



Operation Whisper: The Capture of Soviet Spies Morris and Lona Cohen

Barnes Carr

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Meet Morris and Lona Cohen, an ordinary-seeming couple living on a teacher's salary in a nondescript building on the East Side of New York City. On a hot afternoon in the autumn of 1950, a trusted colleague knocked at their door, held up a finger for silence, then began scribbling a note: Go now. Leave the lights on, walk out, don't look back. Born and raised in the Bronx and recruited to play football at Mississippi State, Morris Cohen fought for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War and with the U.S. Army in World War II. He and his wife, Lona, were as American as football and fried chicken, but for one detail: they'd spent their entire adult lives stealing American military secrets for the Soviet Union. And not just any military secrets, but a complete working plan of the first atomic bomb, smuggled direct from Los Alamos to their Soviet handler in New York. Their associates Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who accomplished far less, had just been arrested, and the prosecutor wanted the death penalty. Did the Cohens wish to face the same fate? Federal agents were in the neighborhood, knocking on doors, getting close. So get out. Take nothing. Tell no one. In Operation Whisper, Barnes Carr tells the full, true story of the most effective Soviet spy couple in America, a pair who vanished under the FBI's nose only to turn up posing as rare book dealers in London, where they continued their atomic spying. The Cohens were talented, dedicated, worldly spies—an urbane, jet-set couple loyal to their service and their friends, and very good at their work. Most people they met seemed to think they represented the best of America. The Soviets certainly thought so.

Operation Whisper: The Capture of Soviet Spies Morris and Lona Cohen Details

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Linda says

There were points where it became difficult to keep track of which spy was attached to which codename(s), but perhaps that's the point? I found it fascinating and it provided great insight into the rationalizing of "patriots" who convinced themselves they were helping promote a better world. I wish the author had included more information on how the Cohens felt about the Soviet Union once they were actually living there. Other than one or two quotes at the end, there's not much to indicate their state of mind. Overall, though, worth the read.

Rebecca says

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

This spy couple did more damage than the Rosenbergs, but you've probably never heard of them. I picked this up because I hoped to learn more about how these spies collected top secret atomic secrets and forwarded them to the Soviets. This book presents you with a great deal of information, but I think it still lacked some of the details I had hoped for. I found the book crowded with tons of details that didn't seem relevant to the story (to me). So many people are introduced aside from the Cohens that I quickly lost track of who was who. Several reviewers have said this reads like a novel, but I have to disagree. It took me forever to get through this; probably because it felt more like a catalog of Soviet spies than the story of the Cohens.

Not a bad choice if you love Cold War spy stories, but probably a bit too dense for the casual reader.

Jack Barsky says

This book is filling in a gap in the annals of Soviet espionage. Clearly, the Cohens contributed much more to the theft of the atomic secret than the Rosenbergs who were executed. This book was of special interest to me because I got to know Morris and Lona personally while I was in Moscow, being prepared for undercover work in the United States by the KGB. They were absolutely lovely people who most have been great friends and neighbors. Goes to show you that the old saying "don't judge a book by his cover" is VERY true. Those nice people (honestly) served an evil cause. As much as it might pain one to say: 'consequently, they were evil themselves', it is the hard truth.

BTW - it also goes the other way - just because we do not like certain people, that does not imply they are bad.

Christine says

The subject matter was interesting, but it was not presented well. The author couldn't seem to stop bringing up irrelevant little details that interrupted the main story. The story didn't effectively weave in the other characters from the Cohen story, but instead stopped to focus on each person for a few chapters and then would just mention their name in a chapter about the Cohens. It didn't really ever integrate the various characters into one coherent story.

Another problem with the book was that it tried to be too matter-of-fact about the spying parts of the story and didn't really present them in an interesting way. Instead of creating some mystery or suspense, or letting the reader figure out some of the connections, the author would just begin with the conclusions and then elaborate in an uninteresting way. It was written like a book-length newspaper article, essentially. Probably one of the least interesting spy books I can imagine.

Randy Johnson says

A well-researched reminder of just how many American-born spies were working for Stalin during the Cold War, and of how much critical information they were able to steal and relay to his government.

Liz Short says

Enjoyed the book-- but listening to it, I had to rewind a few times. Gets a little slow and some points, and there are many characters. I'm guessing that actually reading it would be more pleasurable and easier to follow-- but that being said, I still very much enjoyed the story. Quite fascinating, and good writing.

Mike says

Morris and Lona Cohen should have taken the place of the Rosenbergs. The Cohens' spy ring was responsible for passing key atomic secrets to the USSR. I found this book interesting for its description of key espionage taking place in New Mexico where I live. The book is an easy read and the author takes a bit of literary license to add details that he couldn't possibly know. But it makes for a smoother read. Really stunning to see the lax security and Keystone Cop failures of the ABC (American, British and Canadian organizations) and others as we lose key secrets. Had a hard time understanding how many of the spies found the Soviet system so worthy of praise and taking risks. **3 Stars**

Paul says

This is a reasonably well-written biography of Morris and Lona Cohen, and covers a somewhat interesting period of time - I'd like to learn more about the Spanish Civil War. That said, it was also not exceptional - it seemed like a fairly standard ideological spying story told well.

Ruth says

probably 4.5--great to have this comprehensive history of these 2 infamous spies

Paul says

Mr Carr's book about the Cohens (or Krugers) starts off with a history of the Russian revolution so bad I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Once past that, it is an interesting story of a couple whose espionage career should have ended a decade before they were finally caught.

Julie Huskey says

Morris and Lona Cohen are not as well known as their compatriots, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, but Carr argues that the information the Cohens provided the Soviet Union was far more important. (That the Cohens fled the United States, only to be arrested and tried in Great Britain a decade later, may be the reason for their being less known.)

Carr provides a good biography of both Cohens; at the same time, he places them in the context of the Cold War. The cast of characters -- spies, spy handlers, and spy hunters -- is occasionally hard to track, and sometimes the Cohens disappear from the story for longer than the reader would like. Nevertheless, espionage relies on complexity, so narratives of it are going to require some effort to follow. This is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the Cold War.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

A fascinating and well written true story of Cold War espionage.

Morris and Lona Cohen, an ordinary-seeming couple living in New York City in the 1950s, however they are a key part of a Soviet plan to steal the secrets of the atomic bomb. Betrayed by a defector they disappear from view only to re-appear as Peter and Helen Kroger antiquarian booksellers in London.

I've always been fascinated by the Cohens and have long awaited a book that details their story, especially their activities in England in what became known as the Portland Spy Case. Operation Whisper is the first to study in detail their "two lives" as Morris and Lona Cohen in America and Peter and Helen Kroger in England.

Barnes Carr doesn't disappoint telling an exciting story of espionage sweeping from the East Coast of the US to the leafy confines of London's suburbia. With details of the actual spycraft used (and misused) this is a must read for any cold war espionage fans.

Literary fans will be fascinated by the connection between the Cohens/Krogers and Frank Doel of fame.

Whilst the writer is obviously not familiar with some of the UK place names he writes in a style that is easy to read and pacey making the book read more like a novel than fact.

Recommended.

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for my honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Sam Schelfhout says

After watching a couple seasons of the television show *The Americans* on FX, I became obsessed with Cold War espionage and wanted to explore this topic further through literature and historical events. I found this book through BookBub, which had a sale on this title at the time I purchased it. I was really disappointed with how this book turned out given the enthralling topic.

The book covers the lives of Morris and Lona Cohen, who were instrumental in introducing the secrets of the atomic bomb to the Soviets quickly following World War II. The book shines in its depth of characters and settings throughout each stage of Soviet involvement in war and espionage. In fact, one of my major gripes with this book was that it got way too in-depth for the casual reader. For a book that reads like a novel, the author takes too much time and effort individually introducing each person. Whenever a new character was introduced, no matter how major or minor, the author delved into his/her childhood, silly quirks, and job background to the point where it was unnecessary.

When I originally picked this book up, I thought it would be a story about the titular characters, the Cohens. However, I feel as if less than 30% of the entire book focuses on these two. The rest of the book is a lot of fluff about the people connected to the Cohens and the situations that these outside characters become entangled in. In addition, the lack of context and background information is absent in key parts of the story. At times, reading the book felt more like a chore!

I applaud the author in his commitment to research and effort in telling a rich story, but the story did not flow and was bogged down by extraneous detail. My recommendation is that if you want to learn more about the Cohens, just go straight to Wikipedia and learn about them there. Unfortunately, I would not recommend this title unless you are an expert in Cold War espionage and want a poorly organized wish-wash of information to supplement your knowledge.

Quentin Stewart says

I received an ARC of this book for an honest review.

In the annals of the Cold War only a few are familiar with the Cohens. In the United States if you have lived through or studied the beginning of the arms race and the Cold War the name Rosenberg is well known as the American spies who gave the nuclear secrets to the Soviets. But Mr. Carr's book informs us of another couple who should be given the real credit for stealing the secrets and getting them into Soviet hands. Morris

and Lona Cohen are children of immigrants who in their early lives latch onto the liberal philosophies of socialism and communism. Morris even joins up and fights in Spain's Civil War on the Soviet side, where he is wounded and is brought into the circle of spies for the Soviet Union. Both Morris and Lona accept the propaganda that comes out of the Soviet Union and are determined to help this less fortunate ally.

It is during World War II that the Cohens, working as a team begin to turn over weapon information to the Soviets. Morris is serving in the army, first in Alaska and then in Europe, and Lona is traveling the east coast getting information that might be helpful to the Soviets in the development of new weapons. They see no problem in this because the Soviets are fighting the same enemy as the United States and should have the same weapons to use in the war. But then the first atomic explosion occurs and the Soviets want to get all of the information that they can get on this new weapon. It is Lona who finds a way to get the information,

As the Rosenberg ring is being rolled up the the FBI the Cohen's handler tells them to walk away and in a round about way they end up in England again spying for the Soviets against the British bases of NATO. The British MI5 and MI6 get wind of them and with dogged determination they move in and arrest them and their handler. They were tried and convicted and eventually exchanged for some British citizens who had been arrested in the Soviet Union. The Cohens lived a life as Soviet heroes in their adopted country and would die peacefully there and be buried with honors.

Why are they not that well known in America? The American anti spy network missed them and allowed them to slip through their fingers to continuing their spying for the Soviets. They were never put on trial in the United States thus that embarrassing fact was never exposed except in the inner circles of the FBI. Were they traitors? That is a question that is left up to the reader to decide for themselves.

Ralphz says

You've heard of the Rosenbergs, but you've probably never heard of the Cohens, Morris and Lona, who pulled off a spectacular bit of Cold War espionage ... then disappeared.

The story starts out with young, idealistic communists in the 1930s and comes to its first climax with the theft of blueprints for the atomic bomb.

As the Rosenbergs were rounded up for their spying (for a much smaller secret), the Cohens ran.

Soon, in England, Peter and Helen Kroger mysteriously showed up and start selling books. And stealing secrets.

Eventually they are caught, and thus ends the first great round of East vs. West.

This is a Cold War tale that's riveting in it's scope and detail. Carr weaves his tale with the everyday ins and outs of being a spy.

I received this book for review.

Read more of my reviews at [Ralphsbooks](#).
