

Russian Spying

As I was doing research for interesting topics, I found out about The Thing, considered by many to be the first Russian covert listening device. Also known as The Great Seal Bug, because it was a replica of the Great Seal of the US. On 4 August 1945, it was presented to US Ambassador Averell Harriman as a gesture of friendship between the two Allies during WWII, the US and Russia. It was hung in the library of the Ambassador's residence, the Spaso House in Moscow. The Great Seal Bug hung on the library wall for seven years until it was accidentally discovered when a radio operator was monitoring Russian radio traffic. When the Russians knew that an important meeting was taking place at the Residency, they parked a van across the street and listened. The bug was activated by the Russians beaming a radio beam toward the Residency and the bug would then transmit the sounds (voices) from the room. It only worked when activated. Once the bug had been discovered on 10 September 1952, it was difficult to determine how it worked. Many US agencies including the FBI, CIA were tasked with discovering how it work and develop counter measures. The US White House was swept for bugs on 12 February 1953. The British were also informed of the bug and asked to work on counter measures. Although discovered by the US in 1952, it was kept secret until the 1960 when it was shown to the world during the U2 incident. The Russians had shot down a US U2 aircraft piloted by Francis Gary Powers and accused the US of spying on the Russians. The US delegation to the UN showed the Great Seal Bug at a General assembly session showing that the Russians had been spying on the US since 1945. The Spaso House remains the residency of the US Ambassador to Russia and current Ambassador John J. Sullivan resides there.

During my time in the US Air Force, I worked as a Russian Linguist and Intelligence Analyst. Stationed in northern Japan, I and my fellow Airmen listened to Russian military radio traffic, translated the traffic and reported on activity to the National Security Agency (NSA). My specialty was the Russian Air Defense Command. We listened to and analyzed the traffic from the Russian radar stations along the eastern coast or Russia. We listened to the Russians tracking President Johnson's flight to Vietnam and Australia in late 1967. The flight included Air Force One, B52s and fighter support aircraft.

Of course, the Russians are still spying on the US and the US is still spying on the Russians. I remember when President Putin presented President Trump with a soccer ball in Helsinki in 2018 and many people suspected that a listening device was embedded in the soccer ball.