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THE SPY WHO GOT AWAY

Edward Lee Howard was a C.I.A. recruit bound for Moscow. Dismissed, he eluded the F.B.I., defected and left U.S. intelligence efforts compromised. Now it has been learned that another ex-C.I.A. agent was aware of the betrayal.

By David Wise

IN THE SILENCE JUST BEFORE TWILIGHT in the desert near Santa Fe, the sky changes colors, shading to pinks and reds, and the sunset casts an orange glow on the golden snakeweed, the prickly pear cactuses and the juniper trees. The Sangre de Cristo mountains turn purple, then swiftly black. Suddenly, the first stars appear and the night belongs to the coyotes, the chirping toads and the owls.

On just such a night a little more than a year ago, with the clouds racing past a quarter-moon, Edward Lee Howard, a 33-year-old former officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, slipped away from agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and vanished.

On Aug. 7 of this year, he surfaced in Moscow, granted political asylum by the Russians. According to intelligence officials, Howard betrayed the methods used by the C.I.A. to contact its spies — "assets" in intelligence jargon — in the Soviet Union, leading directly to the arrest of one such C.I.A. asset, Soviet defense researcher Adolf G. Tolkachev, whose execution was announced a week and a half ago by Tass, the Soviet news agency. Howard's information also may have led to the ex-

pulsion from Moscow of several American intelligence agents and the detention of other Soviet citizens who were working for the C.I.A.

Howard is the first known C.I.A. man to have defected to the Soviet Union in the 39-year history of the agency. His defection was, perhaps, the greatest embarrassment ever suffered by the C.I.A. But a second former C.I.A. man, whose identity and role have been a tightly guarded secret, is also a key figure in the case. The second man is William G. Bosch.

F.B.I. agents tracked Bosch down on South Padre Island, at the southernmost tip of Texas, near the Mexican border. For four days, they interrogated him, even as other agents maintained a 24-hour surveillance on Howard in Santa Fe, N.M. According to intelligence sources, Bosch finally told

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One thing is clear, however. The Howard case vastly embarrassed the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. Behind the scenes, there has been a good deal of finger-pointing between the two agencies — each blaming the other.

The existence of a second man in the case is only one of many startling aspects that surround the affair. While many facets of the case remain unclear, an in-depth investigation, including dozens of interviews with Howard's family, friends, associates, neighbors and Government officials, among them a number of persons in the intelligence agencies, has revealed other surprising information, much of which has not previously been disclosed:

■ Edward Howard and his wife, Mary, were both employed by the C.I.A.'s Directorate of Operations, the agency's clandestine arm. They were trained by the agency to operate in Moscow as a husband-and-wife spy team.

■ Only one F.B.I. agent was watching the Howards' house on Sept. 21, 1985, as Mary Howard helped her husband escape by driving home with a dummy in the front seat, a dummy made of clothes shaped in a human form and topped with a wig stand for its head. In the darkness, the agent apparently mistook the dummy for Howard — a ruse that gave the ex-spy a 24-hour head start.

■ Mary Howard further aided her husband's escape by playing a tape recording of his voice over their telephone that fooled F.B.I. agents, who were wire-tapping the phone, into believing he was still at home.

■ Mary Howard was with her husband at an Austrian ski resort near the Swiss border on Sept. 20, 1984, during a trip when the F.B.I. believes he met with K.G.B. agents. But she insists he was only gone from their hotel room for a short time and maintains she never had any knowledge of his alleged spying for the Russians. For a year after her husband vanished, Mary Howard declined to talk

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