

'Atom spy' Ethel Rosenberg's conviction in new doubt after testimony released

- David Greenglass's 1950 grand jury account does not implicate sister
- Brother changed story before trial that led to Rosenbergs' execution

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Newly released grand jury testimony could upend the notion that Ethel Rosenberg was guilty of espionage.

Ethel and her husband Julius Rosenberg were convicted in the most sensational atomic spying case of the cold war in 1951. They were convicted for conspiring to steal secrets about the atomic bomb for the Soviet Union, and were executed in 1953 at New York's Sing Sing prison.

David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg's brother and a key witness in the case against the Rosenbergs, implicated his sister in the conspiracy just 10 days before the trial. Decades later, Greenglass told reporters that he lied on the stand to protect his wife Ruth. Greenglass died in 2014.

Greenglass was indicted as a co-conspirator and testified for the government that he had given the Rosenbergs research data obtained through his wartime job as an army machinist at Los Alamos, New Mexico, headquarters of the top-secret Manhattan project to build the atomic bomb.

He told of seeing Ethel Rosenberg transcribing the information on a portable typewriter at the Rosenbergs' New York apartment in 1945 - information that proved crucial in convicting Ethel along with her husband.

But in newly released transcripts of the grand jury testimony given in 1950 - more than six months before he implicated his sister - David Greenglass speaks at length about trading information with his wife Ruth and Julius Rosenberg, but twice insists in the testimony that he has never spoken with Ethel about the matter.

While recounting the Rosenbergs' involvement with the Communist party, Greenglass said Julius had told him he was given a silver Omega watch by Russian agents, which came with additional citations and commendations. But when asked if Ethel ever made a reference to citations or commendations, Greenglass said: "My sister has never spoken to me about this subject."

Later, Greenglass was asked about a conversation between himself and Julius Rosenberg about Greenglass staying in the army to pass on more information to Rosenberg. When asked if Ethel had also tried to persuade him, Greenglass said: "I said before, and say it again, honestly, this is a fact: I never spoke to my sister about this at all."

Also in the testimony, Greenglass was asked whether the Rosenbergs met at a communist meeting.

"My wife tells me that. I never did find out how they met," he replied.

The National Security Archive of George Washington University released the transcripts, sealed for nearly 64 years, on Wednesday. Judge Alvin K Hellerstein ordered on 19 May that the testimony be released, citing its historical significance.

Although she was never indicted, Ruth Greenglass may have played the role that Ethel Rosenberg was accused of, typing notes for Julius Rosenberg to send to the Russians.

The Rosenbergs maintained their innocence throughout multiple appeals against their death sentence. Their case incited a national and international debate, and speculation about Ethel Rosenberg's innocence continues, although Hellerstein noted that Julius was spying for the Russians, based on intercepted cables.

"There was never really any solid evidence that she had been involved in any part of espionage," said Ilene Philipson, author of *Ethel Rosenberg: Beyond the Myths*. "It just confirms this idea that the government was using her, imprisoning her to get at Julius Rosenberg to try and persuade him to confess."

The release of the testimony confirms what many believed to be true about Ethel Rosenberg, said Philipson. Ethel wanted mainly to please her husband and "had a sense of self as a martyr", according to Philipson.

“Her story ultimately was a very tragic one,” Philipson said.

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