



True Believer: Stalin's Last American Spy

Kati Marton

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This astonishing real-life spy thriller, filled with danger, misplaced loyalties, betrayal, treachery, and pure evil, with a plot twist worthy of John le Carré, is relevant today as a tale of fanaticism and the lengths it takes us to.

True Believer reveals the life of Noel Field, an American who betrayed his country and crushed his family. Field, once a well-meaning and privileged American, spied for Stalin during the 1930s and '40s. Then, a pawn in Stalin's sinister master strategy, Field was kidnapped and tortured by the KGB and forced to testify against his own Communist comrades.

How does an Ivy League-educated, US State Department employee, deeply rooted in American culture and history, become a hardcore Stalinist? The 1930s, when Noel Field joined the secret underground of the International Communist Movement, were a time of national collapse: ten million Americans unemployed, rampant racism, retreat from the world just as fascism was gaining ground, and Washington—pre FDR—parched of fresh ideas. Communism promised the righting of social and political wrongs and many in Field's generation were seduced by its siren song. Few, however, went as far as Noel Field in betraying their own country.

With a reporter's eye for detail, and a historian's grasp of the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, Kati Marton captures Field's riveting quest for a life of meaning that went horribly wrong. *True Believer* is supported by unprecedented access to Field family correspondence, Soviet Secret Police records, and reporting on key players from Alger Hiss, CIA Director Allen Dulles, and World War II spy master, "Wild Bill" Donovan—to the most sinister of all: Josef Stalin. A story of another time, this is a tale relevant for all times.

True Believer: Stalin's Last American Spy Details

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From Reader Review True Believer: Stalin's Last American Spy for online ebook

Jim Cullison says

A chilling masterpiece. Utterly riveting, instructive, and occasionally inspiring, this book presents the amazing true story of a mild-mannered fanatic who sacrificed himself and his family on the altar of Stalinistic cultism. It is a very quick and gripping read that practically screams out to be made into a movie.

Paul says

Students of 20th century American history, and particularly the Cold War, are likely to be familiar with Alger Hiss, one of the highest ranking Soviet spies to betray his native United States, but few are likely to know as much of Noel Field.

Like Hiss, Field worked as a Soviet agent for decades, but where Hiss denied his guilt until his death, Field owned his allegiance to the Soviet Union, even after he was kidnapped on the streets of Budapest, held in solitary confinement - with his wife in another cell down the corridor - and tortured for several years as part of Stalin's post-war effort to consolidate power. He remained a true believer, a tragic idealist who renounced his country, but who appeared confused that his extended family would disapprove of his actions. Field's blindness to the evils of Stalin resulted in the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands of people.

Author Kati Morton is of Hungarian descent, and her parents were tortured by the same man who held Field and his wife before defecting to the West. But where her parents were dissident journalists whose views were confirmed by their treatment in prison, Noel Field blamed himself rather than the perpetrators for the misery inflicted upon himself and his wife.

"True Believer: Stalin's Last American Spy" is an enlightening view into the early days of international communism and the influence it had on certain parts of American society. It is also a character study of a man who truly wanted to do good things in the world, but who convinced himself that he should overlook the evil of the men he served in order to do so.

Esil says

The True Believer tells what should be an interesting story, but it made for mostly quite a dull read. The book is about Noel Field, an American recruited as a spy for the Soviet Union -- who ended up living his later years in communist Hungary. Marton depicts Field as hapless and naive, and blindly dedicated to Stalin. The first two thirds of the book deal with Field's background and activities in the US and Western Europe. The last third focuses on his arrest in Eastern Europe, the horrendous torture he suffered at the hands of the Kremlin and his ultimate dedication to the regime that treated him so badly. For the most part, the book reads a bit too much as a judgmental recitation of events with little attempt to try to understand Field and what may have motivated him and other spies at that time. Field never came together as a three dimensional person. The last third dealing with Fields' arrest, incarceration and ultimate decision to stay in Hungary was interesting enough to bump this one up to 3 stars, but I must admit that I did a fair bit of skimming

throughout. Others more familiar with some of the people and events described might enjoy this book more than I did, but I generally didn't really feel engaged. Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Fran Severn says

Interesting insight into the motivation and operation of the people who betray their country, in this case for idealistic reasons.

Robert LoCicero says

A really fine work by this talented author. In this volume Ms Marton relates the story of a real, honest to goodness American who heart and soul became a Soviet spy and devotee of Soviet dictator Stalin. Noel Fields was among many Americans who during the turbulent 1930s (and late 1920s) became enraptured with Communism, Soviet style. As a bulwark against Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany many thought the fight was worth it and some, like Fields and fellow spy Alger Hiss, participated in or led spy groups for the Soviet Union within the government agencies of the United States. Fields was an operative within the State Department and later functioned with a non-profit aid agency with religious affiliations that aided refugees and displaced persons in Spain during the turmoil of the Spanish Civil War. Fields was such a firm Communist worker that he really only aided fellow Communists in need of help during that civil war. Eventually he and members of his family, some innocent like his stepdaughter Erica or brother Hermann, but others complicit like his spouse Herta, were caught up in the paranoia of the Stalinist era in which thousands were murdered or imprisoned. Fields allegiance to Communism did not prevent him from imprisonment and torture which damaged his physical body and but seemed to leave his mind devoid of reality testing. This is a very interesting story filled with fantastic characters from that time. It also serves as a lesson for modern times in that the current crop of Communist agitators and their Liberal/Progressive apologists are being sold a bogus bill of goods which has a long history of murder, deceit and treason behind it. They must beware of the pernicious effects that that cursed Communist ideology will have on any right-thinking person.

Mary says

Marton tells the story of Noel Field, a minor US State Department official who spied for the Soviets during the 1930s and went on to support Communist causes while working for NGOs in Europe in the 1940s. Marton provides Noel's back story and his ideological reasons for becoming a Communist, and speculates why, after his arrest in 1949 and torture for five years by the very side he was serving, he remained a staunch Stalinist defender pretty much until his death in 1970.

Marton also touches on other spies such as Alger Hiss, and relates the fates of Field's wife, brother, and foster daughter, all of whom also experienced arrest, imprisonment, and terrible hardships at the hands of Soviet / satellite jailers. Finally, there is Marton's own family story - her Hungarian parents were AP reporters during the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and her father ended up imprisoned in the same cell that previously held Noel Field.

I enjoyed this history. It's a tale of humanity - people with stellar intentions who justify murder and other

horrible acts because, hey, it's their side. Still, most American communists couldn't stomach Stalin's purges and caught on that Communism wasn't the path to equality or prosperity, so they dropped out, only to be harassed by McCarthy and Nixon. But the light bulb never went on for Noel Field, and that is what is so fascinating about his story.

ÍSmàil Æl Fådilí says

i want to read the book i find the title attractive and i want to have same information about america

Amy Yingling says

In all my readings on the topic of Russia particularly when it was the USSR I've never came across the name of Noel Fields. Fields, an American, who held many jobs within our government, specifically with the State Department, was actual a Communist spy. Though some of the content was a little dry I still really enjoyed this look into the life of Noel Fields and his undying support and devotion to the communist ideal, or at least the ideals that Fields felt the Soviets had. A true believer of the cause it is amazing how even his own imprisonment and torture, along with several of his family members, never swayed his opinion of the righteousness of Stalinism.

Margaret Sankey says

Marton pounds way too hard on the "AND THIS IS HOW ISIS RECRUITS" aspect of this story, which is otherwise a meticulous and reconstruction of the career of Noel Field--American, Quaker, Ivy League State Department, League of Nations and Humanitarian employee who, disillusioned by the crushing of the Bonus Army and the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, allowed himself to be recruited as a Soviet spy. Of course, with Stalin rather than Trotsky at the wheel, all the internationalist Bolsheviks Field knew began to be murdered, but he chugged along, actually doing good work in the refugee camps of the Spanish Civil War and Vichy France, although patently favoring Communists. His spy information wasn't ever worth much, but he obeyed orders, and was exposed in the Chambers/Hiss investigation, whereupon he fled to Prague. There, in the way that masters always treat their spies, he and his wife were arrested and used to testify against hundreds of people Field had met in the 1930s and who Stalin now wanted out of their positions in the Hungarian, Czech and East German governments so they could be replaced with Moscow-trained ex-pats. This wave of show trial terror extended to people his brother (not a spy or a Communist) had helped escape the Holocaust in Poland, and the arrest this brother (executed, too) and of his foster daughter, married to an American GI, kidnapped in East Berlin and sent to an Arctic labor camp. Marton's parents interview Field and his wife in the chaos of 1956 in Budapest, and their transcripts give a bizarre immediacy to the story--even when confronted directly with the actions of the Soviets, Field just kept clinging. This is useful insight into the recruitment and management of a long-term spy, although not of the transfer ability to radical Islam Marton would like.

Diane S ? says

2.5 Noel was taken to battlefields as a young boy and this so seriously effected him that he idealistically came to believe that there could be a less cruel and more fair world. He became convinced that Communism was the answer, especially since so many were disillusioned with the United States government that time. Recruited he became a Soviet spy, though never a very good one, nor was the information he imparted ever very important. Eventually turned on by Stalin, he was treated horribly and cruelly, yet he still remained naïvely idealistic.

Rough read, sometimes this read like a text book, bogged down in boring details. Was originally interested because I was curious about those who become spies for other countries. Author also tried a little too hard trying to tie Noel's recruitment into how ISIS recruits today. Unfortunate this proved a disappointing read.

ARC from Netgalley.

Don LaFountaine says

I won this book via a Goodreads giveaway.

This was an interesting book about Noel Field who was an American spy for Stalin and felt that the party could do no wrong.

As Noel Field was growing up, he was living in Zurich. His Harvard trained father had set up a research institute there. As a Quaker, Noel's family was decidedly pacifist. One of the most profound influences in Noel's life was being taken to one of the battlefields of World War I to see destruction that mankind was capable of. This left him with a strong feeling that his life was destined to work towards peace for the world. Shortly thereafter, at the young age of 14, he met Allen W. Dulles. Dulles, who was covertly working behind the lines and used Noel's father as a means to get information. Dulles asked what he was planning to do with his life, he replied "to bring peace to the world".

Field's father passed away in 1921, leaving a gaping hole in the family as well as with Noel. No longer having his father's guidance, he tried to find his own way in the world. First stop, America, where he went to Harvard and graduated in 2 years. From there he worked at the State Department, and converted to communism. Though outsiders, coworkers, and even "friends" thought he was ideal hardworking American, they were not at all aware that he was hardworking for the communist underground, passing along secrets and items of interest to others he was working for.

After 10 years in the State Department, Field left Washington for Geneva to the Disarmament Section of the Palace of Nations. Though not a lot happened there, he continued to pass information to his controller. He also became more involved in the communist party, willing to follow orders and plot the murder of a person that was a "traitor" because Moscow said so. Though he did not have to do anything before this person was killed, he showed his blind loyalty to Stalin and the Party, who could do no wrong.

From there he and his wife went to Spain, while the country was in the middle of a revolution, where Franco was working to take power. Here Field seemed to relish the experience because he was helping others. (He and his wife even ended up with an "adopted daughter" out of it, though it was certainly a strained

relationship at the beginning.) This would be a prelude to what they would do during World War II with the USC. During World War II, they saved many refugees using the USC and American money, but only those people who were communist. With the Field's help, many communist people were saved, protected, and guided towards countries where after the war they would be able to bring about the communist utopia.

However by this time, the Red Scare was starting the United States, and though the words and documents of accused members, Noel Field was outed and he was unable to come back to America. Thinking he was safe in Prague, he was kidnapped. Later on, his wife, brother, and "adopted daughter" were kidnapped too. Years of torture followed, with the Noel and his wife not at all blaming Stalin or the Party. After Noel's brother and "adopted daughter" were freed, they found the United States to be unfriendly towards them, thinking that they were part of a great Communist threat. For the rest of their lives, Noel and Herta Field worked to be accepted as Communists from the Soviet Union.

This was an interesting book that describes the life of a committed American Communist that went to whatever depths it took to follow his belief. I felt the story comes across a little scattered, but overall it was not too difficult to follow. The author seems to write with a decidedly liberal slant, (especially in the beginning of the book) and to that end I don't think the book is as "objective" as the jacket cover implies. I think fans of American history, political science, and people who enjoy spy stories will like this book.

Carlos says

Very dry book, recommend it only if you truly interested in the Cold War era and its ramifications all through out Easter Europe. The subject is a lower American bureaucrat who was enticed early on by the Utopia that was communism in the early 1930's , it was a faith that would prove to be his undoing both for him and his family and many other people whose only crime was to be part of the Stalinist purges that took place in the early 1950's . There are accounts of other spies related to the subject of the book but their mention is small and doesn't add much to the story . Interesting enough but not a fun one.

Bill says

There was a great story hidden in a poorly written book. The saga of Noel Field is incredible --- among other things, it shows that people can convince themselves that night is day and day is night.

The quick story: While employed at the U.S. Department of State in the 1930s, Field acted as a Soviet spy. During World War II, he worked in France and Switzerland to support Jewish communist and anti-fascist refugees. During this time, he also had contacts with the U.S. intelligence service OSS. Arrested in Prague in 1949 and imprisoned in Hungary, he served as the pretext for show trials of communist functionaries in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary, when it was claimed that he had served as their American spymaster. The purpose of the show trials was to replace local Communist Party members with others more aligned with Moscow. After his release in 1954, he stayed in Budapest and remained a convinced communist.

Why did he remain a true believer? It boggles the mind.

The more amazing story is about his adopted daughter, Erica Wallach, who ended up in Siberia....and then

made it back to Warrenton, Virginia. Truth stranger than fiction!

Ruth says

interesting look at a Stalinist fanatic

Joanne says

First - I won this book recently in a giveaway. Which has turned out to be a real treat. In case you're not familiar with the what the book is about Kati Marton has taken considerable time to follow the rise and fall of Noel Field. Field was an idealist who decided that communism was the best way to go. Marton very carefully lays out the history of the man, what led him into becoming a spy for the Russians and the ultimate outcome. She has a very smooth style and the book reads very nicely. I found it hard to put down and I'm not one for espionage stories - true or fiction. The copy I got didn't have an index or a "About the author" section but I'm ok with that - it was an advance copy. What was included - and I appreciated - was an extensive endnote section and bibliography. The book is clear, well written and fascinating. Definitely check this one out - whether or not you would normally read espionage books. I'm glad I got it. Highly recommended.
