

## **WOLFGANG VOGEL**

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WOLFGANG VOGEL lurked in and out of the shadows of Cold War Germany. He was known to many prominent figures but not to the general public. As personal emissary of the East German leader Erich Honecker, he helped to facilitate East-West prisoner exchanges and the re-location of thousands of East Germans to the West. He was not, however, a philanthropist. His services did not come cheap, and he became a wealthy man through his Cold War exploits.

Vogel was born in 1925 in the village of Wilhelmsthal, Silesia, then in eastern Germany, the son of a Catholic schoolteacher. In 1944 he did his compulsory Arbeitsdienst (labour service) before serving, from March 1944, in the Luftwaffe. When Silesia became Polish territory in 1945, the Vogels joined the millions of others who, forced from their homes, had to relocate west of the de facto frontier on the Oder-Neisse line.

The family settled in the university town of Jena, part of the Soviet Zone of German, which was to become the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Vogel started his law studies in Jena before transferring to Leipzig University, where he graduated in 1948. Serving his legal apprenticeship to a senior judge, Rudolf Reinartz, in Waldheim, he moved with his boss to the East German Justice Ministry in 1952. With rigorous Stalinist norms being applied, justice was in short supply.

From 1954 Vogel worked as a lawyer in East Berlin, gaining the right to work in West Berlin as well, in 1957. By that time, he was known to the Stasi, the East German state security service, as "Eva" and "Georg". He was their man, an Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter or "unofficial collaborator". Reinartz had deserted to the West after the anti-Communist uprising of June 1953 and urged Vogel

to join him, but the Stasi knew of this and pressured him to work for them. Vogel needed little persuading. His Stasi controller, Captain (later Colonel) Heinz Volpert, saw in him someone presentable, who could act, posing as an independent lawyer, as an arbiter in Stasi dealings with West Germany.

On the morning of 10 February 1962 on the Glienicke Bridge, which connected Allied-controlled West Berlin with Soviet-controlled Potsdam, the US "spy-plane" pilot Francis Gary Powers, was exchanged for the KGB officer Rudolf Abel. Powers had been shot down flying a U-2 reconnaissance plane over the Soviet Union on 1 May 1960. Abel had operated as a successful spy in the United States before his 1957 arrest.

At the same moment, at Berlin's Checkpoint Charlie, the East Germans released another client of Vogel's, an American PhD student, and later professor of economics, Frederic L. Pryor. Arrested in August 1961 on visit to East Berlin, Pryor had been held without charge.

Vogel had apparently brought off the first East-West exchange of prisoners. Clearly he was a front for far bigger Soviet players, but the deal had taken him near the top in the world of secret diplomacy. According to General Markus Wolf, head of the GDR's foreign espionage, Vogel reported directly to the long-serving head of the Stasi, General Erich Mielke.

Another of Vogel's best-known cases was in 1986 when the United States sought the freedom of the imprisoned Soviet dissident Anatoly Shcharansky (later, as Natan Sharansky, a politician in Israel). And earlier, in 1981, Vogel was waiting in the dark at the border for the secret release of Gnter Guillaume, the East German spy whose exposure, in 1974, had brought down the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. Altogether, with Vogel's help, 150 spies from 23 countries were repatriated.

Heinz Volpert played a decisive role in planning a fruitful export for the cash-strapped GDR. This was the expulsion of political prisoners to West Germany in exchange for cash. Rather than holding thousands of prisoners in overcrowded jails and getting unfavourable publicity for so doing, it was better to be rid of them and earn vital foreign currency in exchange. Vogel was seen as the appropriate man to carry out this mission, at first using the Evangelical Church as a go-between in 1962. From 1964 to 1989 he "sold" 33,755 prisoners to West Germany. Their value varied according to their profession, their "crime" and how well they were known in the West.

For his task, Vogel stepped forth as Honecker's official representative for humanitarian questions. In this role he also negotiated family reunifications for 215,019 people. These were family members who had been left behind when the Berlin Wall was erected in August 1961, or they were relatives of escapees or of those who had defected on business trips to the West.

Their freedom was bought by the West German government under Vogel's auspices. In this capacity Vogel got to know the West German Chancellors Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl and other top politicians including the Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Bavarian leader Franz Josef Strauss, as well as Rainer Barzel, Erich Mende and Herbert Wehner who, as Ministers for Inter-German Affairs, played a major role in the early Freikauf (freedom-buying) of political prisoners.

Remarkably, when Vogel was accused after re-unification of exploiting his position for personal gain, Schmidt and Genscher spoke up for him. Vogel's trial lasted more than a year and in January 1996 he was found guilty of perjury, blackmail and falsifying documents, and given a two-year suspended sentence and fined DM92,000 ([pounds sterling]41,000). He was later acquitted on appeal.

In April 1946 Vogel had married Eva Anlauf, a kindergarten teacher. When they divorced in 1966 she moved, with their two children, to the West. In 1974 Vogel married a West German, Helga Fritsch, who moved to the GDR and worked as his secretary. After German re-unification in 1990, they lived in some style, in Schliersee in Bavaria.

Wolfgang Heinrich Vogel, lawyer: born Wilhelmsthal, Germany 30 October 1925; married 1946 Eva Anlauf (one son, one daughter; marriage dissolved 1966), 1974 Helga Fritsch; died Schliersee, Germany 21 August 2008.

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