

Windflyer: The John Walker Spy Case

by Beverly Andress with Ray Batvinis

Oleg Kalugin called him a spy “who turns up once in a lifetime.” High praise; especially from a KGB general with thirty years of intelligence experience and a resume that included the kidnapping of a FBI double agent off the streets of Vienna, Austria. Kalugin was also the spy’s original handler. One high ranking American intelligence official offered a much darker assessment charging that no sentence imposed by a court could “atone for the unprecedented damage” the spy had done to U.S. national security. Both were referring to John Anthony Walker who was arrested by the FBI thirty years ago this month.

The case began one day in November 1984 in tiny West Dennis, MA when Barbara, John’s estranged wife, telephoned the Boston office with a remarkable tale to tell. Fueled by heavy doses of booze, impoverishment and years of marital misery she began describing John’s spying for the Russians while he served in the U.S. Navy. Over the span of almost twenty years, the KGB had paid him approximately one million dollars for America’s most sensitive cryptographic secrets; keys that opened the door to the highest level White House and Pentagon thoughts and plans. She suspected that he was still spying.

That wasn’t all. John had accomplices. There was his brother, Arthur and a close Navy friend later revealed as Jerry Whitworth. John also made an unsuccessful attempt to recruit his daughter, Laura, into espionage. Barbara had known about his treachery almost from the beginning and had even accompanied him on spying missions. It had been the family’s dirty little secret for years.

What she didn’t know, fortunately, was that John was now selling the KGB U.S. Navy secrets stolen by their son, Michael, then serving aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz. I say “fortunately” because in a later televised interview with journalist Barbara Walters, Barbara confessed that she would have taken the family secret to the grave had she known her son was involved.

Walker began his spying in 1967 when he walked into the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC and handed an official a sample of the keylists for the Top-Secret KL-47 cryptographic machine. After retiring from the U.S. Navy in 1976, he settled in Virginia Beach, where he was living in 1985.

The Norfolk FBI office was relatively small at the time with a complement of forty Agents assigned to just four squads. Its size made it valuable as a training ground for new Agents. Squad Four, responsible for counterintelligence and applicant matters, was made up of highly seasoned Agents and first office rookies. I was in the latter category.

At the end of February 1985, Boston’s “airtel” landed on the desk of our supervisor, a courtly Virginia lawyer and true gentleman, named Joe Wolfinger. Joe wasted no time in selecting Bob Hunter to handle what would become the famous Windflyer investigation. Bob was the ideal choice. His impressive resume included 18 years of experience in both criminal and FCI matters including the Brian Patrick Horton case. (Brian Horton was a U.S. Navy enlisted man working for the Nuclear Strike Planning Branch at the Commander-in-Chief compound, who tried to sell Top Secret information to the Russians.) Bob was also Joe’s primary relief, and Joe trusted his judgment implicitly.

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” wrote the eighteenth century English playwright, William Congreve. That famous line was undoubtedly hidden in the deep recesses of Bob’s mind at the start of the case. He had to know Barbara’s motive. Was she being truthful? Or was she merely a vengeful spouse falsely accusing a decorated U.S. Navy veteran and popular Virginia Beach businessman? The answer was critical. If she lied, then the case would be still-born. Her truthfulness, however, would have devastating implications for the nation’s security. Bob Hunter relied on Paul Culligan in Buffalo,



Squad 4 in 1985: Kevin Kenneally, Ray Zicarelli, John Hodges, Bev Andress and Bob Hunter

who was in touch with Laura Walker and Case Agent Walter Price was working with Barbara in Boston to convince them to take a polygraph. After agreeing, both mother and daughter quickly found themselves wired up by Barry Colvert, one of the Bureau's finest polygraph examiners. Barry's conclusions were both definitive and terrifying — no deception indicated.

Life for all of us on Squad Four suddenly became a relentless probe of John Walker's life. We discovered that he was a well-known and wired-in private-eye who owned and operated two businesses. One was a detective agency called Confidential Reports. The other was Electronic Counter-Spy, a company which specialized in sweeping rooms and vehicles for listening and tracking devices. A look at his personal life surfaced a lively romance with a Norfolk police officer. Working closely with John Hodges, another talented veteran, Bob concluded that these three factors forced us to rule out any physical surveillance or contacts with community sources.

We caught a real break, however, in April when, through a combination of hard work and chutzpah, Dave Szady (known to most of us as the "Z-Man"), the FBI headquarters supervisor handling the case, managed to get a court-ordered wiretap on John's home, office and house-boat telephones despite absolutely no evidence of recent espionage activity. Z's miracle soon produced a flood of insights into Walker's movements, friends, contacts and perhaps most importantly, his personality. Day after day John's long hours on the telephone exposed him for what he really was — a worthless, self-centered and horrid creature who lied with impunity even to his closest friends. Wolfinger later described him as "a man who lied even when the truth would have served him better."

We soon narrowed our focus on John and Arthur's financial records as far back as they existed looking for any unusual cash deposits. Arthur also lived in Virginia Beach and worked for VSE Corporation, a defense contractor. Passport records and foreign travel were analyzed as well for any correlation with these deposits. Military records, which arrived in March, made for scary reading. Both brothers were retired career officers in the submarine service. Both had Top Secret clearances for most of those years. John, trained as a Radio Man, rose to the rank of Warrant Officer. Toward the end of his career, he became a Cryptographic Custodian responsible for the security of the U.S. Navy's highest level codes, ciphers and coding machines.

In *Spy Hunter*, a memoir Bob Hunter wrote years later about the case, he described his request for a National Security Agency assessment of John's personnel file. After one careful reading, the "visibly shaken" NSA expert offered a chilling observation. "If these people gave the Soviets the information they had access to, the damage will be not only grave, it will be catastrophic."

After the initial hubbub marking the start of the case, things began settling into a regular routine until one day the wild-card turned up — Barbara! In early April she traveled to Norfolk for a ten-day visit with her daughter, Margaret.

Within hours of her arrival, Bob secretly met with her to develop more information. Margaret knew nothing about her mother's call to the FBI but Barbara had told Arthur. Did he warn John? She didn't know. She had not spoken to either of them. John knew she was in town, however, and would demand a meeting with her. He never missed the chance to bully her into keeping her mouth shut about the family secret.

My role in the investigation abruptly shifted when I became Barbara's temporary minder. Bob introduced me to a sad, chain smoking, hard drinking woman trapped in a world of fear and deceit now complicated even further by her secret cooperation with the FBI. She was terrified of her ex-husband, yet she knew she had to meet him. Barbara and I soon began lunching together, shopping together, running errands and just driving around together. My only two missions were to study her and to steady her.

It all went well. She remained strong when she met with John, showing great courage in the face of his verbal abuse, particularly so considering John's hint that he was still spying and that Michael might be involved. We all breathed a huge sigh of relief, however, when we learned that neither she nor Arthur had tipped him off. After an anxious week and a half, we finally got Barbara out of town.

Working in a forty-man office can be hectic when multiple high profile cases are underway at the same time. Norfolk was no different. While we concentrated on John and Arthur, the criminal squad was zeroing in on Thomas Manning, a Top-Ten fugitive wanted for ten bombings and the 1981 murder of a New Jersey state trooper. Squeezed into the same off-site, the Squad Four crew monitored the wiretap on John sitting side by side with the criminal squad while they kept their eyes on a CCTV focused on a mail box they believed Manning had rented. Toward the end of April, Manning's wife cleared the box leading to a surveillance that ended with their arrest.

I can still recall Butch Holtz, Ray Zicarelli, Kevin Kenneally, Ed Schrader and the rest of us listening day in and day out to John's seemingly endless personal and business telephone conversations. Following each call, we made a record of his schedule along with planned meetings, investigations and other jobs he had to do in the days and weeks ahead. It gradually fell into a dull routine until the evening of Thursday, May 16, 1985, when John's tearful mother called to tell him that "Aunt Amelia has cashed in her chips" — her own colorful way of announcing the death of his favorite aunt (a woman who we later learned had practically raised him). Her funeral was scheduled for Saturday, May 18, in Scranton, PA. John went on ad-nauseam with "Mommy," as he always called her, bemoaning Aunt Amelia's loss, but explaining that he could not attend as he had something to do. John then called Arthur to inform him. Aunt Amelia would have been so proud of her two nephews had she known they settled on one bouquet of flowers from them both after bickering over who was going to pay the florist bill. Next, he spoke to his police officer fiancée, P.K.

Carroll, who yelled at him for blowing off the funeral. That's when he insisted that he had to do something that weekend that "only" he could do.

The next day, a Friday, John was in the office again and as usual on the phone chatting. Everyone seemed to get a different story regarding his weekend plans. With one caller, he was going to Charlotte and with another he was off to Nags Head. Something was up but we didn't know what. Then moments before the office closed, John offered us a tantalizing clue. Picking up the telephone receiver to place a call, he momentarily hesitated to speak to some office workers who were leaving for the evening. Now with a live microphone into his office we clearly heard him announce that he was leaving for the weekend and would return to the office on Monday. He then put down the phone, never completing the call. That tidbit of information suddenly changed the course of the investigation.

Just weeks before that Friday conversation, we had convened a conference to review our full range of investigative options. Wolfinger invited Culligan together with Jack Lowe and Jim

"Dr. K" Kolouch, both highly knowledgeable about KGB and GRU practices in Washington as well as Szady and Dennis DeBrandt from Headquarters. The Department of Defense was desperate to learn what Walker gave up to Russians. The gravity of his crimes ruled out any thought of turning him as a double agent. An interrogation was quickly rejected. His familiarity with law enforcement procedures would lead to his immediate demand for an attorney. In the end, our options were reduced to trailing John to Washington in the hope of catching him in the act of placing and clearing a dead drop — a gutsy call considering such a tactic had never before been conducted. Norfolk and WFO began crafting a plan for a two-hundred mile surveillance, commencing on a moment's notice.

Now the moment had come to kick our plan into action. The first surveillance of John Walker started on Saturday morning at 7:00 am with heavy reliance on aircraft coverage. Henry "Hank" Bolin, an ex-Marine fighter pilot and, John Hodges, an ex-Air Force flier, were in the plane. Hank was at the controls with John spotting. All the tension built up

over the previous three months slowly deflated to boredom, however, as we idled away the day watching John cut his grass, run errands and plan a dinner with a woman, while his fiancée was working. We broke off that evening only to mount up again, same time, same place, same crew on Sunday morning. Shortly after noon, Hodges suddenly saw John emerge from his house, get into his van and briefly drive around his neighborhood looking for surveillance. Convinced that he was clean, John then made his way to Interstate 64 and began heading west. This operation forever sold me on the value of aircraft surveillance. While we followed behind out of sight, Hank and John, sitting three thousand feet overhead, never took their eyes off of him. The trigger point was the Interstate 64/95 intersection. Would he go north on I-95 to Washington or south to some place unknown. He swung onto the northbound ramp. Bingo!

Wolfinger immediately relayed John's change in direction to a command post at WFO. Moments later eighty-five "beepers" ("The Big Beep") went off signaling Agents and SSG personnel to begin a static surveillance at predetermined

choke-points throughout suburban Maryland and Virginia. At 3:30 am Monday, May 20, 1985, Bob arrested John in the dark hallway of a Ramada Inn at Rockville, MD.

Over the previous twelve hours, WFO watched Walker cruise around the Virginia side of the Capitol Beltway and across the American Legion Bridge into Montgomery County driving aimlessly for the next several hours looking for surveillance in anticipation of filling and clearing his drop. Surveillance is

like a battle. You make a plan, but once the battle is joined, you toss it away. In this case we lost him. After glumly waiting for several hours, Doug Stauffer and his team suddenly boosted our spirits with the announcement that they found Walker's package hidden along the side of a road in rural Poolesville, MD.

The mother lode was a plastic garbage bag containing a thick plastic package made up of eight by ten inch copies of classified documents that included 129 stolen naval secrets. A thick study identifying the weaknesses of the land-based



John Walker. Photo courtesy of the International Spy Museum

Tomahawk missile, schematics and vulnerabilities of the USS Nimitz's missile defense system, an exhaustive study of how America's spy satellites could be sabotage and authentic codes needed to launch US nuclear missiles were just samplings of the impressive cache. Walker's fate was sealed when Department of Justice attorney, John Dion, authorized his arrest on charges of espionage.

When WFO took over the surveillance, our team returned to Norfolk. I got home late and exhausted. Around 4:00 am, Bob Hunter roused me out of bed with a call telling me that John was in custody. I was to meet up at the office with the other Agents to begin interviews and searches. Carroll Deane, a savvy criminal Agent (Hunter and Wolfinger knew I needed adult supervision) and I soon found ourselves knocking on Arthur's door to start an interview. I knew the facts but Carroll knew the ropes. He was the consummate professional and I'll forever be thankful to him for being there. Our interview with Arthur that day lasted eight hours. Over the next four days, Deane, Hodges, Kenneally and I along with Barry Colvert interviewed Arthur for a total of thirty-five hours. Following each failed polygraph, Art would dribble out more incriminating facts about his involvement. Gradually, he just started showing up at the office, often before start of business, trying "to clear things up." On May 24, 1985 he finally gave us a sworn signed statement about documents he stole from his employer, VSE. Nine days after John's arrest, Arthur was taken into custody.

In the hours following John's arrest, the Norfolk Naval Base sent a flash message to the Nimitz then making a port call at Haifa, Israel. It was an order for Michael Walker's arrest. When confronted by Naval Investigative Service Agents, he denied everything. Some hours later after sitting alone in the ship's brig the twenty-one year old seaman asked to speak to an Agent. His statements would later help seal his fate as well. Weeks later, Jerry Whitworth, John's Navy friend

then living in California, became the fourth man arrested.

After two more years of legal wrangling and lengthy government debriefing sessions, all four received lengthy prison sentences. John, ever the conniver, agreed to a life term in exchange for a reduction in Michael's sentence to twenty-five years. He agreed also to testify against his close friend, Jerry. As remote as the possibility was, the deal left the door open for John's future parole. A furious John Lehman, then the Navy Secretary, publicly denounced the agreement and resigned in protest after learning that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had signed off on the deal. As for the hapless Arthur, he was sentenced to a life sentence after his conviction on all charges. Jerry took his chances in court and lost. He is now in Leavenworth Prison where he will remain for the next 350 years.

Three decades later, Barbara, John and Arthur are all gone. Barbara died a few years ago. Ironically, both John and Arthur were eligible for parole this year. They died within a month of each other last summer in the Federal Prison Hospital at Butner, NC. As for Michael, he was paroled in 2000 after serving fifteen years. Today, he lives quietly in Massachusetts struggling to rebuild his life as a local artist.

Me, I'm retired and living the good life in Florida. But today as I enjoy an easier pace — sharing days filled with family and friends — I still occasionally think back to those FOA years in Norfolk and realize how blessed I was. Not only was I was privileged to learn from wonderful mentors but the Walker case was probably the defining moment which set the course for the rest of my Bureau career. A person couldn't get any luckier.

Our June 2015 history column will be The Kidnap Racket: E.J. Connelley and the Weyerhaeuser Kidnapping by Brian Hunt.



John Walker's briefcase. Photo courtesy of the International Spy Museum

Happy Armed Forces Day!

We honor all of our veterans who have served in the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Navy!

The first holiday was celebrated on May 20, 1950 with parades, open houses, receptions and air shows.

