

The Albanian betrayal

From 1949 to 1953, intelligence services of Britain and the U.S. secretly infiltrated approximately 105 agents by sea or air into Albania. Codenamed "Pixies," they were anti-communist Albanian fighters recruited from refugee camps in Italy.

The clandestine operation was aimed at sparking rebellion in Albania against the harsh rule of its Stalinist dictator, Enver Hoxha. The CIA and Britain's MI-6 hoped, by overthrowing the communist regime in Albania, to reverse the tide of Soviet takeovers in Eastern Europe. Equally, Albania's strategic Adriatic ports had to be denied to the Soviet fleet.

Lord Bethell's recently published book, *The Great Betrayal*, tells the tragic story of these missions. It has rekindled a good deal of controversy in Britain and recalled a very dark period.

Each group of "Pixies" landed and promptly fell into communist ambushes. Some were machine-gunned as they landed by parachute. Some were trapped and burned alive in a farmhouse. Only a handful managed to escape to Greece.

The final disaster occurred in 1953 when the Albanian secret police, the Sigurimi, captured an air-dropped radio. The CIA obligingly parachuted gold, arms and the anti-communist guerrilla leader, Hamit Matjani into the hands of the Sigurimi.

In all, around 100 Albanian exiles died. Communist security forces then executed almost 2,000 Albanians who had helped the rebels; thousands more who aided or were related to the "pixies" were sent to hard labor camps. Thirty-two years later, Albania still watches her skies and coasts for "enemy agents."

Why were communist troops waiting for each air drop? Simply because one of the senior members of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI-6) — and the man who was co-ordinating the operations in Washington with the CIA — was the charming Kim Philby.

This patrician Englishman had been a spy for Russia since his university days. According to Philby, he was determined to strike a blow against the "decadent capitalist system." And he did. For years, he provided Moscow with a steady stream of top secret data from London and Washington. Along with two other Soviet spies, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, Philby caused inestimable damage to Western security. The full dimensions of the disaster have never been revealed.

Incredibly, Britain refused to remove Philby even though the CIA had, by early 1951, become convinced he was a Soviet spy. When Philby was forcibly retired in mid-1951, the British and Americans still kept parachuting agents into Albania.

The dark drama of Philby's treachery has been brilliantly told by John Le Carre in his books,

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Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy and *Smiley's People*. In these works — ones that I consider among the best modern literature — Le Carre uses the character of Bill Hayden to represent Philby.

By no coincidence, the chief British organizer of the missions into Albania was a soldier and commando, Col. David Smiley. In the Le Carre books, Smiley is a senior SIS official whose career and marriage are shattered by his friend Hayden's betrayal.

Much as I admire Le Carre, I strongly object to his portrait of Hayden-Philby. In the books, Hayden comes across to us as a terribly civilized intellectual; cynical but at heart an idealist. He betrays his nation and friends out of devotion to the higher ideal of world communism.

As said many times, "to understand everything is to forgive anything." Le Carre leads us to feel almost as much spiritual kinship for the traitor Hayden as the protagonist Smiley. In the end, Le Carre suggests, traitors and heroes are merely reverse sides of the coin.

This view has become common in our society. Treachery, formerly the most despicable of crimes, has now become merely a psychic disfunction. Traitors have almost become a vocation, like "peace activists" or "war protesters." When a Canadian ambassador is caught spying for Russia, he is posthumously forgiven, having been under "terrible emotional stress."

We may still frown on people who sell their nation's secrets for money; but for those who act out of ideology there is reserved a certain respect. Today, in Britain, the U.S. and Canada there are well-known and never-prosecuted traitors. We dismiss many of them as "disillusioned idealists." In truth, past treachery seems to have become a peccadillo of youth.

But this is not at all what treachery is about. It is not a question of conscience or moral imperatives. Treason, in the case of Philby, had to do with the terror of brave men parachuted into the middle of the waiting enemy. It had to do with knowing you and your friends have been betrayed; of learning that your entire family had been killed. It had to do with being tortured and facing firing squads.

Philby's snobbish, elitist treachery brought death to more than 1,000 people. Today, people still grieve for those who died, betrayed by Philby. The elegant Philby never dirtied his hands with blood — he merely sent witty reports to Moscow to get even with the capitalist ruling class, of which he was a part.

Col. Philby of the KGB lives today in Moscow, a hero of the Soviet Union. He does not travel outside of Russia. There are too many Albanians with long memories.



KIM PHILBY
In a 1955 photo