

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ~~SECRET~~

# Memorandum

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OFFICE OF  
DATE: November 26, 1965  
RECEIVED  
NOV 26 1965  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

TO : The Attorney General

FROM : Director, FBI

SUBJECT: ROBERT GLENN THOMPSON  
INTERNAL SECURITY - RUSSIA

Thompson is the former Office of Special Investigations, United States Air Force, enlisted man who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit espionage in March, 1965. In May, 1965, he was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment and he is presently serving this sentence at the Federal Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Prison authorities at Lewisburg advised in August, 1965, that Thompson had directed a letter to attorney Wolfgang Vogel, Berlin, Germany. Thompson told Vogel he had obtained Soviet citizenship in 1957 and requested that Vogel represent him in a possible exchange for persons imprisoned in the Soviet Union or East Germany. Vogel is the East Berlin attorney who represented Soviet spy Rudolf Abel in his exchange for Francis Gary Powers.

Information has been received from the Department of State that a Foreign Service officer in Berlin met with Vogel on November 9, 1965, at which time Vogel brought up the Thompson case and indicated the "East" was interested in bringing about Thompson's release in exchange for prisoners held by the "East." On November 23, 1965, we learned from a representative of the Bureau of Prisons that the Warden, Federal Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, had reported Thompson had received a communication from Vogel in which Vogel told Thompson he would be willing to accept his case. The Bureau of Prisons representative advised that because of the attorney-client relationship between Vogel and Thompson it would no longer be possible for the prison authorities to monitor communications between them.

Thompson is an American citizen, born in Detroit, Michigan. It would seem highly improper if an American serving a sentence such as Thompson's could evade this sentence through a claim of Soviet citizenship. The Soviets are obviously trying to repay him for his past activities on their behalf.

- 1 - The Deputy Attorney General
- 1 - Mr. J. Walter Yeagley  
Assistant Attorney General

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146-7-52-576

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE		R
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

December 23, 1965

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Dear Mr. Attorney General:

With reference to your memorandum of November 30 to Under Secretary Ball on the question of prisoner exchanges, we will certainly keep your Internal Security Division as well as the FBI currently informed of cases of concern to the State Department which involve persons in US custody. I believe that the Department of Justice through the Legal Attache in Bonn was brought into the case of Robert Glenn Thompson as soon as the possibility of Thompson being exchanged was mentioned by the East Germans.

As regards this particular proposal, you are probably aware that John Van Altena, who was one of those offered in return for Thompson, was seized October 12, 1964 while attempting to smuggle an East German resident into West Berlin, for which he was sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Efforts and negotiations to secure his release have continued since then, primarily through the East Berlin lawyer, Wolfgang Vogel, who has figured prominently in exchange and release cases in the past. It was only on November 9, 1965 that Vogel injected the question of exchanging Robert Glenn Thompson, based, according to his statement, on Thompson's appeal to him. Vogel can at any time submit such a proposal to the Van Altena family or their lawyer, although there is no indication that he has as yet done so. However, the Department of State has cautioned the US Mission in Berlin that high level clearance here in Washington would be necessary before any intimation was given that such an exchange might be possible.

Should we be faced with such a situation, we will consult with the Department of Justice immediately.

Sincerely yours,

*U. Alexis Johnson*  
U. Alexis Johnson  
Deputy Under Secretary

The Honorable  
Nicholas deB Katzenbach  
The Attorney General

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
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ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Authority NJ-084-001-1-13  
By cbw, NARA, Date 2-4-13

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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

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Action

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FM USMISSION BERLIN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 586  
INFO RUEHCR/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 167  
RUFHOL/AMEMBASSY BONN PRIORITY 494  
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E X D I S

SUBJ: PROPOSAL FOR RELEASE OF US PRISONERS IN VIETNAM

A MISSION OFFICER MET DECEMBER 30 WITH THE EAST BERLIN ATTORNEY WOLFGANG VOGEL AND THE LATTER'S WEST BERLIN ASSOCIATE JUERGEN STANGE TO DISCUSS THE CASES OF US CITIZENS IMPRISONED IN THE GDR. IN THE COURSE OF THE MEETING VOGEL SAID HE WISHED TO RAISE ANOTHER MATTER. HE HAD BEEN AUTHORIZED BY HIS PRINCIPALS, SPECIFICALLY BY THE EAST GERMAN ATTORNEY GENERAL STREIT, TO MAKE AN OFFER TO BRING ABOUT THE RELEASE OF SOME US PILOTS OR OTHER SERVICEMEN HELD IN NORTH VIETNAM IN RETURN FOR FAVORABLE ACTION IN THE CASES OF SOVIET AGENTS HELD IN THE WEST. VOGEL MENTIONED THE THOMPSON CASE (US), THE KROEGERS (BRITISH), WENNERSTROM (SWEDISH), AND A CASE IN FRANCE CALLED STEINBRECKER. (IT WAS NOT CLEAR FROM VOGEL'S PRESENTATION WHETHER STEINBRECKER WAS A SOVIET OR AN EAST GERMAN AGENT.)

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THE MISSION OFFICER POSED SEVERAL QUESTIONS:

1. WAS VOGEL'S PROPOSAL AUTHORIZED IN THE SENSE OF HAVING NORTH VIETNAMESE APPROVAL?

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 DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
 27 FEB 14 1966  
 INTERNAL SECURITY  
 Criminal Section

VOGEL SAID HE HAD HIS INSTRUCTIONS ONLY FROM STREIT, AND HE DID NOT KNOW WITH WHOM STREIT HAD BEEN IN CONTACT. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, HE BELIEVED IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE THAT HE HAD BEEN AUTHORIZED TO CONVEY THE PROPOSAL AT A TIME WHEN A NORTH VIETNAMESE DEPUTY PREMIER WAS IN EAST BERLIN. (DEPUTY PREMIER LE THANH NGHI ARRIVED THERE DECEMBER 28 FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GDR.)

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By ebw, NARA, Date 8-4-13

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-2- 586, DECEMBER 31, FROM BERLIN

VOGEL THEN EXPLAINED THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROPOSAL. HE SAID HE HAD MET IN PARIS IN THE FALL WITH A BRITISH ATTORNEY CALLED SINCLAIR TO DISCUSS THE KROEGERS CASE. SINCLAIR HAD SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY OF BRINGING ABOUT THE RELEASE OF US PRISONERS IN VIETNAM AT THAT TIME. VOGEL HAD REPORTED SINCLAIR'S PROPOSAL TO STREIT ON HIS RETURN TO EAST BERLIN. STREIT HAD DISMISSED IT AT THE TIME AS IRRELEVANT BUT HAD LATER REVERTED TO THE TOPIC AGAIN WITH VOGEL AS BEING OF POSSIBLE INTEREST. NOW AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE, STREIT HAD INSTRUCTED HIM TO CONVEY IT TO US.

2. WAS THE ONLY CONTEXT FOR THE RELEASE OF US PRISONERS SOME WESTERN CONCESSIONS ON SOVIET AGENTS, OR WERE OTHER ARRANGEMENTS CONCEIVABLE?

VOGEL REPLIED THAT THERE WERE OTHER POSSIBILITIES IN HIS VIEW. ONE MIGHT BE THE RELEASE OF VIETNAMESE PRISONERS (HE DID NOT SAY WHETHER NORTH VIETNAMESE OR VIET CONG) HELD BY THE U.S.

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3. HOW LARGE AN ACTION FOR THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS WAS ENVISAGED?

VOGEL SAID HE IMAGINED PERHAPS THREE US PRISONERS MIGHT BE RELEASED IN RETURN FOR THOMPSON, FOR EXAMPLE, IF IT WAS A QUESTION OF SOVIET AGENTS. HE DID NOT OFFER ANY ESTIMATES IF THE CONTEXT WERE US RELEASE OF VIETNAMESE PRISONERS BUT COMMENTED THAT HE BELIEVED IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO EXPAND THE PRISONER RELEASE ACTION IF IT WORKED SMOOTHLY. HE STRESSED IN THIS CONNECTION THE IMPORTANCE HIS PRINCIPALS ATTACHED TO DISCREET HANDLING OF THE PROPOSAL. PUBLICITY, HE SAID, COULD RUIN THE WHOLE SCHEME. (IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT VOGEL'S WEST BERLIN ASSOCIATE, STANGE, WHO WAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE MEETING, IS KNOWN TO HAVE CLOSE CONTACTS WITH WEST GERMAN INTELLIGENCE. IT SHOULD BE ASSUMED, THEREFORE, THAT VOGEL'S OFFER WILL BE PASSED BY STANGE TO THE FRG GOVERNMENT.)

4. WAS THE PROPOSAL INTENDED TO HAVE BROADER POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS?

VOGEL REPLIED INDIRECTLY BY AGAIN NOTING THAT THE PROPOSAL WAS BEING CONVEYED SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE VISIT OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE DEPUTY PREMIER TO EAST BERLIN.

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OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

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INTERNAL SECURITY DIVISION

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ATTORNEY GENERAL

JUSTICE  
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Origin  
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Info:

ACTION: USBER BERLIN  
INFO: Amembassy BONN  
REF: Berlintel 699, info Bonn 594  
SUBJ: US Prisoners in GDR

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After thorough review Vogel's latest proposal (see reftel) Dept of Justice has decided that it will not RPT not approve deal involving release of Thompson. While it is conceivable that release of Thompson might be reconsidered under different circumstances, it is highly unlikely that Justice would approve any deal involving exchange of Thompson for US prisoners in East Germany.

In the interest of clarifying negotiations the Mission should therefore inform Vogel categorically that US will not RPT not agree to release of Thompson in context negotiation to free US prisoners. The East Germans should in other words be disabused of any hope that US prisoners can be used to effect Thompson's release.

Obviously there is little reason for optimism for early release US prisoners, particularly in light of the Mission's comments in last para reftel. Nevertheless Dept believes Mission should make every effort to determine whether, with Thompson prize out of the question, East

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German

Drafted by: 2/9/66 Tel. Ext. 2316 Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by: EUR - Walter S. Stoessel

Clearances: GER - Mr. Puhan INR - Mr. Ekern

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Authority NLT-084-001-1-19  
By cbw, NARA, Date 2-4-13

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INTERNAL SECURITY Criminal Section

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Germans might be interested in lesser stakes. Vogel should be asked about feasibility of one or another his previous offers, but Mission should continue avoid any general committment on issuing visas for commercial travel.

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END.

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FEB 14 1966  
GENERAL INVESTIGATIVE  
DIVISION

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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# Memorandum

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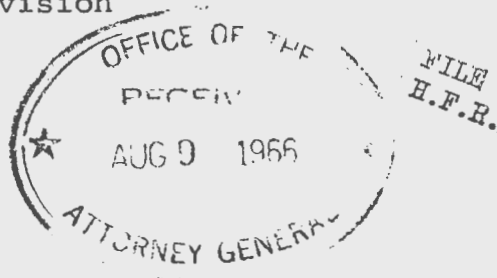
TO : Harold Reis, Executive Assistant to  
The Attorney General

DATE: August 9, 1966

JWY:vde

FROM: *[Signature]*  
J. Walter Yeagley, Assistant Attorney  
General, Internal Security Division

SUBJECT: ROBERT G. THOMPSON  
MARY HELLEN BATTLE  
WILLIAM LOVETT  
MOSES HERRIN  
MATTHEWS  
Exchange of Prisoners



As you may recall the East German Government apparently is interested in exchanging the last four prisoners named above for Robert Thompson. At least Attorney Vogel of East Berlin has so represented and our people in Berlin are willing to believe he can produce. There is attached hereto a letter of August 4, 1966 from the Department of State on this matter forwarding to us also an internal State memo of August 3 together with several State Department cablegrams. Since the Attorney General (and this office) has consistently indicated to the State Department that Thompson is not to be considered available for such an exchange, I again advised the State Department of this position through Mr. Hal Ekern of the Legal Adviser's Office. He did not attempt to disagree with the validity of that position but stated that as indicated in the attachments hereto, Washington lawyer Ricey New had been in touch with Vogel on several occasions and on one occasion was permitted by the East German authorities to visit one of their prisoners. He is the only American so far that has been permitted this privilege and State Department is most anxious to keep the channel open.

Since Vogel had asked New to contact Thompson in his behalf, State Department was hopeful that we could arrange such an interview at Lewisburg Prison. I told Ekern we would not arrange such an interview for the purpose of furthering this exchange. I noted, however, that if New could be considered as Thompson's lawyer or counsel that the Bureau of Prisons probably would recognize the right of the prisoner to contact his lawyer but that should such a

cc - Records  
Mr. Yeagley  
Mr. Doherty  
Mr. Davitt

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meeting occur, it should in no way be interpreted as an indication of any interest on the part of this Government in such a trade. It was agreed that Mr. New would call upon me so that I might determine to my satisfaction whether or not he might fall in this category. New called at my office this morning bringing a copy of a letter to him of July 19 from Wolfgang Vogel, a copy of which also is attached.

I reiterated to Mr. New that Thompson was not available for an exchange of this sort under any circumstances and that we could not intercede to arrange for anyone to talk to Thompson on this basis. I pointed out, however, if he is the prisoner's lawyer, the Bureau of Prisons might let him talk to Thompson, not because the Bureau would agree with the subject matter of the talk, but merely on existing regulations permitting lawyers to see their clients who may be in prison. He said that he understood that this was our position; that although he was interested in getting the release of Miss Battle, he could understand the reasons for that position. He said he would write the Bureau of Prisons to make arrangements but asked if I would call them to clear the air by simply telling them the same thing I had told him. I did call Myrl Alexander to that effect. He indicated to me personally that he didn't like the idea but he would make his decision based on the letter from New and the letter from Vogel to New. I told Mr. New that we did not want to seem to be unfriendly to his client's interest and that I hoped he succeeded somehow in securing her release since she appeared to be doing, at some personal risk, what she thought was the right thing to do in assisting the escape of an East German.

I tried to make our position as firm and as clear as I could in this to Mr. New, because I agree with the thought expressed in one of the cables from Berlin that indicated that until the East Germans understand that they cannot get Thompson's release, they are not likely to be interested in making a deal on any other terms. The State Department, you will note, wants them to make the deal in exchange for the approval of visas to East Germans in the interest of foreign trade and commerce.

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