

Review of the book by
Trevor Barnes (2020) *Dead Doubles:
The Extraordinary Worldwide Hunt For One
of the Cold War's Most Notorious Spy Rings.*
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One day in January 1961, the British Special Branch, which was responsible for the investigation of crimes against national security, sprang into action in London, not far from Waterloo Station. Three people were arrested at the very moment top secret material was changing hands. Of these, two were Harry Houghton and Ethel Gee, both British citizens. The third person went by the name of Gordon Lonsdale and carried a Canadian passport in that name. Houghton and Gee were caught in the act of handing British defence secrets to Lonsdale at the moment of their arrest. Prior to the arrest of the three, Special Branch, in close cooperation with the Security Service, also known as MI5, had established that Gordon Lonsdale was not his real name. Neither was he Canadian. Much later during the investigation it came to light that his real name was Konon Molody, a Soviet citizen and an intelligence officer of the Committee of State Security, better known by the acronym KGB. His work in the UK as a trader in jukeboxes and bubble gum was just a cover.

The case of the spy ring led by Lonsdale/Molody is the subject of *Dead Doubles* by Trevor Barnes. In a period of about five years when the operation ran, Lonsdale received top secret information from Houghton and Gee on British technology in the field of advanced underwater detection (sonar) that the Royal Navy was using. Both of them were basically in it for the money. Gee had access to this information through her work at the Under-

water Detection Establishment (UDE) at Portland on the English south coast. Hence the name 'Portland spy ring' that was commonly used in the British media when the affair became public.

As Barnes explains, 'dead double' was a term used by western intelligence services during the Cold War to refer to the KGB practice of forging a new identity for an intelligence officer operating outside the Soviet Union. The KGB did this by stealing the identity of a person from a western country, preferably someone who had died at a very young age. In that way, the deceased person whose identity was stolen, usually a male during the Cold War, became a 'dead double.' The stolen identity made it possible for a KGB officer such as Lonsdale/Molody to operate below the radar of the local security service in a western country, because obviously it was impossible for the KGB officer to cross paths in real life with a deceased person. Especially since the citizens' registry was set up in Canada in such a way that it was relatively easy for the KGB to steal the identity of a dead person in that country. The KGB called its personnel that operated in the West with a false identity, often for a period of many years, 'illegals,' and Moscow felt these operations were generally the best their intelligence services had to offer. In fact, Lonsdale operated not with the identity of a dead double but of someone who had emigrated to the USSR from Canada at a very young age.

The author of *Dead Doubles* is clearly well-versed in the basics of intelligence, Humint in particular. Barnes has written a very readable and well-researched account of the Lonsdale/Molody case for which he also used a fair number of sources in Russian. He was also greatly helped by the fact that MI5 systematically releases archive material relating to past operations, a practice that is obviously of great benefit to intelligence historians. This book offers the first thorough overview of the case of the Portland spy ring and focuses both on the British investigation and on the way the KGB operated. It also offers extensive background information on the many personalities that played a role in the story. Once he was back in Russia, Lonsdale had his memoirs published in the UK and the USA in 1965, but they were, of course, very incomplete and contained a strong element of KGB disinformation.

When the British authorities started investigating, it turned out the case was about more than just Houghton, Gee and Lonsdale, because there were other important actors involved as well. From Lonsdale, MI5 followed the trail to a couple known as Peter and Helen Kroger, both also KGB illegals, who were living in the London borough of Ruislip, in their case with New Zealand passports. Their real names were Morris and Lona Cohen, American citizens who had taken part in KGB intelligence operations in the U.S. prior to their arrival in Britain in 1954. The couple were committed communists and played important supporting roles for Lonsdale, especially by maintaining communications with Moscow, through radio transmissions and by other means.

The question arises as to how Houghton got caught in the crosshairs of MI5. It was the Polish security official, Michal Goleniewski, a CIA asset codenamed SNIPER, who gave leads to Houghton's identity. The CIA shared SNIPER's information with MI5. (In the intelligence business, information from an agent is often fragmentary and offers only partial clues). Goleniewski's information not only consisted of leads to Houghton's identity, he also gave the CIA clues that led to the unmasking of a KGB agent inside the British intelligence service MI6, George Blake. Barnes analyses the connections between all these different cases. In many ways, they are typical for Humint: an individual case rarely stands alone.

After three years in a British prison, Lonsdale was released to the Soviet Union in a spy swap in 1964 and the Krogers followed him a few years later. As for the work of Lonsdale/

Molody as an illegal, was it all worth it in personal terms? There is no real answer to this question by an outside observer, of course. Lonsdale had been active as an illegal in the West since 1954, first in Canada and later, until his arrest in 1961, in Britain. During these years, his wife and children stayed behind in Moscow and he saw them rarely, if at all. As is well-known, Soviet authorities were prone to asking rather a lot of their intelligence personnel.