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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, Contact Division
 FOR : Support Branch
 FROM : []
 BY : [] Resident Agent

DATE 4 Dec 59
 NH-2125

SUBJECT: CIA Financial Responsibility to Michael Marlak

1. We wish to bring to your attention a development which requires priority investigation and urgent remedial action. It concerns an \$1,800 fraud perpetrated in the name of the Central Intelligence Agency on two contacts of this office, Michael and Katherine Marlak.

2. The background. We first heard of the Marlaks through a Guide 223 form dated 26 February 1959, which indicated that they would be visiting Russia and Poland that June. On 6 May, we were advised that our request for security checks had been cancelled "because of prior interest of another component". In early October, other sources recommended Marlak to our attention because of talks he had been giving around Waterbury, Connecticut, following his return, and on 9 October we queried Support about whether we might see him. The reply to this was that SR/10 had intended to use him, but decided against it, and we could go ahead. On 14 October, Index confirmed this permission both by teletype and a clearance form 1124. We then went about establishing contact with the Marlaks through contacts of Chase Copper and Brass Company, of Waterbury, where Marlak is a casting shop specialist. Since he was temporarily working on the dog watch and his wife works (as an accountant) during the daytime, it was arranged for us to make our visit to his home the evening of 3 December so that they would both be available at once.

3. We found the Marlaks an extremely friendly, interested, and intelligent couple, living in a modernized, pine-paneled farmhouse surrounded by ten acres of woods, outhouses, and beautifully manicured lawns divided by a stream. If Marlak had received an engineering training instead of going to work as a youngster, he would doubtless be a member of the Chase management; as it is, he is constantly bombarding Chase for a chance to assume more responsibility in the firm. In short, the contrast between the Marlaks and their home surroundings, and those of his fellow millworkers who live nearby, is startling. Both he and his wife are second-generation Americans, solid citizens, and willing to do anything for their country including accept operational assignments. Their caliber is indicated by the fact that they would still serve in the same manner today despite receiving treatment which they feel is unjust, which has left them bewildered, and on the hearing of which left our Contact Specialist hard put to it to hide his own reaction.

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
 SOURCE METHOD EXEMPTION 3B2B
 NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
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4. The circumstances. Not long after our welcome, during which we presented our credentials as usual, the Marlaks said they had a problem they hoped we might be able to help resolve. It all started some time before the 1958 touring season began, when one of their Marlak relatives in New Jersey said he had come across another relative, and suggested a family get-together in New Jersey, to which the Connecticut Marlaks went. There they met Konstanty Mierlak, of 197 Roebling Street, Brooklyn 11, New York, an accounting department worker for the Holland-America Line. They gathered that "Connie" had left Russia about 15 years ago via Italy and South America, and that he was on the way to becoming an American. They also learned that they still had relatives living a few miles from Minsk, who appeared to be Marlak's first cousins and Mierlak's second cousins. Marlak knew that his late father had lived somewhere near the Niemen River, but it had not occurred to him that there would still be relatives in the area; he had never heard from anybody there, and although his father had said he hoped Marlak could some day visit the area, Marlak never gave it much consideration.

5. In September, Mierlak got the Marlaks aside and propositioned them about making a trip to the USSR and looking up the relatives. He offered to pay all their expenses if they could go right away, even including Mrs. Marlak's salary, but the Marlaks could not get away on such short notice, and it was not until sometime over the 1958-59 winter that the subject was again developed. This time Connie said that it wouldn't be possible to pay all the expenses, but he advised that their round trip air fare would be paid, an amount coming to around \$1,800. He cautioned them against mentioning his interest to anybody, ultimately gave them operational assignments (we know of two); told them to take all the pictures of the area they could, and to bring back as comprehensive a story as possible about various conditions in the area. He also told them to go ahead and buy their tickets and to give him the receipt, and that he would get the money and pay them back on their return.

6. The Marlaks did as they were told, and we have heard a long account of their efforts to make contact with their relatives. It reads like episodes out of "Foreign Intrigue," involving doped champagne, arrest for picture taking, tailing by security agents (and vice versa), and the manner in which they discussed it caused us to accept their account as factual. The main point is that, of their 15 days in the USSR, they spent five days in Minsk trying to do their job for no other reason than that they had been asked to make the effort in return for air passage. As Marlak said, "Minsk is no tourist paradise. We did it because we thought it was important. Now, we feel somehow as though we've been had, and frankly we don't like it and we can't afford it."

7. Connie met the Marlaks at the airport on their return, and spoke with them briefly. Some days later, they met again, at which time Connie informed them that, after they had left the US, he learned that his superiors wouldn't pay for the trip after all. The Marlaks were dumfounded. In the course of

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subsequent correspondence back and forth, plus verbal discussions with Connie, the Marlaks came to understand that Connie's superiors were the Central Intelligence Agency. This was evidently confirmed in their minds via contacts made shortly after their return by Jim Pys of the Boston Office, since Connie seemed to be aware of that contact and acknowledged the organizational connection between Jim and Connie's superiors. Furthermore, the kind of information of interest to Jim made the Marlaks believe that their journey certainly was indeed of real interest to CIA, even though they were unsuccessful in its ultimate operational purpose.

8. During the course of this account, which, to our amazement, was rendered more in sorrow than in anger, the Marlaks asked us for an opinion as to whether we thought such a thing was "right and decent." Our only possible answer was that we had never heard of such a proposition having been made and (after a look at their correspondence) we felt it wise to add that we would look into it. Following this, plus looking at a couple of hundred pictures and 600 feet of movies, we found occasion to caution the Marlaks against discussing this situation with anyone, with particular reference to the operational aspects of their mission. They said they hadn't, and wouldn't, and we left on relatively friendly terms.

9. We have a very positive feeling that this is not a situation that can be brushed under the rug. We believe the Marlaks to be honorable, responsible people with the best interests of the United States at heart. We also believe that our relations with first-generation Americans in this area will suffer a crippling blow if the matter is not straightened out in very short order, and to that end we invite your attention to the copies we have made of their correspondence with Connie. We have stapled it together, and suggest your particular perusal of the last item, which is undated. This is a roughed-out version of a letter they were working on summing up the situation as they see it. They did not say where they were going to send it -- possibly it was going to Jim Pys if they knew his address. They were perfectly willing to give it to us for disposition, although emphasizing that they were "just thinking out loud" and it wasn't complete.

10. Regardless of who may have been responsible for this situation, there are these things to consider:

- a. The Marlaks believe the CIA wanted them to make the journey, they performed as best they could, they were subsequently debriefed by two acknowledged Agency representatives, and what they believe to be CIA has welshed on a promise to pay their transportation to and from (but not in) the Soviet Union.

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b. The Marlaks hoped to make the trip on their own some time, but following a business depression in Waterbury plus a strike at Chase, they were in no position to cough up \$1,800 on their own at the time they went.

11. We are sending a copy of this memo, plus enclosures, to Boston so they will know what has happened, what is currently afoot, and that the Marlaks have concentrated their disgust on this office. We hope it will be possible to give attention to this memo very quickly. Please advise.

Enclosures: as stated

cc: []

FILE: Michael Marlak

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Don't fuggly!

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