

SPY CASE: Robert Glenn Thompson

Name **THOMPSON, Robert Glenn**

Photo



Employer US Air Force
Office of Special Investigation at Berlin's Tempelhof Air Base

Dates of Employment December 1952 to December 1958 with an honorable discharge

Employee Type Uniformed enlisted

Job Title/Duties Administrative Clerk

Military Rank Airman Second Class (demoted from Airman First Class)

Clearance Level Secret

Spying For USSR

Codename

Spying Dates June 1957 - July 1963

Co-conspirators Boris V. KARPOVICH, counselor in the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC. Used alias John KURLINSKY (PNG'd)

Fedro KUDAHSKIN, former chief of the Soviet section of verbatim reporters at the United Nations (returned to USSR Aug 1963)

A Russian named only as "Steve"

Methodology 9 Jan 1957: Court-martialed for dereliction of duty (being unfit for duty because of drunkenness) leaving his post and stealing a revolver. Demoted from Airman First Class to Airman Second Class and forfeited \$67 in pay.

February 1957: Thompson's wife leaves for the US

July 1957: After 22-year-old THOMPSON was reprimanded by commanding officer because Thompson came to work unshaven and unkempt, he went out and got drunk.

After 20 shots of cognac, he decided "to hell with it" and walked into East Berlin wearing civilian clothes. He contacted Soviet intelligence officers saying he wanted to defect.

The intelligence officers questioned a drunk Thompson for three hours and sent him back after telling him they didn't think he would make a good spy.

Ten days later, a car pulled up to Thompson with men (one with a gun) who told him to get into the car.

"They took me back to the same place I was before, only this time the atmosphere was different. They threatened to 'double-agent' me—meaning one of their agents would get word to my superiors that I was working for them. They interviewed me for nine hours that time, and I smoked a lot of cigars. I agreed to work with them."

For the next five months, Thompson brought into his office a Minox camera hidden in his tobacco pouch. He photographed Confidential and Secret documents and delivered to the Soviets 50 to 100 photographs every two weeks. The Soviets gave him a shoe with a concealment device in the heel where he could hide two rolls of film.

He stole information on: US military installations, missile sites, code books, OSI intelligence and counterintelligence activities in Berlin, the identity and personality data on OSI Agents, safe house locations, etc.

He said the Soviets gave him four electrical outlets, which were microphones, to screw in office walls. Thompson received \$4,000 from the Russians.

December 1957: Thompson told the Soviets he was being ordered to an Air Force

Base in Montana. He claimed the excited Soviets flew him to the USSR for additional training: secret writing and microphotography. The Russians gave him \$1,000 to buy a short-wave radio. He was to tune to a certain broadcast on Thursdays at 7:05 am and listen for the code words 'Amour Lenin.'

He was also given a cigarette lighter decorated with four aces which was identical to the one a female Soviet agent would have. The meeting place was in front of a movie theater in Smith Falls, Ontario. Parole: "Are you from Toledo?" and Thompson would reply, "Yes, since June 23, 1932."

He was to arrange for a meeting by sending a letter in secret writing to an accommodation address in East Germany.

January 1958: Reported to Malstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana

Once Thompson got to the US, he stopped spying and left the Air Force in December 1958.

While living in Detroit, MI, Thompson was approached by Soviet embassy counselor in Washington Boris KARPOVICH who told Thompson to get a job with the FBI or Air Force OSI and gave him \$300. Thompson said he doubted the FBI would hire him. He was tasked to gather information about a police officer in Detroit and obtain information on missile bases in Michigan.

Thompson had no contact with the Soviets until mid-1961 when Fedor KUDASHKIN, stationed at the UN, went to Detroit and put pressure on him. Thompson moved to Long Island, NY but Kudashkiin tracked him down in November 1961 and threatened to expose him. Thompson agreed to work for him.

"He wanted me to supply information about water reservoirs on Long Island, on the gas lines between New York and Long Island, on the power plants in these areas."

He was also tasked to collect information on people living on Long Island. Thompson would pose as an insurance man and question the target subject's neighbors and credit agents. He was sent to Canada to find Igor GOUSENKO (a Soviet defector).

Thompson met with Kudashkin over 12 times in parks, beneath water towers, in parking lots. He didn't get a lot of money for his work: "I never even made my gas money."

Spring 1963: While meeting with Kudashkin, Thompson saw two men in a car taking pictures of them.

Possible
Motivations,
Problems

Revenge: "I wasn't in this for money. I was disgusted, and it was part of my plan to get revenge."

Also money, disgruntlement

At his job in the AFOSI, he was constantly bragging and showing off, wanting to be a 'big-wheel'. Coworkers described him as weak, anti-officer and a malcontent who drank excessively.

He was frequently moody and envious of the Special Agents assigned to his office.

Suffered from a skin disorder and pockmarks and was extremely sensitive about his appearance.

He was loud and boisterous, had no close friends, suspected of being unfaithful to his German wife and was not very devoted to his children.

When his wife moved to the US in February 1957, he was suspected of living with another woman.

While living in New York in later years: Thompson had an obsession with the color red: wore red clothes, dressed his children in red clothes, painted his house and fuel truck red.

Finances

Identified/
Investigation

Investigation began in 1958 when Thompson returned to the US.

7 June 1963: FBI surveillance watches a personal meeting with a known KGB officer and individual who later was identified as Thompson.

August 1964: FBI questioned Thompson and he confessed.

Arrest
Date/Location

7 January 1965, at his service station in Babylon, NY

Charges

Conspiracy to commit espionage (18 U.S.C. Sec. 794(c))

Espionage (18 U.S.C. Sec. 794(a))

Conspiracy to commit a crime against the United States (18 U.S.C. Sec. 371)

Acting as an agent of a foreign government (18 U.S.C. Sec. 951)

Court	U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, NY
Lawyers	Defense: Sidney Siben Prosecution: US Attorney Joseph E. Hoey
Status	7 Jan 1965: Pled not guilty 8 March 1965: Pled guilty to conspiring to commit espionage 13 May 1965: Found guilty and sentenced to 30 years in prison for conspiracy to commit espionage 1 May 1978: A rare Spy Swap--Thompson was released from the federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA and flown to West Berlin. He was then swapped for a Alan van Norman, a 22-year-old American college student who was arrested on 2 August 1977 in East Germany for trying to help a family escape East Germany. Swap arranged by East German lawyer Wolfgang Vogel.
Date/Place of Birth	20 January 1935, Detroit, MI
Citizenship	US "I am a citizen of the German Democratic Republic." — <i>Thompson told reporters at his release in 1978</i>
Residences	Bay Shore, Long Island, NY Detroit, MI West Berlin
Education	High School dropout During his incarceration, Thompson earned a Bachelor of Laws Degree from LaSalle Correspondence University
Family	German-born wife Eveline, married Thompson while Thompson was stationed in Berlin with the AFOSI.

Three children in US: Patricia, Karen, Dean

Mother: Mrs. Norma G. Simmers, a Detroit widow who remarried and moved to Tuscon, AZ with her husband

Other Employment When arrested, Thompson was running a home fuel-oil delivery service as a truck driver.

Additional Bio While living in Bay Shore, NY, Thompson built a fence between him and his black neighbor and would yell racial epithets to the neighbor. Thompson also hung a noose in a window facing the neighbor.

In the May 1988 Air Force OSI publication, "Volunteers: The Betrayal of National Defense Secrets by Air Force Traitors" it says "information developed during the course of the investigation and Thompson's imprisonment" that Thompson was born on 23 January 1925 in Leipsig, Germany, son of a German father and Russian mother. He joined a Nazi Youth Brigade and was captured by the Soviet Army in 1945 (20 years old). He was later trained as a KGB Illegal and claimed, while in prison, that he was a KGB Major.

"Thompson is known to have assisted another Soviet Illegal across the Canadian border and may have been the support officer for an Illegals network operating in the US. His job as a truck drive provided cover because it allowed him to come and go as he pleased."

But the book then describes Thompsons high school records, grades and attendance and that he dropped out in the 10th grade.

In 1991, intelligence author and historian Nigel West wrote in a British newspaper that he discovered Thompson was not an American but a German named Gregor Alexander Best with a wife named Sylvia and two children in East Germany. He wrote that Thompson was born in Germany to a Russian mother and a German father, Thompson served in the Red Army as a tank commander and was trained to spy by the KGB and sent to Canada in 1949.

Thompson himself made matters confusing by claiming to the media when he was released in 1978 that he was an East German who was born in Leipzig, Germany and that spying "was his job." He said that he was a Soviet agent and Thompson was his cover name.

In 2010, CI Centre asked Nigel West about Thompson's claim. He said that Thompson was never an Illegal and Thompson's claims to be a Soviet intelligence officer were false. Thompson's motivations were complex, but evidently Thompson believed that he would not be exchanged in a spy-swap if he acknowledged being a US citizen.

Documents [Robert Glenn THOMPSON, Appellant, v. UNITED STATES of America](#) (US Court of Appeals, 22 Dec 1971)

[Robert Glenn THOMPSON, Appellant, v. UNITED STATES of America, Appellee](#) (US Court of Appeals, 19 Sep 1973)

Quotes "I wasn't in this for money. I was disgusted, and it was part of my plan to get revenge." — *Robert Thompson*

"I am guilty and I want to take what's coming to me. I feel relieved it's partially all over. I made a bad mistake when I was 22. I had a lot of things on my mind most young fellows don't have. I was stupid." — *Robert Thompson*

"Espionage is not a game; it's a serious business. But if I had to do it over again, I'd have to do it again. This was my job. . . I wouldn't change a day in my life, but I'm glad to be out." — *Robert Thompson to the media upon his release to be swapped in 1978*

Case Links [I Spied for the Russians](#) (Saturday Evening Post, 5 June 1965)

Books

News

[American Charged with Selling Secrets to Russia](#) (AP, 8 Jan 1965)

[Air Force Veteran Faces Spy Charges](#) (AP, 8 Jan 1965)

[Soviet Aide Ordered Expelled](#) (AP, 8 Jan 1965)

[Can't Believe Son Red Spy, Says Shocked Mother of Vet](#) (AP, 8 Jan 1965)

[Neighbors in Bay Shore Split on Character of Suspect; SUSPECT VIEWED IN VARYING WAYS](#) (New York Times, 8 Jan 1965)

[Thompson Denies Spy Charge And Says He's '100% American'](#)

Robert Glenn Thompson denied vigorously today that he had served as a spy for the Soviet Union in this

country and abroad. . . . (New York Times, 9 Jan 1965)

[L.I. Spy Tells of Serving Soviet; Thompson Switches Plea to Guilty -- Trained by Reds](#)

Robert Glenn Thompson, a former Air Force enlisted man who pleaded not guilty on Jan. 7 to charges of having been a spy for the Soviet Union, changed his plea to guilty yesterday. . . . (New York Times, 9 Mar 1965)

[Espionage: The Stupid Spy](#)

To the neighbors around Bay Shore, L.I., Robert Glenn Thompson, 30, seemed average enough—an overweight (6 ft. 2 in., 250 lbs.) and overworked Air Force veteran who scratched out a living for his German-born wife and three kids by running a home fuel-oil delivery service. Last January, when Thompson was arrested by the FBI and charged with committing "13 overt acts of espionage" for the Russians between 1957 and 1963, the folks in Bay Shore were predictably surprised. Just as predictably, Thompson denied all. But last week he changed his mind, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, and blabbered his sordid little spy story to the press. . . . (TIME, 19 Mar 1965)

[Confessed Spy Gets 30-Year Prison Term](#) (AP, 13 May 1965)

[EX-AIRMAN GIVEN 30 YEARS AS A SPY; Judge Declares Thompson Undermined U.S. Security](#)

A former enlisted man in the Air Force who pleaded guilty to having spied for the Soviet Union in this country and abroad was sentenced yesterday to 30 years' imprisonment. He is Robert Glenn Thompson, 30 years old, of Bay Shore, L.I. . . . (New York Times, 14 May 1965)

[Four Nations Negotiating Political Prison Swap](#) (UPI, 26 Feb 1978)

[Soviet Spy Freed in Triangular Swap](#) (AP, 1 May 1978)

[Spy Swapped for US Student](#) (UPI, 2 May 1978)

[Latest East-West Spy Swap is Completed](#) (AP, 2 May 1978)

[PAPER SAYS SPY A GERMAN, NOT AMERICAN](#)

Robert Glenn Thompson, a former U.S. Air Force intelligence operative jailed in 1965 for spying, was not an American but an East German agent named Gregor Alexander Best, a British newspaper reported. The weekly Mail today said it interviewed the man in an unspecified place in the former East Germany. . . . (AP, 28 Jul 1991)

[Spy Trader](#)

Like a character out of a Kafka tale, Wolfgang Vogel spends his days sifting through files, looking for evidence to defend himself against charges he finds difficult to comprehend. The twist is that for years Vogel was a lawyer whose clients were often people like Kafka's Joseph K., arrested for reasons not made clear to them.

Today, at 67, Vogel sits in the second-floor study of his lakeside house and pores over his files like a

worried law clerk. Shrunken and sad, his scant gray hair cut short, like a criminal's, he stares now and then at a lake dotted with sailboats and ringed with villas like his, homes of East Germany's formerly privileged.

When he worked in the shadowy world of espionage and secret deals, Vogel was one of the cold war's more engrossing figures. The trim, 5-foot-6 lawyer cut a dashing figure in well-tailored double-breasted suits. His wife, Helga, drove him everywhere in a gold-colored Mercedes. While the Berlin wall stood, nothing seemed beyond Vogel's powers. He arranged, with considerable elan, the exchange of spies and political prisoners. And he was a superb spy trader, a man as highly regarded in East Berlin and Moscow as he was in Bonn and Washington. . . . (New York Times magazine, 23 May 1993)