

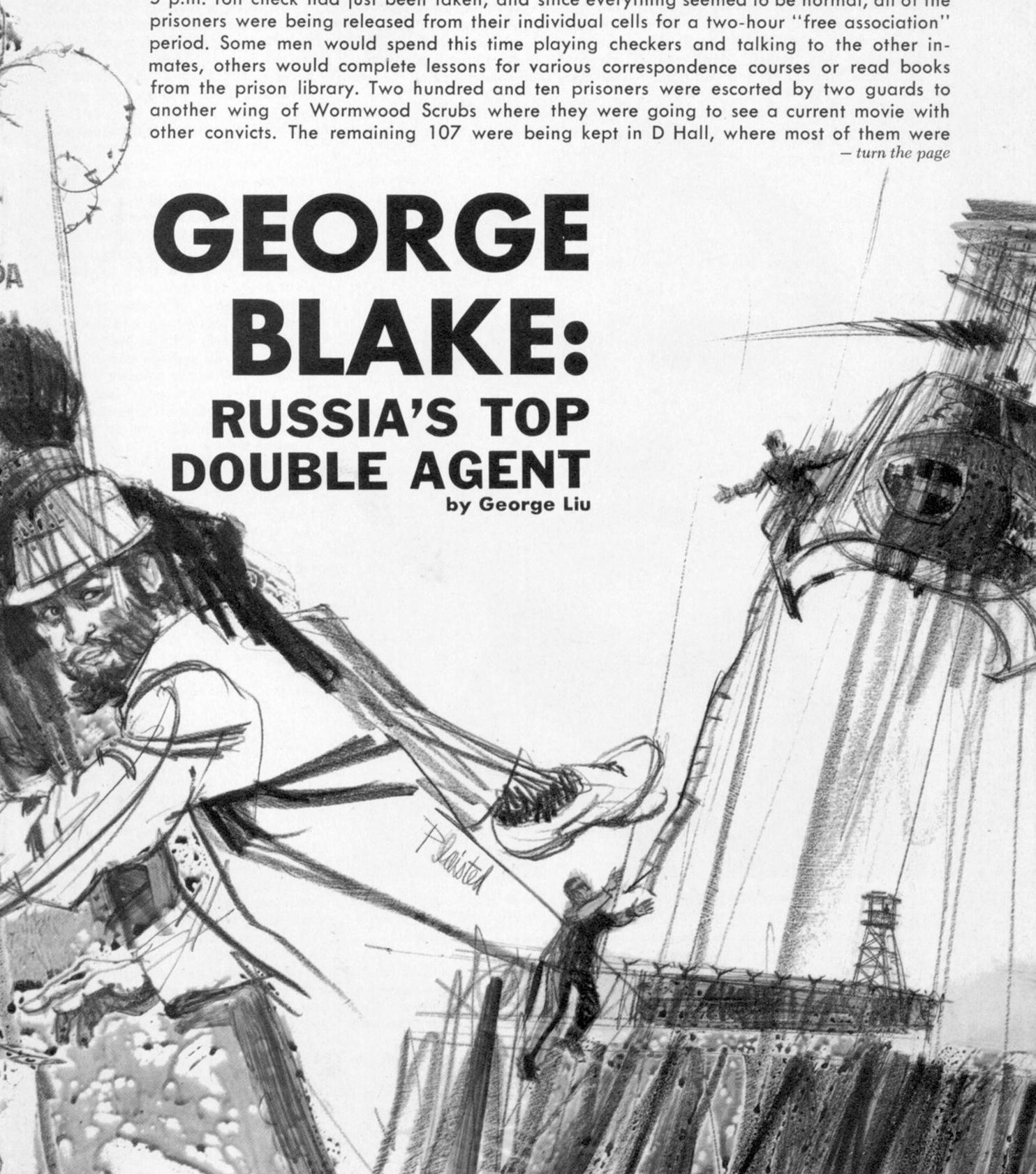
The twisted trail of a spy who crossed the bridge from West to East

**I**T WAS RAINING heavily on London and the 317 prisoners in D Hall of Wormwood Scrubs Prison were being kept indoors on Saturday, October 22, 1966. The 5 p.m. roll check had just been taken, and since everything seemed to be normal, all of the prisoners were being released from their individual cells for a two-hour "free association" period. Some men would spend this time playing checkers and talking to the other inmates, others would complete lessons for various correspondence courses or read books from the prison library. Two hundred and ten prisoners were escorted by two guards to another wing of Wormwood Scrubs where they were going to see a current movie with other convicts. The remaining 107 were being kept in D Hall, where most of them were

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# GEORGE BLAKE: RUSSIA'S TOP DOUBLE AGENT

by George Liu



watching the wrestling matches on television.

George Blake had watched the matches for several minutes before he turned to a guard and angrily spoke out: "All those matches are phony. They're all rigged."

The guard nodded his head indifferently, then replied, "Well, you don't have to watch them if you don't

Although he had been off the "escape list" — a file of all prisoners who had attempted to escape or those who were regarded as potential escapees — for over four years, the governor of the prison wouldn't give him the freedom of movement the other inmates had. Unconsciously, Blake glanced at the two guards supervising the men. Both were watching the tele-

gized, "Sorry, I'm going back to my cell. I've got to finish my Arabic lesson."

At the foot of the stairs, Blake cautiously turned his head back to see if any guard or prisoner was watching him. No one was looking. It took him only a dozen seconds to reach the second floor of the building. Walking between the rows of cells, Blake discovered that he was the only person on the floor.

There was a large, iron-barred window, its glass partly broken, at the end of the corridor. Blake walked up to it, stooped down, and ran his right hand down the central iron bar. Near the floor his hand stopped at a strip of dark adhesive tape which had been wrapped around the bar several times. Blake had placed it there to conceal a cut in the cast iron.

Blake waited a minute until the men below him let out a yell. It took only a few kicks with his boot to bend the cut bar far enough out of shape to allow his body to squeeze through. The ground was twenty feet below him. Blake swung his legs out as he leaped and landed on a parapet covering an entrance to D Hall. With one more short jump he was on the ground.

"The guard," Blake quietly spoke to himself and kept low near the parapet, waiting. A few minutes passed, and then a lone figure decked out in rain gear and carrying a flashlight passed by. The guard swung the light towards the parapet but didn't see the figure huddling there.

"Eight minutes, just eight minutes." Blake was thinking of the small amount of time he had left for his escape. "Eight minutes to get to the wall and to get out."

The guard disappeared in the rain.

Blake hurdled a short hedge and ran towards the wall twenty yards away. As he approached it, he saw the ladder hanging down next to the bricks. It was made of nylon and each rung was reinforced with a long, grey knitting needle.

One, two, three . . . up the twenty rungs Blake slowly climbed. His mind was counting off the minutes before the guard would return. He reached the top of the wall and then pushed his body off the narrow ledge. It was a drop, twenty feet straight down to the ground. Blake made a quick roll on his side as he landed and then pushed the shock off his legs. This was a trick he had learned twenty years before when he was instructing British agents who were being air-dropped in Nazi-held territory. Blake's blue prison uniform was thoroughly soaked when he got



Scotland Yard released this photo of double agent George Blake, serving a 42-year sentence, when he escaped from Wormwood Scrubs Prison on Oct. 22, 1966.

want to. Is there supposed to be anything better on?"

"Hell no. Right now there's just those rigged matches." Blake turned his eyes back to the screen but he couldn't keep his mind on the action. For a moment he thought about the movie in the other wing of the prison, but he knew he would never be allowed out of D Hall by the guards.

vision.

Blake stayed in the main hall for a few more minutes and then started to walk towards the exit as the men were yelling for their favorites. The two guards didn't see him leave.

"Hey, George, stay and watch the TV," a prisoner called.

Blake didn't turn around to see who was addressing him, but quietly apolo-

up and tried to look through the heavy rain.

At 7 p.m. the prisoners of D Hall were returned to their cells for the evening count. At 7:10 a guard noticed that a cell on the second floor was empty. However, a few prisoners usually lagged behind, so it was ignored. Ten minutes later, the cell was still empty and so the Governor of the prison and the main gate were notified. A quick search of the grounds was made and the nylon ladder was found hanging inside the wall. A guard also found a lot of pink chrysanthemums outside the prison which had been placed next to the wall where the ladder had been thrown over. At 7:43 Scotland Yard was noti-

rank of captain in the British Royal Army during World War I. When Egypt became an English Protectorate, his father became a British citizen. Catherine Beijderwellen, his mother, came from a Protestant family in Holland.

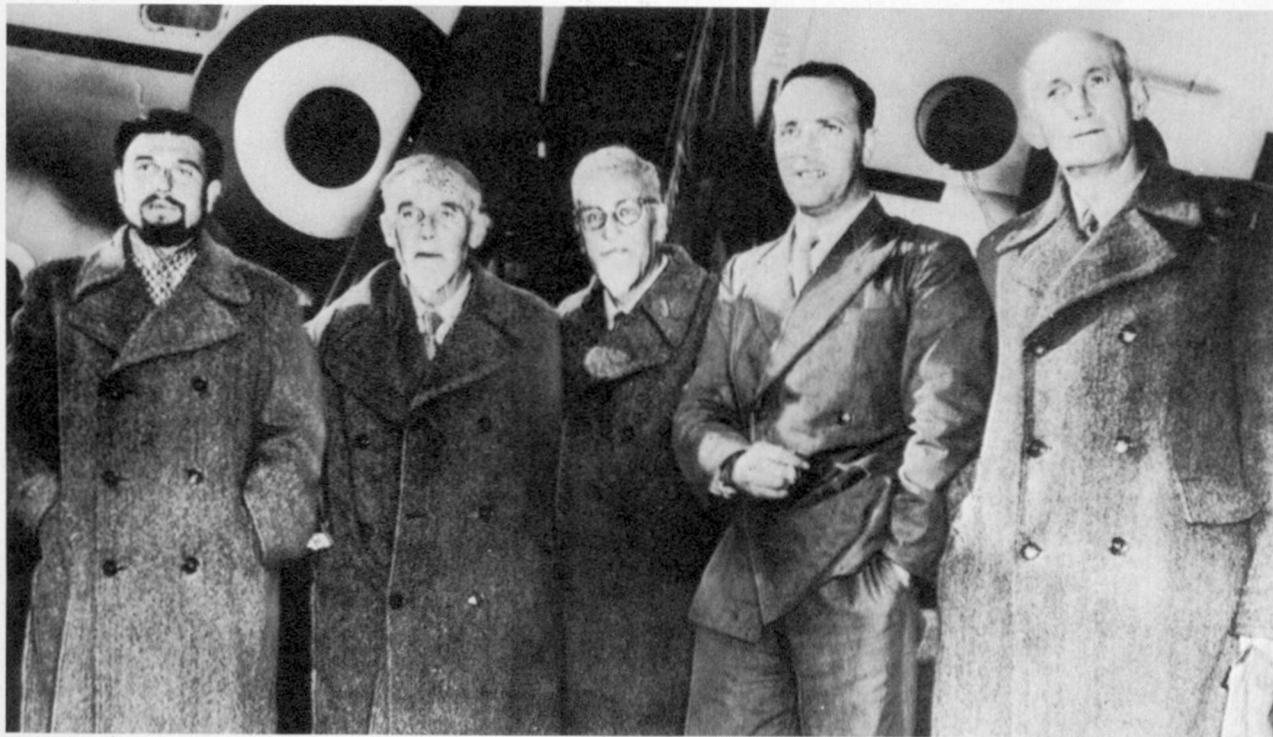
In 1935 George traveled to Cairo where he lived with an aunt and her rich husband. It was there that he was taught the English language.

Blake's return to Rotterdam came only a few months before Adolph Hitler launched his armies against the nations of Europe. For several months of uneasy peace he lived with his grandmother while continuing his education. Blake was just under eighteen when the invasion of Holland

that his feelings were genuine and he was recruited as a courier. For two years Blake bicycled around the countryside while carrying messages for the underground fighters.

In the spring of 1942 Blake rode his bicycle to a drop point where he was to pick up some coded messages. Instead, there was a large envelope placed there. Tearing open the envelope, he discovered that it contained an assortment of official-looking documents. There was one piece of paper on which was written: "The Movement has been betrayed. Get out of the country before the Gestapo arrests you. Use these false papers."

Blake immediately jumped on his bicycle and started to pedal to the



*On the left is a bearded George Blake when he was British Vice-Consul in Seoul as he was released with other Britons by the North Koreans in April, 1953.*

fied and an urgent message went out: *Find George Blake.*

It was Sunday when the English people heard the news. George Blake, the man who worked as a double agent for the Russians for nine and a half years while serving as a British intelligence officer, had escaped from prison.

George Blake was a man who had no strong national loyalties. He was born as George Behar in Rotterdam in 1922. Albert William Behar, his father, was an Egyptian Jew who had spent five years in the French Foreign Legion and had earned the

came. His mother, who had married an English diplomat after her first husband died, and his two sisters were able to cross the Channel into Great Britain before the Nazi storm troopers overran the small nation.

Since it was dangerous for Blake to remain in Rotterdam, he fled to Warnsveld in eastern Holland, where he lived with an uncle. It was there that Blake was introduced to the clandestine activities that would have an impact on his life. While living under the name of Pieter de Vries, he was contacted by the Dutch underground, which had learned of his anti-German feelings. They discovered

south. He did not stop at his uncle's home, but traveled quickly into Belgium and then into France. Blake had boarded a train heading for the Pyrenees region of France when he was stopped by a Nazi guard who demanded to see his papers. Silently Blake handed over several of the forged documents he had received. One gave his age as 16 years. The guard was satisfied and let him continue riding on the train.

Near the French-Spanish border, he made contact with an "underground railroad" which had helped downed

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Allied pilots escape from Nazi territory. With its help Blake walked over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. Near Madrid he was arrested by the Civil Guard. However, since he had a British passport, he was sent to the English base at Gibraltar. From there he was flown to England in 1943.

When George landed in England, he adopted his stepfather's surname: Blake. Because of his knowledge of Flemish and German and of the geography of Holland, he was recruited by the British Special Operations executive, who needed a man with those abilities for the Dutch branch. Blake spent the remainder of the war training agents who were being air-dropped into Holland. At the end of the war he received the Dutch Order of Nassau, an honor bringing him knighthood for his services.

Blake spent some time as an interpreter for the naval staffs in Berlin and Hamburg before he was approached by MI-6 (Military Intelligence, Branch 6, the organization which conducts England's espionage activities abroad), who needed a man with his war experiences and linguistic abilities. Using the front of a naval officer, he attended a Russian interpreter course at Downing College, Cambridge, which was being run by Commander Anthony Courtney, who headed the Russian Section of Naval Intelligence. Courtney stated: "The Foreign Office contacted me and asked if I would accept Blake in the course. They indicated that he was being absorbed into our intelligence service, but that he should be regarded at the college as just a serving officer."

Blake's studies came to an end in 1948 when he was posted to Seoul, South Korea, where he was to pose as vice-consul at the embassy. Again, that was a mere cover to conceal the fact that his real bosses were in MI-6 and not in the Foreign Office. In 1949, with the information he had received from contacts, Blake warned his superiors that the North Koreans would soon cross the 38th Parallel, but his warning was ignored.

The second invasion and occupation Blake had foreseen came in the summer of 1950 when the North Koreans crossed the demilitarized zone and entered the South.

Captain Vyvyan Holt, head of the British Legation in Seoul, was given authorization to withdraw his staff as the Red army approached the city. Holt chose to remain in the legation building with Blake and another employee, Norman Owen, to take care of final administrative work.

It was July 2, 1950, when Holt

ordered Blake and Owen to the basement of the legation building to burn the ciphers and other appropriate papers, while he remained in the main room to reassure the British civilians who had taken refuge there. The two men quietly burned the papers as they listened to rifle shots. As an afterthought, they poured the contents of the building's wine cellar down the drain in hopes of preventing a drunken massacre. The front door was pushed down and several armed soldiers entered the main room. Holt, Blake, Owen and the other British civilians were arrested by the "People's Army" of North Korea.

Blake and the other civilian captives, including Philip Deane, a British journalist, and Commissioner Herbert Lord of the Salvation Army, were kept in the South until U.S. forces advanced towards the Yalu River. On October 31, 1950, the prisoners, along with 700 American soldiers, were taken on a death march across the 38th Parallel. The people were forced to walk 15 miles a day, and the combination of this physical exertion and the poor diet of millet had its effect. Those who dropped out of the march were sent to "People's Hospitals," where they were shot and buried. Commissioner Lord was forced at gun point to sign on the death certificates that these deaths were due to "heart failure." Lt. Cordus H. Thorton, a captured Army officer, was shot in the head because he had let too many of his men drop out. Twenty-five percent of the march's participants died as a result of it.

It was a cold winter in Pyongyang that year. Blake shared a 9-by-9-foot cell with nine other prisoners. For the most part, he and the other civilians were not mistreated like the military prisoners, but there were times when the guards did their best to break the men.

"Look, there's a guard coming this way." Philip Deane spoke to Blake as they were resting on the ground, exhausted.

The guard pointed to the two men and spoke in broken English, "You two, get me some water."

Blake protested. "We can't. We're too tired."

"You can walk. You can get me some water." The guard was pointing to several 20-gallon drums a few hundred yards away.

"We can't. We're too exhausted. How can we? Maybe if you gave us some better food than that bird seed crud that we get all the time, we might." Blake was persistent.

The guard became enraged over this back talk. "I'm the guard here. Bend over, get down."

The two men could only obey his orders. The guard brought the butt of the rifle down on Blake's back. Then Deane was hit. Over and over he beat and kicked the two men before him, but neither one of them gave out any cries of pain. Blake's face was partially buried in the snow, but the guard could see a forced smile on his lips. Blake kept that smile throughout the beating.

During the months of captivity, the men around Blake admired him for his courage and for his ability to resist the attempts at brainwashing. Bishop Cecil Cooper stated: "Blake was a man of great energy. He kept us alive by his enthusiasm and his courage. Blake resisted the brainwashing fiercely, arguing with the political officers who were attempting to indoctrinate us."

During the time of captivity, the civilians were not exposed to as much brainwashing as were the military. However, they were constantly bombarded with propaganda: works of Lenin, Marx, and Mao; modern Soviet literature and Russian newspapers. Blake was hungry for reading material and eagerly read these books. During the summer of 1951 he began to have doubts about the wickedness of communism. Nowhere in the reading material could he see slums in Russia, but he knew they existed in the capitalist nations. The communist system did not "exploit" the workers as was done in the Western nations. The more Blake read, the more convinced he became that it was better than the system he had been raised under.

The break came in November, 1951. Blake had been talking to his interrogator when he demanded, "I want to see the Tiger."

A few minutes passed, then the commandant of the prison camp appeared. "What do you want?"

Blake's reply was short. "I want to work for the communists."

This was met with a short laugh. "Why do you want to do that?" The man's voice became bitter. "You've already convinced one of our men that the South was better than our People's Democracy. Why am I to trust you?"

The words came carefully from Blake's mouth. "At first, I believed in the capitalist system. But now I have come to believe that the communist system is the only one which can establish a better and a more just society in this world."

Tiger ordered some guards to bring  
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Blake some food. After he had finished eating, the two men discussed Blake's change. Blake convinced Tiger of his desire to help the communists. When he was offered to be moved out of the prison to another camp for defectors, he declined and insisted on being returned to his friends. However, he made it clear that he would not inform on them.

Blake spent another 15 months in captivity until his repatriation in April, 1953. He was flown to London where he arrived as a hero. MI-5 (counter-intelligence) made a thorough investigation of his term of captivity but could not find anything to indicate disloyalty. Only Blake knew of his secret defection. Instead of being dropped as an intelligence officer, MI-6 decided to keep him.

After an extended vacation Blake was given a position in an unpublicized department of the Foreign Office. He then secretly contacted the Russian embassy and arranged a meeting with one of their men. The Russians sent a General Korovin (this was the London alias of Nikolay Robin, who returned to the USSR in 1961 to head the "Executive Action" section of the KGB, the section concerned with executions and assassinations) to discuss Blake's offer to hand over secret documents. Korovin was surprised when Blake stated that he wanted no money for his services. The deal was made: Korovin would supply Blake with the necessary photographic equipment in return for copies of all the documents he could get. Later, in his trial, Blake confessed: "I freely admit that there was not an official document on any matter to which I had access that was not passed on to my Soviet contact."

Attorney-General Sir Reginald Manning Buller summed up Blake's activities: "He agreed to make available to the Soviet intelligence service such information as came his way in the course of his activities in order to promote the cause of communism . . . and he had access to information of very great importance."

In the spring of 1955 Blake, his wife and his two children moved to West Berlin where he was posted to the British Military Mission. Again Blake posed as a minor government official while gathering and evaluating information supplied from East Germany. The intelligence unit which he controlled was mainly interested in information relating to Russian arms. During this time Blake was also gathering information on the other British intelligence units working in

Berlin and behind the Iron Curtain. His wife, Gillian, was unsure of her husband's specific work but suspected that it was related to the spy business because of his odd working hours.

At periodic intervals Blake would drive into East Berlin to shop, since the exchange rate for East and West German marks made it attractive for a low-paid civil servant to go there. His real interest in that sector was his contact, a Russian interpreter named Sova, who worked for the "Chamber of Technics." The information that he passed on to this man was impressive: names of agents working in the East, the structure of MI-6 in West Berlin, photographs of secret documents pertaining to England's policy on the Berlin question. Blake was supplied with a cigarette lighter containing a hidden camera and with this he photographed many of his colleagues. One source indicated that he was especially busy just before the 1959 Geneva conference on Germany making copies of documents revealing the West's policy on the matter. Some claim that he tipped off the famous Berlin telephone tap to the East Germans. This was a tunnel extending several hundred feet into East Berlin where the CIA could tap all of the military phones in the city.

During Blake's five year stay in Berlin, agents working in the East were disappearing. MI-6 officials were disturbed by this, but they were unable to find the leak in security. One incident took place in the apartment building which housed Blake's family and the families of other British civil and military employees. A former Soviet secret service official who had defected was being kept there until he could be flown to England. After Blake told his contact of the man's whereabouts, a special crew was sent to get this defector. One night the man was drugged and carried into the Eastern Zone. Later, when confronted with angry British officials, the Soviets explained that they were unable to return the man because he had died under "interrogation."

Blake left Berlin in September, 1960, and traveled to Shemlan, Lebanon, where he was to study the Arabic language at the Middle East College of Arabic Studies, which was run by the Foreign Office. This was to prepare him for intelligence work in an Arab nation. Blake continued to pass on all the information he had collected to Soviet agents in Beirut, 20 miles from Shemlan.

A month after Blake had left Berlin a minor spy named Horst Eitner was arrested as a double agent by the

West German police. Eitner had made part of his living by working with British agents. In the process, he would photograph his contacts, make tape recordings of his conversations, and then sell the material to the Russians. One of the men he worked with, Blake, he discovered was working for the Soviets. In order to get a lighter prison sentence, he offered this information to the British. Eitner's report was ignored by them.

In March, 1961, Col. Anthony Alster, head of the Polish secret service, fled to the West to avoid a possible purge of Jews holding high positions in the communist bloc nations. Alster had been in charge of agents working in "West Work," the term used to describe espionage activities in the West, and had personally met Blake several times. The British authorities were astonished by the information the defector had given the communists, and sent out messages calling back all agents who had been in contact with Blake. For many it was too late. Authorities claim that in East Berlin alone 42 agents disappeared or were arrested by the communists. The fate of these men, along with others in Iron Curtain nations, is unknown, but for many, Blake's betrayal meant death.

Blake's studies in Lebanon were ended when he received a telegram ordering him back to London. Upon his arrival he was arrested as a double agent and was formally charged for violating the Official Secrets Act. His trial on May 3, 1961, was held in secret and lasted only 69 minutes. The Attorney-General stated that although Blake did not have access to documents relating to secret or atomic weapons, "He had done most serious damage to the interests of this country . . . He had information of very great importance." For his betrayal Blake was given a sentence of 42 years, the longest one given for over a century. Gordon Lonsdale, another top Soviet spy who was sentenced the month before, received only 25 years in comparison.

Blake was held by the British security service for a half year before he was sent to prison. Over the service's protests, he was sent to Wormwood Scrubs Prison where Lonsdale was being held. Blake quickly adjusted to prison life, and to the guards he seemed to be a man who had accepted his fate.

A convicted spy normally would receive much abuse from fellow prisoners, but Blake was an exception. He

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was respected by his fellow inmates, who knew him as a bright and witty person. Many of the "star" prisoners (first time offenders with long terms) of D Hall would spend their "free association" periods in his book-lined cell, where they could receive language instruction or discuss world affairs. Even after his escape, they remained loyal to him. The London *Observer* reported: "It is understood that the inmates of D Block, almost to a man, declined to reveal any information — if they had it — about Blake. To them, he was a popular figure."

The officials at Wormwood Scrubs were at first apprehensive about having a man with Blake's reputation in their prison. However, their attitude soon changed and he was given some of the privileges the other prisoners had. He was allowed to keep a shortwave receiver in his cell for language studies. Many of the guards were charmed by his warm personality. To the prison officials, Blake was a model prisoner.

**B**lake remained a model prisoner until his escape in 1966.

The most widely accepted theory on how Blake escaped states that the operation was planned by the Soviet KGB and carried out by "scarperers," professional escape artists, perhaps the same ones who liberated several of the "Great Train" robbers from prison. Since Blake would not have any useful information for the communists, the motive behind the breakout was to demonstrate the power of the KGB and to reassure its agents working in the West that they would not be abandoned if caught.

There has been speculation that Blake might have received escape instructions through the shortwave receiver in his cell. It was capable of picking up the low band broadcast which would normally be used for such transmissions. In a room located one-half mile from Wormwood Scrubs, police found a crude broadcasting antenna made of bamboo and wire. Also, they found 14 wrappers from 100-pound notes. Prison officials claim that the long distance and the high wall around the place would shield radio waves from inside receivers. However, many prisoners claim that inmates have regularly monitored police radio messages.

A more practical way for Blake to get information was through the "trusted men" who were housed outside the prison. These prisoners were allowed to dress in civilian clothes and worked away from the prison. Since they had contact with the out-

side world, Blake could have used one of them as a messenger. Perhaps it was through one of these men that he received his final instructions or perhaps a saw with which he cut the iron bars.

Where Blake went after he got over the wall is another question which has not been answered. One man who claims knowledge of Blake's escape route is Benno Weigl, a stateless journalist living in London who had spent ten years in a Czechoslovakian prison as a spy. Using the pseudonym of Michael Rand, he wrote an article for the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* based on three letters he received from three contacts in Czechoslovakia.

According to Weigl, the operation, which cost 14,000 pounds (\$39,200), was planned and financed by the Russian officials in England and carried out by "middle men." After Blake got over the wall at Wormwood Scrubs, he was picked up, given new clothes and dark glasses, driven to a local airport and put on a plane heading for Frankfurt. After landing in that German city, he was met by two Czech officials who gave him a paper guaranteeing him political asylum in the USSR (and presumably in any other communist nation). From Frankfurt he was driven to the German-Czech border, where he crossed at Schirnding, using an English passport and a visitor's visa. Once across the border, he was driven to Prague where he was housed at the "International" and "Prague" hotels while conferring with East German and Russian officials. Then, on November 3, he was driven to an airport and transported by helicopter to East Berlin, where he is supposedly residing now. While Weigl claims that this story is the truth (he burned the three letters before Scotland Yard officials could see them), he purports to have no knowledge of Blake's escape from the prison itself.

Two incidents which took place in 1964 might substantiate communist backing of the escape. In 1963 an inmate escaped from an English prison and made his way to East Germany. After a year's stay there, he was handed back to British officials in West Berlin. During his interrogation he stated that the East Germans were interested in prison security and how to overcome it. He was forced to write several papers on this topic. Also during that year two ex-prisoners confessed to the police that they were accomplices in a plot to spring Blake from prison. One of them would land a helicopter, which would have the

word "POLICE" painted on it, near the prison. The other man, dressed in a prison uniform, would climb over the wall and bring Blake out. He would be flown to East Germany and then to the USSR. The Home Secretary of England, after hearing of this plot, described it as "fantastic, but not impossible."

Another theory is that Blake engineered his own escape, either to flee the country or to contact a public official in order to obtain a review of his case. However, he was not a rich man and did not receive pay for his espionage activities. He probably didn't have enough money to pay the scarperers.

Philip Deane believes that the escape, along with Blake's activities as a spy, has been one gigantic plot carried out by MI-6. Rather than being a double agent, argues Deane, Blake was really a *triple* agent, feeding his Russian contact with specially prepared information. When the Soviets began to doubt his reliability, MI-6 "arrested" him and then conducted a show trial in order to convince them of his loyalty to communism. Deane bases all this on the belief that the conditions and brutality Blake had met in Korea could not have convinced him that communism could produce "a more just society." Also, he states that Blake was never away from his fellow prisoners for any longer period of time, thereby excluding the possibility of brainwashing. Deane's theory would explain why he was kept by MI-6 instead of being automatically dropped upon his return from Korea.

**R**ecently, a spokesman for Scotland Yard announced that they had intercepted a letter from Blake addressed to his mother, who still resides in England. The letter stated that he was fine and that he would soon be moving to some Eastern European country. The letter was mailed from Egypt.

In the 1960's the people of the Free World suddenly became aware of the cold world of espionage. There was the U-2 affair, which broke up a "Summit" meeting. There was the Wennestrom case, where a ranking NATO general turned out to be working for the Russians. There was also Oleg Penkovsky, a top Russian official who passed information to the CIA. All of these cases ended with either imprisonment (Wennestrom), exchange (Powers for Abel) or execution (Penkovsky).

Only one spy — George Blake — has been able to escape from the cold.