

T O M H A N K S

A STEVEN SPIELBERG FILM
**BRIDGE
OF SPIES**

IN THE SHADOW OF WAR,
ONE MAN SHOWED THE WORLD
WHAT WE STAND FOR.

JOURNEYS IN FILM

educating for global understanding



DREAMWORKS PICTURES FOX 2000 PICTURES AND RELIANCE ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT
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AN AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT/MARC PLATT PRODUCTION A STEVEN SPIELBERG FILM TOM HANKS "BRIDGE OF SPIES" MARK RYLANCE AMY RYAN AND ALAN ALDA CASTING BY ELLEN LEWIS
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JOURNEYS IN FILM: BRIDGE OF SPIES

Table of Contents

Click the Chapter heading to be taken to that page

The Cold War	4
The U-2 Program	5
Jim Donovan, Attorney-at-Law	6
The Case of Rudolf Abel Going to Berlin	7
Implications for Today	10
Additional Resources	11



The Cold War

As World War II in Europe drew to a close, British, French, and U.S. forces were racing eastward and Soviet troops were racing to the west, each side trying to gain the maximum territory from the retreating German Army. When the dust settled, the U.S.S.R. controlled most of Eastern Europe, including the eastern part of Germany.

The detonation of two U.S. atomic bombs in Japan a few months later led to an intense effort by the U.S.S.R. to develop its own nuclear weapon. Helped by information obtained from sympathizers in the United States, the Soviets detonated their own bomb in 1949. Having come to a stalemate in weaponry, the communist and democratic nations would conduct their rivalry through a Cold War, in which political tensions and military rivalry were intense but did not erupt into open warfare between the United States and the U.S.S.R.

During this period, the U.S. Congress made headlines through the anti-communist activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the wild accusations of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Ordinary Americans became convinced that they were threatened not only by atomic and space-based weaponry, but also by communists within their own government.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were the United States and the Soviet Union so suspicious of one another? What events had caused their antipathy even before World War II?
2. Research the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Was it a fair trial? What were the implications of the Rosenberg case for the trial of Rudolf Abel?

Timeline of events

AUGUST 29, 1949 — Soviet Union detonates its first atomic bomb.

OCTOBER 1, 1949 — The People's Republic of China is proclaimed.

JUNE 19, 1953 — Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed for spying for the U.S.S.R.

JUNE 21, 1957 — Rudolf Abel is arrested as a Soviet spy.

OCTOBER 4, 1957 — U.S.S.R. launches the first satellite, Sputnik I, touching off the "space race."

OCTOBER 25, 1957 — Abel is convicted of espionage and sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment.

3. What evidence is there in *Bridge of Spies* that the events of the Cold War period were having an impact on the U.S. judicial system? On Jim Donovan's family?
4. Find out more about the actions of HUAC and Senator McCarthy, to which Rudolf Abel refers in his conversation with Donovan about art. Why does Abel say that American artists live in fear? How did the actions of Congress affect the arts?
5. Watch the videos [Duck and Cover](#) (1951) (Bert the Turtle Civil Defense Film) and [How to Protect Yourself from Nuclear Fallout and Survive an Atomic Attack](#) on YouTube. How accurate are they? What effect would such videos have on the children and adults watching them?

The U-2 Program

The U-2 spy plane is a technological marvel that pushes the extreme limits of powered flight; it can fly for more than 10 hours with a range of 7,000 miles, farther than most commercial airliners, and can reach altitudes of 70,000 feet. Despite being fragile and difficult to maneuver, it has proved valuable from its early flights over the Soviet Union, to the modern conflict in Afghanistan. Although now equipped with a computerized instrument panel and digital photography equipment, the U-2 will soon be replaced by drones.



Francis Gary Powers

U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers (1929–1977) left the Air Force and joined the CIA’s U-2 pilots. After his U-2 was shot down and he was captured in 1960—and finally released—he was at first criticized for not destroying his plane and for not committing suicide.

After being cleared, he worked as a test pilot and then as a helicopter pilot for a television station until his death in an accident.

At first the United States claimed that a weather plane had crashed, but eventually President Dwight Eisenhower acknowledged the existence of spy flights. However, instead of apologizing as the Soviets demanded, he stated that such flights were necessary and would continue. In protest, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev then refused to attend a Paris summit meeting that had been convened to discuss the situation in divided Germany, the possibility of an arms control treaty, and a detente in relations between the U.S.S.R. and the United States.

Timeline of events

JULY 4, 1956 — A U-2 flies over the U.S.S.R. for the first time.

MAY 1, 1960 — Francis Gary Powers is shot down over the U.S.S.R.

AUGUST 17, 1960 — Powers is convicted of espionage and sentenced to three years in prison and seven at hard labor.

FEBRUARY 1962 — Powers is released in exchange for Rudolf Abel.

Discussion Questions

1. What special preparations and precautions were taken by pilots to prepare for a U-2 flight? Judging from the events portrayed in the film, were they adequate?
2. Why were U-2 pilots required to carry a coin with a toxin embedded in its grooves that ? Should the U.S. government have required such an extreme measure?
3. President Eisenhower had suggested an “Open Skies” policy, under which both Soviet and U.S. planes could make overflights to inspect each other’s nuclear weapons facilities. Would such a plan have worked?
4. Francis Gary Powers was awarded the Prisoner of War Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the National Defense Service Medal, the CIA’s Director’s Medal for extreme fidelity and extraordinary courage in the line of duty, and the Silver Star, all of them posthumously. Why were these awards not presented in his lifetime? Should they have been?

Jim Donovan, Attorney-at-Law

After his graduation from Harvard Law School, James B. Donovan (1916–1970) served as a commander in the Navy and associate prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals. Subsequently, he practiced insurance law as a partner at Watters and Donovan in New York. For four and a half years he did his best to defend Soviet spy Rudolf Abel and to appeal Abel’s conviction despite harsh public censure as a “Commie lover.” Unlike the Rosenbergs, Abel was sentenced to prison rather than execution, thanks largely to Donovan’s prescient argument that Abel might be useful in a future spy exchange. Donovan had expected to work pro bono, but was awarded a \$10,000 fee that he donated to Harvard, Columbia, and Fordham law schools.

In 1962, Donovan was called on to travel to East Berlin at great personal risk in order to arrange the exchange of Francis Gary Powers for Rudolf Abel. Through his courage and negotiating skills he was also able to bring home a young Yale graduate student, Frederic Pryor.

In the same year, he acceded to the request of Cuban families to negotiate with Castro for the release of Bay of Pigs survivors. Through several visits with Fidel Castro, including during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he managed to win the freedom of 1,163 survivors, nearly 5,000 of their relatives, and 35 Americans who were being held on other charges.

Discussion Questions

1. What qualities of Jim Donovan made him an excellent negotiator in stressful situations? Which scenes in the film show these qualities vividly?

Timeline of events

1957 — Jim Donovan defends Rudolf Abel on espionage charges, loses the case, and continues with an appeal.

FEBRUARY 1962 — Donovan negotiates the release of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers in exchange for Abel.

JUNE 1962 — Donovan negotiates the release of survivors of the Bay of Pigs invasion and others being held by Cuba.

2. How did Donovan’s choices affect his family? What was their reaction? How did his choices affect his legal career and his relationship with his law firm? What personal risks to his safety did he endure? What were his motivations for these difficult choices?



James B. Donovan (1962)

3. Why does Abel say that Donovan reminds him of a man he knew during the Russian Civil War, the one the partisans referred to as *Stoikey Muzhik* (Standing Man)? Is this an apt comparison?

4. From the icy reception Powers gets from officials on the plane, he realizes that he cannot expect a warm welcome upon his return to the United States. Donovan tells him, “It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what people think. You know what you did.” Do you agree with this statement? Why, or why not?

Video clips for this section are listed on page 11.

The Bill of Rights

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Amendment VI

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

Mug shots of Rudolf Ivanovich Abel



The Case of Rudolf Abel

On June 21, 1957, FBI agents pushed their way into Rudolf Abel's hotel room and questioned him for 20 minutes; they threatened that if he did not cooperate, he would be arrested. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents waiting outside the door then entered and arrested him, searched him and his room, and seized several items of evidence. After Abel was removed, FBI agents received permission from the hotel manager to conduct a search, finding a hollowed-out pencil containing microfilm and a cipher pad in a wastebasket. Neither the FBI nor INS had a warrant from a judge for either the search or the arrest. The FBI asked the INS to make the arrest feeling that they themselves could not. Were it not for the FBI request, Abel would not have been arrested.

Following his arrest, Abel was secretly put on a plane and taken to a federal detention center in Texas, where he was questioned for long periods without a lawyer in the hope of making him a double agent. Although allowed limited legal counsel for a few hours for a deportation hearing, he was without a lawyer during the espionage questioning. After more than two months of interrogation and 48 days in solitary confinement, he was returned to New York and charged with espionage, a capital crime.

Jim Donovan raised numerous objections about procedure during the trial. After Abel's conviction, Donovan's appeals eventually reached the Supreme Court. He raised a number of issues: the warrantless search; the use of the INS to arrest Abel for one purpose at the prompting of the FBI agents who had a different purpose; the interrogations without benefit of counsel; and the government's failure to produce documents that would have helped the defense. In a narrow 5–4 decision, the Supreme Court voted to uphold the conviction. Donovan succeeded only in saving Abel from execution.

Discussion Questions

1. Jim Donovan was not the first American lawyer to defend an unpopular client in a climate of fear and outrage. Research the story of John Adams's defense of the British soldiers who were indicted in the Boston Massacre in 1770. What parallels do you find with the Abel case?
2. Explain Amendments IV, V, and VI in your own words. Which of these amendments seem most relevant to the Abel case? Do you agree with Jim Donovan that several of these fundamental rights were violated in Abel's case?
3. The case of *Jencks v. United States* was decided in 1957, just a few months before Abel's trial. The ruling of the Supreme Court was that the case must be dismissed if prosecutors refuse to turn over to the defendant relevant statements made by government witnesses on the subject matter of their testimony at trial. That decision led to the Jencks Act, which was invoked by Donovan at trial. However, the trial court denied Donovan's motion to review the full notes from 75 FBI interviews with the prosecution's chief witness, Abel's assistant. Although Donovan received only a fraction of the notes, he found at least one clear contradiction between the testimony given to the FBI by the witness and the testimony he gave in court. Should the defense have access to evidence, even if disclosure of that evidence to the defendant could compromise national security?
4. Donovan objected to leading questions from prosecutors to government witnesses and to other prosecutorial



tactics, but the trial judge repeatedly declared that the jury could decide the truth. The jury made its decision to convict Abel after only three and a half hours of deliberation. Have you ever served on a jury? If so, has your experience strengthened your belief in the jury system or undermined it? If not, talk to others who have served on juries and report on their experience.

5. Donovan moved to suppress physical evidence seized from the hotel room. He argued that the government could either have the warrantless search for counter-intelligence purposes to turn Abel into a double agent, or it could prosecute him for espionage; it could not have it both ways. Do you agree that using the INS was an unacceptable means of circumventing the Fourth Amendment?
6. Is it possible that the presumably impartial jurors were influenced by the fact that Sputnik was launched two weeks before the trial opened?

Video clips for this section are listed on page 11.

Going to Berlin

Since the occupation of Germany by the Allied Powers at the end of World War II, and its division into four sectors (British, French, American, and Soviet), Berlin had been a particular issue of contention. West Berlin was an island inside Soviet-controlled East German territory. In an effort to gain complete control, the Soviets blockaded the city, refusing to allow supplies to reach its 2.5 million inhabitants. Rather than risk another war, the West responded with an airlift, providing food, medicines, gasoline, and other necessities in almost 300,000 flights. The Soviets finally lifted the blockade in May 1949.

West Germany was far more prosperous than East Germany, which had been stripped of much of its manufacturing capacity by the Soviets at the end of the war. Consequently, many East Germans tried to leave to go to the West through Berlin, an embarrassment to the Communist nations. East Germany, backed by the Soviets, built a wall more than a hundred miles long around West Berlin to prevent anyone from East Germany escaping to West Berlin.

Watchtowers studied the wall, and anyone trying to get

into West Berlin risked imprisonment or death. The wall served as a menacing symbol of the Cold War.

Denounced by presidents from John Kennedy (“*Ich bin ein Berliner*”) to Ronald Reagan (“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”), the wall was demolished in 1989 after protests by the East German people. Its removal was a major step toward the reunification of Germany.



Timeline of events

MARCH 1946 — Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech acknowledges the division of Germany.

1948–49 — The Soviets blockade West Berlin and the West responds with the Berlin Airlift.

1949 — The Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic are created.

1958–1961 — Berlin Crisis occurs when Nikita Khrushchev issues ultimatums about West Berlin.

AUGUST 31, 1961 — East German workers begin building wall around Berlin.

NOVEMBER 1989 — East Germany opens the border with the West in response to popular pressure.

OCTOBER 3, 1990 — Germany is reunited.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Soviets use the fiction of Abel’s wife as a way to open negotiations?
2. Why was the trip to Berlin a dangerous assignment for Jim Donovan? What techniques and incidents did the filmmakers use to enhance the sense of danger? How did they create suspense when most viewers were aware of what the outcome would be?
3. Who was Frederic Pryor? Why was he imprisoned by the East Germans? Why did Jim Donovan put the Powers–Abel exchange at risk in order to include Pryor in the “package”? Do you agree with Donovan’s decision?
4. While waiting on the bridge, Donovan states to Hoffman, “Look, he [Pryor] matters too. Every person matters.” In matters of espionage and counterintelligence, is this principle enforceable? Should it be?

Implications for Today

1. Today the United States has many residents who are not U.S. citizens. Some are legal residents, some are undocumented. Should the Bill of Rights apply to foreign nationals living in the United States?

2. There have been numerous cases of espionage in the United States in recent years. Aldrich Ames, Jonathan Jay Pollard, Robert Hanssen, and Wen Ho Lee are probably the

best known, but there are many others. Investigate one or more cases, determining what kinds of information was involved, who was responsible for the investigation, how the accused were uncovered and apprehended, and how the cases were resolved. How does treatment of those arrested compare with that accorded Rudolf Abel?

3. What does the U.S. “spy program” look like today? What agencies are involved? What restrictions do they have on their activities? Who are their targets: Religious extremists? Homegrown terrorists? Others?



4. How do we defend the Bill of Rights today? Find out about the mission and activities of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Freedom Forum, the Southern Poverty Law Center, People for the American Way, and other watchdog organizations. What issues seem to be of greatest concern today? Why?

5. Surveillance and espionage are now far more high tech than during the 1960s. Research the current status of contemporary controversies, such as the debate over Edward Snowden and the National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance program. What is your stand on these issues? Why?

Additional Resources

Books:

Bridge of Spies, by Giles Whittell

Operation Overflight, by Francis Gary Powers

Strangers on a Bridge: The Case of Colonel Abel and Francis Gary Powers, by James Donovan

Mayday: Eisenhower, Khrushchev, and the U-2 Affair, by Michael Beschloss

Internet resources:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>
Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, presenting the official documentary record relating to foreign policy

<https://www.aclu.org/>
American Civil Liberties Union, an organization defending constitutional rights

<http://ccrjustice.org/>
Center for Constitutional Rights, doing litigation and advocacy on a range of civil and human rights issues

<http://www.hrw.org/>
Human Rights Watch, engaged in fact-finding and advocacy to promote policies supporting global human rights

<http://www.americanbar.org/aba.html>

American Bar Association, with goals of eliminating bias and enhancing diversity in the justice system and advancing the rule of law

http://jnslp.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/09_Kahn.pdf
“The Case of Colonel Abel” by Jeffrey Kahn in the *Journal of National Security Law & Policy*. An analysis of what we can learn from the Abel case to apply to contemporary judicial proceedings against accused terrorists.

This discussion guide for the film *Bridge of Spies* was written by Eileen Mattingly of Journeys in Film.

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JAMES B. DONOVAN, P. 6:
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