



ALEXANDER VASSILIEV & ALGER HISS

PART I

G. Edward White

“DON’T GIVE A DAMN about Alger Hiss. Never did.”¹ Thus ends Alexander Vassiliev’s introduction to *Spies*, the recently published book based on notebooks containing material Vassiliev copied from KGB archives between early 1994 and early 1996. The depositing of Vassiliev’s notebooks in the Library of Congress, and the simultaneous publication of *Spies*, co-authored by Vassiliev and American intelligence scholars John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, are important events in the history of Soviet and American intelligence from 1930 to 1950, with ramifications that sweep well beyond that era.

The greatest significance of the information in Vassiliev’s notebooks lies in its concordance with other existing data about Soviet espionage activities in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Occasionally information in the notebooks identifies for the first time Soviet agents who operated in the United States. More often, it serves to reinforce, and sometimes to clarify, previously pub-

G. Edward White is David and Mary Harrison Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Virginia School of Law.

¹ Alexander Vassiliev, “Introduction,” in John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* liii (2009) (hereafter *Spies*).

lished accounts of the activities of Soviet agents, such as memoirs of agents who defected from the Soviet cause in the 1930s and 1940s,² and the National Security Agency's decryptions of the correspondence among Soviet agents, their controllers, and the Moscow Security Agency between 1942 and 1946.³ Vassiliev's notebooks confirm the identities of American agents for the Soviets from, as it were, the other side.

One of the most visible and controversial of those agents was Alger Hiss. The story of Hiss's exposure in 1948, subsequent conviction for perjury in 1950, and long campaign to clear his name is a familiar one.⁴ Most specialists in twentieth-century Soviet-American relations now agree that Hiss, who died in 1996 maintaining that he was neither a Communist nor an agent for the Soviets, was both of those things, and as a result the Hiss case has widely been thought of as having passed into history. But the story of the public appearance of Vassiliev's notebooks provides yet another useful perspective on the Hiss case. This essay recounts that story, and suggests that it can be seen as yet another illustration of the theme of betrayal that ran, and continues to run, through the life of Alger Hiss.

I

Alexander Vassiliev joined the KGB in 1983. He was at that time a student at Moscow State University, pursuing a career in international journalism. He spoke three languages, was a member of the Communist Party, and had a "dream to be a Soviet spy."⁵ The Soviets regarded international journalism as an ideal cover for intelligence agents. By 1985 Vassiliev had been drafted into the

² Hede Massing, *This Deception* (1951); Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (1952).

³ For more detail on those decryptions, known as the Venona project, see John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (1999).

⁴ See Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (second edition, 1997) (hereafter *Perjury 2nd*); Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers* (1997); G. Edward White, *Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars* (2004).

⁵ *Spies*, xxx.

armed forces as a cover and sent to the Red Banner Institute, the KGB's "spy school." Two years later he graduated from the institute and was assigned to work in the American department of the KGB intelligence directorate, "the most elite unit."⁶

Unfortunately for Vassiliev, between 1987 and 1990 the American unit of KGB intelligence had been rendered ineffectual. Aldrich Ames, the CIA agent recruited by the KGB, had exposed a number of Moscow-based KGB officers in the American unit who were cooperating with the CIA, undermining the unit's reputation. At the same time "perestroika and glasnost were taking root in the Soviet Union," and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev apparently "didn't care about the information and recommendations" the KGB made to him. Vassiliev was reduced to "shuffling meaningless papers." "I was useless," he concluded, "and the whole KGB intelligence service seemed useless too." He longed to be able to pursue his civilian career, international journalism, which he thought "the most exciting profession" of the day.⁷

In 1990 Vassiliev took "a calculated risk." He resolved to "retire" from the KGB by asking his superiors to dismiss him because he did not "support the current leadership of the Communist party of the Soviet Union" and did not "consider it necessary to defend it." He knew of no one employed by the KGB who had "retired" before reaching pension age, but he felt that he had some leverage because, in a political climate in which Soviet intelligence agencies had become increasingly unpopular, "I could go to liberal newspapers and tell them my story." Vassiliev's gamble worked: the KGB allowed him to retire, and even permitted him to travel abroad as a journalist. The Soviet Union was collapsing, and by 1991 Vassiliev had traveled to Israel, Belgium, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and for a week was "the only Soviet journalist in the international press corps" covering Operation Desert Shield in the Gulf War.⁸ His em-

⁶ Id. On some occasions I will be citing multiple page references for Vassiliev in *Spies* in order to reduce the number of footnotes in this essay.

⁷ Id., xxxi.

⁸ Id., xxxii-xxxiii.

ployer was *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the official Soviet newspaper, which remained in existence after the collapse.

Between 1991 and 1993, as the Soviet Union fell apart and Boris Yeltsin's anti-Communist, West-courting regime established itself in Russia, the former Soviet intelligence agencies came under pressure, with many members of the media calling for their dissolution. In that atmosphere Vassiliev found himself defending the agencies, and he made friends with members of the press bureau of the SVR, the post-Soviet version of the KGB in Russia. Meanwhile, American book publishers, recognizing that post-Soviet Russia was in economic as well as political turmoil, approached the Yeltsin government and representatives of the intelligence agencies with the idea of paying for access by western scholars to those agencies' archives.

One of the publishers' projects involved Crown Brooks (a subsidiary of Random House) and the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers of the KGB. Retirees of the Soviet intelligence agencies had two great fears in the anti-Soviet political climate of the early 1990s: first, that the agencies might be required to make their files public (as had happened in East Germany), and second, that the agencies might even be abolished, with the retirees losing their pensions. Agreeing to open old archives, for a fee, might be a way to forestall a full-scale opening of all the intelligence archives and make some pension-funding money in the process. For its part, Crown Brooks saw a chance to commission books based on KGB archives that would address highly marketable subjects, such as the Cuban missile crisis, the murder of Leon Trotsky by KGB operatives, and Soviet espionage operations against a variety of countries.⁹

⁹ Four books eventually emerged from the Crown project, only one of which, John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (1993), was actually published by Crown. Two others, David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (1997), and Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels: The British Secrets and the Heart of the KGB Archives* (1999), were published by Yale University Press, and the book Vassiliev co-authored with Weinstein, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era* (1999) (hereafter, *The Haunted Wood*), was published by Random House's main division.

Crown Books and the retirees agreed that all the projected books would be jointly authored by an American scholar (chosen by Crown) and a Russian writer (chosen by the SVR). Only the Russian authors would have access to KGB files. In 1993 Yury Kobaladze, the SVR's chief press officer, offered Vassiliev the chance to jointly author a planned book on Soviet intelligence in America in the 1930s and 1940s. His American co-author would be Allen Weinstein, who in 1979 had published *Perjury*, an authoritative study of the Hiss case. In the years following *Perjury*'s appearance Weinstein had left the history department at Smith College to become the head of the Center for Democracy, a Washington-based organization that promoted scholarly cooperation between the West and nations in the former Soviet bloc. The SVR had opened a file on the Center for Democracy, believing that it might have close ties to the CIA.¹⁰

Vassiliev speculated that the SVR chose him to work with Weinstein because he was a visible civilian journalist, not affiliated with the intelligence agencies, and was, at the same time, a former agent of the KGB with experience in espionage tradecraft. His years in the KGB and as a journalist had allowed him to become personally acquainted with many SVR officials, and he was thought of as generally supportive of the beleaguered Russian intelligence community. Because Vassiliev could read Russian and Weinstein could not, their understanding was that Vassiliev would research the files, translate the information he found from Russian to English in the form of draft "chapters" on particular topics, such as the activities of individual agents, groups of agents, or atomic espionage, and eventually give those chapters to Weinstein, who would rework them for the book.¹¹ Before they were delivered to Weinstein, Vassiliev's chap-

¹⁰ The file on Weinstein and the Center for Democracy was kept in the bookcase of the SVR's press bureau office. *Spies*, xxxiv-xxxv.

¹¹ The "chapters" interspersed documents Vassiliev had copied from files and translated into English with Vassiliev's commentary on them. They were presented in the form of mini-narratives about agents or groups of agents. I made a comparison of one chapter, entitled "Washington Sources," with passages on those sources in *The Haunted Wood* and in the second edition of Weinstein's *Perjury*,

ters were vetted by an SVR “declassification commission,” composed of Kobaladze, the head of SVR archives, and the chiefs of all the SVR operational departments from which files had been obtained.¹²

In early 1994 Vassiliev began work in the KGB archives. He was not allowed full access to them: he would request files and the heads of the departments in which the files were stored would grant or deny his requests. Here Vassiliev’s experience in tradecraft helped him, and so, inadvertently, did his lack of knowledge of the history of Soviet espionage in America. He knew that personal files and operational correspondence files would be the primary sources of information about agents, and that the operational files would provide him with agents’ code names, which he could then seek to match to personal files. The fact that the operational files were “a total mess” actually became an advantage to Vassiliev: he copied down all the code names contained in those files and observed which ones “were mentioned again and again.”¹³

Early in his research in the operational files Vassiliev “struck gold.”¹⁴ He came upon a December 1948 list of Soviet agents who had operated in America between 1938 and 1948, complete with cover names and real names. The list had been sent to Moscow by Anatoly Gorsky, then a senior officer in the Committee of Information (KI), an institution that briefly sought to merge the intelligence operations of the KGB and GRU (military intelligence). Gorsky’s list was probably designed to inform the KI, as it sought to rebuild its American intelligence networks after 1948, of the maximum damage its previous networks had suffered.¹⁵ Gorsky’s list identified

which was published in 1997. The results of that comparison will subsequently be discussed below. Thanks to John Earl Haynes for giving me access to his copy of Vassiliev’s “Washington Sources” chapter (hereafter “Washington Sources”), which is also in the Library of Congress.

¹² *Spies*, xxxvii.

¹³ *Id.*, xxxvi.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Gorsky’s list referred to six Soviet operatives who had either defected, and given information about other agents to the FBI, or who had made damaging admissions

21 Washington-based agents, all of whom were described as being in “Karl’s group” – “Karl” being Chambers’s code name. The list included Chambers himself, Hiss (then given the code name “Leonard”), and Hiss’s brother Donald Hiss (given the name “Junior”). The agents listed were characterized as “failures in the USA (1938-48),” KGB parlance for agents who had been compromised.

With Gorsky’s list before him, Vassiliev was able not only to read operational files with more precision, but also to make informed requests for personal files. The SVR was very protective of its personal files, which were registered in the archives under real names as well as code names, so Vassiliev’s requests were frequently denied. But the operational files in the archives typically did not contain cover lists of real names, and had not been researched, so Vassiliev easily obtained access to them. In this fashion Vassiliev worked away for more than two years, laboriously copying material from those files into the notebooks that would form the basis of the “chapters” he would eventually deliver to Weinstein. The SVR saw no objection to his taking his notebooks home with him while he prepared the summaries. “I am sure the SVR realized I would behave sensibly,” Vassiliev recalled, and indeed at the time he was copying down the real names of Soviet agents he had no intention of using them in his summaries.¹⁶

II

While Vassiliev was laboring in the archives, Alger Hiss’s long life was reaching its end: he would die in November 1996. About a year before Vassiliev was offered the chance to research KGB files, Hiss had a brief moment of apparent triumph in his campaign to establish his innocence. In August 1992, he wrote letters to several Russian officials, including General Dmitri Volkogonov,

when questioned by American authorities. In addition to Chambers, the operatives in question were Elizabeth Bentley, Louis Budenz, Hede Massing, and Alexander and Helen Koral. The details of their cooperation, and the information they revealed, can be found in *Spies*.

¹⁶ *Id.*, xli.

then the chairman of the Russian commission overseeing access to KGB and Soviet Communist Party archives. Hiss wrote that he was 88 years old, wanted to “clear my name” of the accusations of being a Communist and Soviet agent, and was “unable to travel to Moscow” to investigate the “KGB and other Soviet Union archives about me.” He added that “it would be a historical injustice if those archives were given to any publisher or other person on an exclusive basis.” He asked that his longtime supporter and legal representative John Lowenthal be allowed to “act in my stead,” describing Lowenthal as “director of the Nation Institute project on the Hiss case.” Hiss requested that Lowenthal be allowed to “examine and obtain copies of all documents about me.”¹⁷ Lowenthal planned to travel to Moscow in September 1992 to seek meetings with the officials to whom Hiss had written.

In effect, Hiss was asking the SVR to allow Lowenthal to enlist it in Hiss’s campaign for vindication. The SVR has long had what Vassiliev characterized as a “very simple policy about admitting whether a [suspected agent] had cooperated with it or not.”¹⁸ The policy was never to admit that cooperation unless the alleged agent did, even if the agent in question was imprisoned. The standard KGB/SVR rejoinder to all inquiries about their possible affiliation with any person has been “no comment,” a policy that extends to alleged agents who are retired or deceased. However, Volkogonov (who was affiliated with the Yeltsin government, not the SVR) took a different tack.¹⁹ When he learned that Lowenthal was coming to Moscow in September 1992, he met with him, and informed him

¹⁷ The letter, written August 3, 1992, was introduced in evidence in *Vassiliev v. Frank Cass & Co., Ltd.*, [2003] EWHC 1428 (QB), an unsuccessful libel action brought by Vassiliev that will subsequently be discussed. Vassiliev quotes from the letter in *Spies*, xxxviii.

¹⁸ *Spies*, xxxviii.

¹⁹ Volkogonov’s principal responsibilities at the time Hiss wrote him were researching intelligence archives to help determine the names of missing American soldiers in the Vietnamese war. He would testify on that subject before a U.S. Senate committee on POW-MIA affairs in November 1992. See *Washington Times*, November 25, 1992.

that he would not be granted access to any archives. Instead, Volkogonov himself would search for any reference to Hiss in the KGB files and inform Lowenthal about the results of his search.

Hiss had written the same letter he wrote to Volkogonov to Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the SVR. Primakov did not respond to Hiss or meet with Lowenthal. But in late September, after his return from Moscow to London, Lowenthal received a fax from Volkogonov and, five days later, a letter from Yury Kobaladze, the chief press officer of the SVR, representing Primakov. Both communications to Lowenthal said essentially the same thing. Volkogonov's fax said that "on the basis of a most careful analysis of the data, I can report to you that Alger Hiss was never an agent of the intelligence services of the Soviet Union." Kobaladze's letter said that "in the archives of the [SVR] there is no material indicating that Alger Hiss at any time or in any manner cooperated with the foreign intelligence of Russia or its predecessors."²⁰

At this point two questions surface. First, why did Hiss write the letters? The likely answer is that he and Lowenthal were seeking to counter any damaging information about Hiss which might result from American publishers' access to Soviet-era archives. In addition to the Crown Books project, Yale University Press had completed an agreement in 1992 giving designated American and Russian scholars access to another set of archives.²¹ In his letters Hiss had alluded to the injustice of "any publisher" having the exclusive opportunity to see Soviet-era files. Hiss's letter was carefully worded:

²⁰ Both Lowenthal's fax and Kobaladze's letter were introduced into evidence in *Vassiliev v. Frank Cass*. They are quoted in *Spies*, xxxviii-xxxix.

²¹ The archive in question was the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History, whose acronym in Russian was RTsKhIDNI (pronounce "ritz-kidney"). It contained files of the Comintern, the Soviet-era organization that directed policy for Communist parties outside of the USSR, and of the Communist Party of the United States. The designated American scholars were Haynes and Klehr; the Russian scholar was Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov. A book co-authored by Haynes, Klehr, and Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (1995), and another by Haynes, Klehr, and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (1998), resulted from their work in the RTsKhIDNI archive. For more detail, see White, *Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars*, 221-222.

he sought the opportunity to establish that he had never been a “paid, contracted agent” for the Soviet Union.²² Like many of his ideologically driven agent contemporaries, Hiss had refused payment for his services. The Russians could back up his denial without looking at a single intelligence file.

Hiss and Lowenthal had probably not expected that Russian officials would respond by informing Lowenthal that there was no mention of Alger Hiss in any intelligence archives. When he received Volkogonov’s fax, Lowenthal asked Volkogonov for a letter and videotaped comments reinforcing it, and he agreed. On October 29, 1992, after a trip to Moscow to pick up the video and a one-page supporting letter on Russian Federation stationary, Lowenthal, together with Hiss, held a news conference at the Algonquin Hotel in New York in which they released Volkogonov’s letter and video and claimed that Hiss had been exonerated.

This raises the second question: why did Volkogonov and Kobaladze act as they did? Vassiliev speculated that the SVR may have been blind-sided by Volkogonov’s response, and then concluded that in the face of it, issuing a simple “no-comment” would have signaled that Hiss was in fact an agent.²³ Alternatively, the SVR might actually not have had a personal file on Hiss, because Hiss was an agent of the GRU (the foreign intelligence arm of the military), not the KGB (the predecessor of the SVR). And so the SVR might well not have known, at the time, that some KGB operational files had identified him as an agent by name. As for Volkogonov’s motivation, that would subsequently become clear.

Between the October 29, 1992 news conference and November 16, a groundswell for Hiss’s vindication built up, with the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the major television networks, CNN, National Public Radio, and *Newsweek* all reporting Volkogonov’s comments and indicating that Hiss had apparently been exonerated. The

²² Hiss to Volkogonov, August 3, 1992, in *Vassiliev v. Frank Cass*. The “paid, contracted agent” language in Hiss’s letter is also quoted in White, *Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars* 213, which cites several additional sources on the Hiss-Volkogonov exchange. *Id.*, 284 n32.

²³ *Spies*, xxxix.

groundswell culminated with an essay, "My Father's Honor," in the *New Yorker* by Tony Hiss, Alger's son. "[N]ow people everywhere know," Tony wrote, "that Alger Hiss was not a Communist, not a spy, not a traitor Now my father can rest easy."²⁴

Developments in November and early December showed that Tony's conclusions had been premature. American specialists in Soviet intelligence reacted skeptically to Volkogonov's claim that he had made an exhaustive search of all the Soviet-era archives. Weinstein wrote a column mirroring that skepticism, noting that Primakov had not endorsed Volkogonov's statements, and indicating that he would be visiting Moscow later in the month to meet with Primakov and Volkogonov on the topic of Western access to KGB files.²⁵ Then, on November 24, Volkogonov backed off his earlier statements. In a letter to the Moscow *Independent Gazette*,²⁶ he admitted spending only two days in KGB archives and having been "pushed . . . hard" by Lowenthal "to say things of which I was not fully convinced." His motives for sending Lowenthal the fax, and preparing the video and supporting letter for him, had been "primarily humanitarian."²⁷

A *New York Times* Moscow correspondent, Serge Schmemmann, interviewed Volkogonov for a story that appeared in the *Times* on December 17. Volkogonov repeated that his search of the KGB archives consisted of "two days swallowing dust"; that the fax, letter, and video given to Lowenthal had been "only my personal opinion"; that Lowenthal had pressured him to widen his evidentiary claims; and that he had responded to Lowenthal and Hiss for humanitarian reasons. He admitted to being "a bit taken aback" by the reaction to his initial comments on Hiss, and acknowledged that Hiss had "wanted to prove that he was not a paid, contracted spy."²⁸ The

²⁴ Tony Hiss, "My Father's Honor," *New Yorker*, November 16, 1992, 100.

²⁵ Allen Weinstein, "Reopening a Cold War Mystery," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1992.

²⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in Russian. Volkogonov's letter was printed in Serge Schmemmann, "Russian General Retreats on Hiss," *New York Times*, December 17, 1992.

²⁷ Quoted in Schmemmann, "Russian General Retreats on Hiss."

²⁸ Quoted in id.

American media was much slower to report Volkogonov's retraction than his "exoneration" of Hiss. When Hiss died in 1996 Peter Jennings reported that "Boris Yeltsin said that KGB files had supported Mr. Hiss's claim" of innocence.²⁹

Between the Volkogonov incident in late 1992 and Hiss's death in late 1996, another set of archives began to cause difficulties for Hiss. The release of files from the archives of the U.S. National Security Agency was directly connected to the same cluster of developments in the early 1990s that launched Vassiliev on his project with Weinstein.

In the course of their research for *The Secret World of American Communism*, Haynes and Klehr discovered that a few Soviet agents in America had been exposed to U.S. authorities because, in an interval during and just after World War II, a U.S. intelligence agency had decrypted coded transmissions to Moscow from Soviet controllers working in the United States. The agency in question, the National Security Agency, had dubbed its code-breaking project, which lasted from 1942 to 1946, Venona. Haynes and Klehr interviewed a NSA official about the Venona project before *The Secret World of American Communism* was published, and were told that it existed, but that all its files were classified.

After *The Secret World of American Communism* appeared in early 1995, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the chair of a presidential commission on governmental secrecy, invited Haynes and Klehr to discuss the Russian government's cooperation in the release of hitherto classified information from Soviet-era archives. Their testimony before Moynihan's commission came in May 1995, and the irony of Russian archives being opened to scholars, but U.S. archives from the same time period remaining closed, was noted. By July 1995, Moynihan had engineered a ceremony, at the headquarters of the CIA, in which representatives of that agency, the FBI, and the NSA attended an announcement that the first batch of Venona files was being made public, with other batches to follow.

²⁹ Jennings was not only wrong about what the KGB files supported, but on what Yeltsin had allegedly said. Yeltsin had not issued any public comment about Soviet-era intelligence archives and Hiss.

In March 1996, a decoded cable from Anatoly Gorsky (the compiler of the list of Soviet “failures” in America that Vassiliev had found so valuable) to Moscow Center was released. It had been sent on March 30, 1945, and discussed a conversation between “A” – one of Gorsky’s associates – and an agent given the code name “Ales.”³⁰ The description of “Ales” seemed to match Alger Hiss so closely that one NSA analyst had written on the cable, in August 1969, “Probably Alger Hiss.” It identified “Ales” as working for the GRU since 1935, being the leader of a small group of agents that partly consisted of “his relatives,” being employed at the State Department, working with the courier “Pol,”³¹ recently (along with his whole group) having been awarded a Soviet medal, and (apparently) having attended the Yalta conference and then traveled to Moscow.³² The first three features of the description squared exactly with information about Hiss provided by Whittaker Chambers in his testimony at Hiss’s perjury trials and his subsequent memoir, and the last was public knowledge: Hiss had gone to Yalta as aide to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius.

When the “Ales” cable was made public, it received some media

³⁰ “A” was initially rendered as “Pya” in the cable. NSA officials eventually concluded that “Pya” was a garbled decryption, and “A” an abbreviation for “Albert,” or Iskhak Akhmerov, the “illegal” chief of the KGB’s New York station, an obvious candidate to be dispatched by Gorsky in search of “Ales.” “Legal” Soviet agents had official functions in the United States and used their real identities; “illegal” agents used false papers and assumed the roles of “ordinary” Russian immigrants. Akhmerov was working for a New York fur store at the time. He had not had prior contact with Hiss because Hiss worked for the GRU. See *Spies*, 19-20.

³¹ The code name “Pol” stumped intelligence scholars for many years. Haynes and Klehr believe he was the American literary agent Maxim Lieber, a close friend of Whittaker Chambers at the time Chambers broke with the Soviets. See *id.*, 16-17.

³² The language in the cable was “After the Yalta Conference, when he had gone to Moscow, a Soviet personage . . . allegedly got in touch with Ales.” John Lowenthal was subsequently to claim that the “he” in the sentence referred to the “personage,” not “Ales,” so that “Ales” could have been anywhere in the world when the “personage” – “Ales” implied it was Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Vishinsky – contacted him. That claim will subsequently be discussed.

G. Edward White

attention, with one *Wall Street Journal* columnist calling it “the smoking gun in the Hiss case” and suggesting that people who refused “to recognize [the cable’s] implications” were “the sort who would insist on Mr. Hiss’s innocence even if he confessed.”³³ Hiss himself, however, speaking through Tony, denied that he was “Ales” and stated that he had only visited the impressively decorated Moscow subway when he and Stettinius briefly stopped there after Yalta. There matters rested when Hiss died, at age 92, of bronchial failure. There would be no deathbed confession, he had told David Remnick in an interview in 1986. He had “no secrets.”³⁴ But by the time of Hiss’s death, Alexander Vassiliev had already discovered that a good many secrets about Hiss were lying around in Moscow.

To be continued . . .



³³ Eric Breindel, “New Evidence in the Hiss Case,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 1996.

³⁴ Quoted in David Remnick, “Alger Hiss: Unforgiven and Unforgiving,” *Washington Post Magazine*, October 12, 1986.