by John le Carré in the best-selling novel, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

He has lunch nearly every day at La Niçoise in Georgetown, preferring fish, particularly fresh flounder, accompanied by a bottle of French wine. Once as a practical joke, someone at the restaurant put a microphone in the flowers on his table. Angleton almost immediately noticed it, looked at his companion with a finger to his lips, and removed the vase.

For years he has moved in an aura of discreet mystery, an enigmatic character even to his CIA colleagues, though his staff swear by him. His wife Cecilie, grown son, and two daughters long have been accustomed to his frequent, unexplained absences. He claims that for years they thought he worked "somewhere high in the Post Office."

As befits one in his curious trade he often works when others sleep. Not infrequently he will drop in on a friend at ten at night, sitting until two AM, chain-smoking, sipping bourbon and water, now and then rubbing a hand over his forehead and eyes, chatting tirelessly, his mind fully alert. He is discretion personified, turning away awkward questions with an elliptical answer. Even at two AM he sometimes will phone an intelligence contact and, in murmured tones, announce his impending arrival.

For weeks he will disappear, then arrive at the home of friends, bearing a magnificent cattleya orchid raised in his own greenhouse in suburban Virginia, or a bit of semi-precious stone he has been polishing, or an intricate trout fly he has made.

Now 57, Angleton got into the spy-catching business by accident. His father, a wealthy executive who ran National Cash Register operations in Italy, joined the OSS during World War II and recommended his son. Young Angleton, with a Yale degree and two years at the Harvard Business School, had just enlisted. He was interviewed, recruited, and after special counter-espionage training in England was sent to Italy in 1943, where he rose to the rank of major in charge of counter-espionage.

It was in Italy after the war that he first met the Jewish underground leaders who then were helping fellow Jews escape Europe for British-ruled Palestine. Their friendship flourished. For the past 20 years Angleton has been the CIA official with whom successive Israeli leaders have preferred to deal. Given the current Middle East situation, these contacts have given him immense responsibility—and also have caused jealousies within the US government. Some observers feel Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and CIA Director Colby have decided to gather liaison with Israeli intelligence into their own hands.

Angleton's critics accuse him of having built a virtually unassailable empire-within-an-empire. There is some truth to this. As steward of the nation's innermost secrets—even the White House leads to leave counter-espionage to career professionals—Angleton has had great authority with all US security agencies. Another charge often heard is that he is a man steeped in hostility to the Communist world, a man who sees spies under every bed.

He makes no secret in his quiet, professional way that he regards