

The code clerk, a recent arrival named Robert Hall, showed a complete lack of interest in his work and even left Beck alone in the room for forty-five minutes. The door was open at all times, and Beck was one of several people allowed to wander in to talk to the clerks there, though State Department regulations laid down that the only people allowed to enter the code room of any embassy were code clerks and people with specific authorization. The one precaution was that Soviet messengers had to wait behind a barrier several feet from the code room door.

Morale among the three code clerks in the embassy was particularly low. They were all dissatisfied with their lives and conditions, and were consequently easy prey for subversion. There is no evidence that any of those working there during Beck's visit succumbed, but one man, James Lewis, was especially vulnerable, as he was living with a Soviet woman. He wanted to marry her, but was caught in a double trap: State Department regulations did not allow married men to serve as clerks in Moscow; if he did marry, he would be transferred back to the United States, but because of Soviet regulations he would have to leave his wife behind.

Confidential and coded messages were supposed to be destroyed with care after dispatch, but it was the custom in the embassy, Beck noted, for all the originals of confidential messages to be piled up together with the original drafts of the coded telegrams. When enough messages had accumulated, they were taken to the basement by a messenger to be burned. There was no guard, and no control was ever exercised to see that the messages were in fact destroyed. With both the original documents and the coded copies, the messenger would not only be in a position to know the contents of all confidential communications to and from the embassy, but would also have the necessary data with which to break the secret codes and ciphers.

But there was still more disturbing evidence of the lack of security. The Soviet employees habitually loitered in the basement—indeed, some of them lived there—and usually gathered to watch the bundles of confidential messages being burned at the end of the working day. "Paper bundles such as the bundles of confidential messages do not burn readily," Special Agent Beck noted, "and even after being in the fire for