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A. I. Murphy

A Soviet Defector at NSA

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The appearance of Soviet defector and former KGB official Peter Sergeyevich Deriabin before a large NSA audience during Security Week 1973 ought to be viewed for what it was—an event of extraordinary significance to us as private citizens and as cryptologic associates within the intelligence community. It was extraordinary first of all because it happened (Who would have imagined during Arlington Hall days that we would one day see an ex-KGB official inside the NSA perimeter?); and secondly, because it happened during a time when some Americans may be tempted to play down the hostile intentions of our traditional adversaries.

Here was an impressive former adversary now in our midst, sharing with us his first-hand knowledge of the mission and functions of the pervasive Soviet secret police. Deriabin knew all about it, in great detail. No wonder. For ten years he had been among the elite in several capacities within the system. He spent five years with the Kremlin Guard Directorate, which was charged with protecting the Kremlin and high-ranking Soviet officials. In 1952 he was transferred to the foreign intelligence section of the State Security apparatus and served in the Moscow headquarters until he became chief of counter-intelligence in the KGB office in Vienna. In February 1954, for ideological and personal reasons, he requested asylum through the U.S. authorities in Vienna. And here he was in front of us in NSA. Truly an edifying experience for everyone present, but more so for those who have been around long enough to have seen a full allotment of Sigint successes and disappointments in the business of matching cryptologic wits with the Soviets. Our security people deserve credit for their resourcefulness in arranging his visit.

Whether or not Mr. Deriabin intended it, his talk seemed to stimulate a renewed sense of awareness of

the importance and sensitivity of the mission of NSA. Simply put, this awareness was in the form of a warning that we stay alert and at the same time revitalize the old virtues of integrity and perseverance in our work. He came across as an affable, decent individual with firm bearing, and an authority on what he had to say. He was a little nervous at first, as he said, because of the size of the audience (it certainly couldn't have been through any lack of courage on his part, having willingly come to NSA from under cover), and because he suspected that we probably knew as much as he did about the KGB.

On the face of it, the talk was strongly directed toward alerting NSAers to the folly of some Americans who seem bent on accepting the notion that the KGB is to the Soviet Union what the FBI is to the United States, and Deriabin was clearly citing the dangerous consequences of ignoring the myriad facts to the contrary. Who can argue with that? Perhaps, to the disappointment of some, he did not openly express any substantive views on any matters that we might consider gut issues in the cryptologic arena, say Martin and Mitchell, the Pueblo seizure (even though those issues post-dated his defection), Kremlin orchestration of the war in Vietnam, or the Communist timetable in general; and, presumably for personal reasons, he was not inclined to discuss his reasons for defecting, having sidestepped a request from the audience in that regard.

In retrospect, however, a deeper message, which in a real sense spoke for these concerns, seemed reflected in the man's character and his very presence before us, a

28 ~~SECRET~~~~HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY~~

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message which said: "This is a critically important time in history. You've come a long way and you must press on. You've stood up to them around the world and at great personal sacrifice. And because you drew the line and held firm, their solidarity has begun to erode and their people are beginning to question the system. You must persevere. Do not weaken at this challenging time. Get your house in order and stay alert, especially in this season of ostensible detente."

Within that context it seems only fitting that things turned out the way they did, that the free world got Deriabin and the Soviets got Martin and Mitchell.

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