

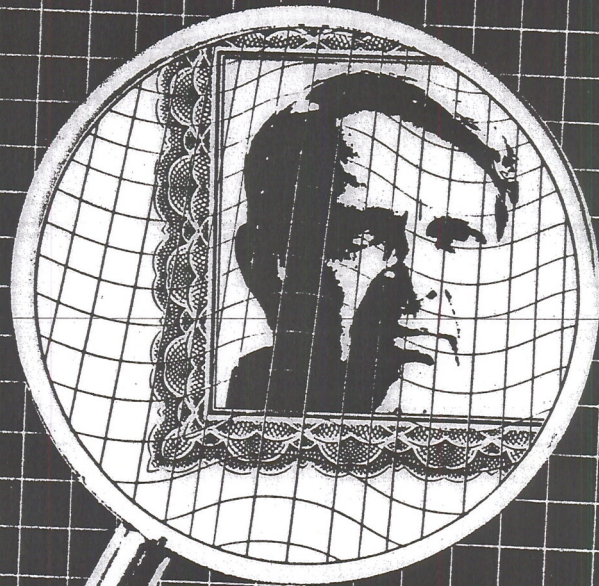
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# PORTRAIT OF A COLD WARRIOR



SECOND THOUGHTS OF  
A TOP CIA AGENT

JOSEPH B. SMITH

In any case, trying to make a Soviet intelligence officer into a CIA agent is the highest-priority objective of the Clandestine Services. No matter how many sophisticated satellites were put over the skies of the Soviet Union, without an agent who moves in the highest circles of the Kremlin we will never know when the Soviet leaders may press the button on their little black box. Where a Soviet intelligence contingent as large as the one in their embassy in Mexico City exists, the CIA station automatically must put attempting to recruit a Soviet above any other activity.

If we failed to recruit any Soviet for the vital task of finding out the intentions of the Soviet leaders while I was a member of the Mexico City station I don't think it was because we were incompetent. I think it's an almost impossible task. The KGB, the clandestine Soviet security service, functions inside the Soviet Union and abroad as the organization which makes the Soviet police state work. The Soviet Union does not divide the essential job of protecting national security, and the KGB is the responsible agency. The KGB makes possible control of speech, travel, work, education, even personal relationships, in Russia. Abroad it is the principal apparatus of Soviet espionage. There is one other organization in the espionage business in the Soviet Embassy, the GRU. The GRU is the intelligence division of the Soviet General Staff and engages primarily in collecting strategic, tactical, and technical military intelligence. Because of its role in spying on Soviet citizens, the KGB is the senior service. GRU officers are subject to KGB scrutiny if their actions are suspicious. No congressional committees investigate the Soviet intelligence services. The KGB does all the investigating that is done in the Soviet Union. It is an elite organization. Even President Nixon's White House palace guard did not enjoy the elitist positions Soviet KGB officers do.

They are as self-assured and as content with their lot in life as might be expected. They are well paid. They have good housing in a country where families still have to share apartments. They are chosen from the top graduates of Soviet universities and have the best education which the Soviet Union has to offer. As the Soviet Union has become more sophisticated, so have they. Gone are

the baggy pants, the short box-cut jackets of the 1950s. They speak fluent English and they speak fluently the language of the country where they are stationed. They know how to appreciate to the hilt the culture and comforts of these foreign countries where they serve. In Mexico they collect pre-Colombian art, buy paintings and artisan products, and visit the country's fabulous variety of interesting vacation spots. They go to Cuernavaca, Cuautla, Valle del Bravo, Puerto Valarta, Cancun, and Acapulco as often as any Americans.

We like to think the pleasures of the Western World, the freedom to travel as we please, and the other freedoms of our society, which are unknown in their country, might tempt them to want to stay and, therefore, we have a good chance to recruit them. We like to imagine KGB wives would get fed up with their role as charwomen in Soviet embassies. KGB notions of security are so strict they will not permit Soviet ambassadors to hire a local char force. KGB wives have to scrub the embassy floors and clean the offices.

We forget they enjoy both the wonderful new life-style abroad and enough exciting things to do to make the wives endure their unpleasant task, and at home they have the satisfaction of privileged positions and status symbols. Even if they were to find our world better physically or politically what we want them to do would require that they forego their newfound happiness in foreign countries and return to the Soviet Union to lead nerve-wracking double lives as CIA agents. We want a man in the Kremlin not in New York.

We aren't quite as naive as the above may sound in the methods we use when we try to recruit a Soviet, but I'm afraid we don't reflect enough on what we expect a KGB or GRU officer to give up in order to work for us.

In Mexico City we tapped the Soviet Embassy's telephones, watched who went in and out from across the street, bugged the apartments of the Soviets we were interested in, hired an army of access agents—people who come into normal and frequent contact with the Soviets, such as shopkeepers, travel agents, sports club personnel, even attractive women who catch their eye—and we made a point of meeting them ourselves. Everyone in the station carried in his wallet a list of license numbers

of all Soviet cars, in case one of their cars showed up in some odd place. We had pictures of the Soviets on our office walls so we could memorize their faces. All these efforts were directed to finding the key that would turn them into our agents or even just tempt them. Raya Kiselnikova, on her own, found a boyfriend and decided she liked the boutiques and discotheques in the Fiat Zone enough to walk out of the embassy, but nothing we tried could move the target we selected as our most likely candidate, Edward Saratov, a KGB specialist in operating against Americans who was in Mexico under cover as a representative of the Tass News Agency.

For the first time in my career, in Mexico City, I became involved in the business of trying to recruit a Soviet. I worked on Valeri Nicolaenko, a young KGB officer who had the cover rank of first secretary at the Soviet Embassy and whose covert responsibilities we did not know.

Working on the Soviets was a complete change from my past operational experience. Much had changed in the Clandestine Services by the early 1970s. Des Fitzgerald dropped dead on the tennis court of his country home in Virginia in July, 1967. By that time he had been promoted from CWH to DDP and directed all CIA's covert operations. Every moment of the cold war, every job he held, every assignment he ordered undertaken was a great adventure to Des. The greatest adventure his successor, Thomas Karamassines, could imagine was staying out of trouble. In this he was a reflection of the man who chose him for the job—Richard Helms. Helms had skillfully managed to keep out of the Bay of Pigs operation although he was Richard Bissell's deputy at the time. Rather than being swept away when Bissell was forced to leave, he replaced Bissell as DDP. Helms became the first career Clandestine Services officer to be Director of Central Intelligence.

Ironically, Helms and Karamassines, masters of evasion, were the men who led CIA into its worst misadventures and the men who had to face congressional committees to answer for MHCHAOS and talk about the \$10 million they spent trying to prevent the man the Chileans elected, Salvadore Allende, from becoming president of Chile.

The explanation is simple. They were cautious bureaucrats to whom holding onto their high positions was the most important goal in life. When the President ordered them to do something illegal or impossible, as they testified to Congress regarding MHCHAOS, in the first instance, and the plan to stage a coup in Chile, in the second, they did what the President wanted. They kept their doubts to themselves.

Caution was the byword of Soviet recruitment operations. Such operations, in Mexico and everywhere, were corporate station efforts. Each officer worked on part of the puzzle, which, when completed, was supposed to show the image of a Soviet recruitment candidate. Most of the effort was dedicated to compiling more and more information on the person chosen as a likely recruitment prospect. More and more access agents were constantly recruited for the same purpose. Hours were spent talking over the access agents' opinions of the Soviets who came into their store or with whom they played tennis. In Mexico City we had four women who worked all day long comparing and checking tapes and reports from access agents with tapes of telephone and bedroom conversations of the KGB officers we were pursuing. I have said that I think it is a terribly difficult job and I can't find fault with thoroughness. I also think, however, these activities were often a substitute for boldness and imagination which had gone out of style in the Clandestine Services by the time I got to Mexico. The effort spent on access agents and collating vast amounts of trivia on Soviet intelligence officers kept many people busy and out of trouble. If we couldn't recruit the Tass man, we could recruit the Tass man's dentist. This was almost entirely safe, whereas approaching a Soviet with the proposal he go back to Russia to penetrate the Kremlin for us risked refusal and retaliation.

We were so busy analyzing hundreds of pages of this kind of data on Edward Saratov's personal habits, we had no idea Raya Kiselnikova was about to defect. If we had, we would have tried to contact her and convince her to stay in her job in exchange for a good salary and future rewards we would hold in escrow. Raya was only a KGB secretary but so are many successful spies. Secretaries,

even Soviet ones, usually know more than their bosses about what is really going on in the office.

One night in February, 1970, we received a tip that Raya Kiselnikova had walked into a police station asking for political asylum. Mexico's policy toward granting an alien this privilege assured approval of her request. The Mexican authorities were happy to turn her over to us and forget about what happened to her. Raya was spirited off to Tequisguajapan, where we were certain the KGB security officer, charged with seeing that things like Raya's walkout didn't happen, would never think of looking for her while we planned what to do next.

She was scared and didn't want to talk. She just wanted to stay in Mexico and never go back to Russia. She wanted a job. Since she spoke four languages fluently, was an excellent secretary, and a pretty young woman, finding her a job wasn't too difficult.

"Get packed, you and I are going to Acapulco," I surprised Jeanne pleasantly by announcing when I came home from work one night two weeks after Raya's defection. We had gotten Raya's defection. We had gotten Raya's defection. We had gotten Raya a job in a plush Acapulco hotel as a secretary in the public relations office. Now the problem was how to get her to talk. I had contact with an American writer living in Acapulco. Taking Jeanne along as cover for a brief "vacation," I was going to Acapulco to see if he could interview her on the pretext he wanted to write her story—splitting with her the profits from sale of the article to a big U.S. magazine. This would test her reaction to cooperating with an American and how much she would tell. If results were favorable, we would then send in a trained CIA interrogator and get as much information as we could from her.

Our plan worked. Raya was soon telling her story to a CIA officer. She was thirty years old and had been a widow for several years. Her husband, a young Soviet physicist, had died of radiation. This caused an immediate sensation. Specialists flew in from Washington to try to pinpoint the cause and make sense out of it. She was also able to tell them about a nuclear experiment station we had hitherto known little about.

After that, however, her information and insights dropped to our customary level of personal information

and gossip about KGB people in the embassy. We found out some new information about who disliked whom, some covert love affairs that were going on, and the general state of morale. One important thing we did identify was the location and layout of the Referentura—the KGB equivalent of a CIA station.

The principal use we were able to make of Raya's information was to make it public in order to embarrass and harass the KGB officers in Mexico. In the intelligence trade this is called "burning." The KGB officer we decided to burn with the hottest fire was Oleg Nechiporenko. Nechiporenko had arrived in Mexico City in 1961 and, hence, had been there nine years by the time Raya defected. We decided to pay special attention to him because he had been a recruitment target for all these years and a hopeless one. Since we couldn't recruit him, we took advantage of Raya's defection to give wide publicity to the fact he was the KGB security officer and, with the help of Raya's press conference, we invented the story that he had been a major instigator of the Mexico City student riots of 1968, which culminated in a shoot-out in which a number of protesters were killed.

Nechiporenko was an extremely able operator. He evidently had some Spanish blood, possibly one parent was a Spanish Communist—one of the thousands who fled to Russia after the Spanish Civil War. His Latin looks, fluent Spanish, and sharp wits enabled him to move around Mexico with greater ease than any of his colleagues. Once he had even gotten into the U.S. Embassy posing as a visa applicant and was not discovered for several hours. How much he learned about the way the embassy offices were arranged and what other information he gleaned, we didn't know. So he was someone we were particularly happy to harass.

As a result of our identifying him as a dangerous KGB officer and someone who had intervened in Mexican affairs, when the Mexican government uncovered a small band of guerrillas and found they had gone via Russia for training in North Korea, Mexican authorities blamed him for this even worse intervention in their country's political concerns and threw him out of Mexico. Getting KGB officers publicly identified as such, and wherever

possible, declared *persona non grata* was something we tried to do whenever we failed to recruit them.

The trouble with "burning" is that two can play the same game. CIA officers are the number one recruitment target for the KGB. Their aim is essentially the same as ours, to be able to obtain thereby otherwise unobtainable information. Despite the way spy stories tell it, this is not very often a violent game. We want a live KGB officer in the Kremlin and they want a live CIA officer in Langley, Virginia. Publicly identifying each other is about as violent as things usually get. This results in benching an able player from the opposite team. Burned intelligence operators have to cool off for a long time at home before being able to go back to work abroad. If you are not a KGB or CIA officer you probably can't appreciate or even understand the warm glow of satisfaction reading the other fellow's name in print can bring, or the cold anguish felt when you read your own.

In the mid-60s, the East German satellite Soviet service had a book published in German and English called *Who's Who in CIA*. It was a masterpiece of burning. CIA then assisted John Barron with material for his book *KGB, The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents*. Barron's book contains an appendix of fifty-one pages listing KGB and GRU officers. He also used our story about Nechiporenko among the many examples he gave of Soviet spying. I am certain Barron's book and Philip Agee's are related. When Agee contacted the Cubans, it is small wonder the abused Soviet intelligence service through their Cuban surrogates returned the compliment by having Agee write a book naming as many CIA officers as he could remember. Agee's book has two appendices: one of twenty-six pages, listing CIA officers, and another of six pages, naming organizations used by CIA.

I was never named in any book or newspaper article or radio or TV newscast. I was proud of that and I was a bit disturbed about getting involved in working on the Russians in Mexico City. As soon as I met my first Soviet intelligence officer, I knew he would be able to recognize I was CIA. Again, despite the imagination of writers of spy novels, the techniques of professionals in "developing a contact," as it is called, are basically few. As Paul Linebarger pointed out to us in his seminar, our profes-

sion is the same as the con man's. A teenager may be taken in by his first pornographic book describing a large number of positions for sexual intercourse, but the practitioners of the oldest profession know they are only changes on a few simple ones. Spy fiction devotees may think there is a huge bag of tricks available to good agents; practitioners of the second-oldest profession know it isn't true.

The man who replaced Nechiporenko as our number one candidate for possible recruitment was a splendid operator, but his manner of doing business was to concentrate on two elementary tactics—copying his American victims' habits, and sex. Edward Saratov was a tall, good-looking man in his early thirties. Although he was the Tass representative in Mexico City, people who met him usually thought he was a recent American university graduate. He was.

Saratov had gone to Yale. During the thaw in the cold war in the late fifties, known as the "spirit of Camp David" after Eisenhower and Khrushchev met there, he had done graduate work at Yale in political science. Although not as true blue and Yale all the way through as Jack Armstrong, Saratov was a reasonable facsimile of a well-bred, well-educated young American. His accent was American, he liked a good dry martini, and he had a large collection of a variety of American jazz. His specialty, of course, was recruiting Americans.

Before coming to Mexico City, Saratov had cut a swath through Washington. The FBI was too embarrassed to give us all the details, but he successfully seduced several of their secretaries. The careful work of our collators of reports from Soviet defectors had enabled us to identify him, but he moved from Washington to Mexico City without being caught.

In Mexico City he exploited his friendly American manner at the Foreign Correspondents Club. He became vice-president and by virtue of this office was able to expand his contacts still further in both the international colony and within the Mexican government. He aspired to become president of the club. In that position he would be able to open still more doors by directing a broad program of club activities focused on any groups or individu-

als he wished to develop through the flattery of invitations to be guest speakers at the club and so forth.

Win Scott, in the tradition of cold warrior activities I had been raised on in the Clandestine Services, ran an election operation in the Foreign Correspondents Club in order to thwart Saratov's presidential ambition. We didn't subsidize this club, as we had the one in Manila in Mag-saysay days, but enough members were in arrears in their bar bills, as is true of all such clubs, so that Win was able to defeat the Tass man. The objective of recruiting Saratov was not served by this tactic. By the time I got to Mexico, however, all the appropriate tactics were in use. Saratov was under surveillance, his home telephone was tapped, his apartment bugged, and he was surrounded by access agents.

We even had an access agent concentrating on Saratov's favorite operational approach—the one he had employed so successfully against the FBI. An attractive American woman, divorced from a Mexican, had agreed to serve in this capacity. Someone as devoted to the cause of meaningful cryptonyms as the person who chose MHCHAOS had selected hers. "LI" was the digraph indicating Mexico. Her cryptonym was LIBOX.

Saratov's charm, interesting background, bright mind, and good looks were not all he had going for him in his pursuit of women. One day a tape from a conversation in his apartment revealed something else. His wife was talking to another Soviet embassy wife who had dropped in for a visit. Saratov was taking a nap. He liked to sleep in the raw. His wife took her friend into the bedroom and with genuine awe in her voice said, "Look at that. Did you ever see one that size? And he's completely relaxed."

Some sexologists claim that penis size is a masculine fantasy imposed on feminine sexuality. Neither Mrs. Saratov nor LIBOX thought so. Her case officer tried to treat the details of her work delicately, but he told me more than once when he came back from meeting her that LIBOX purred all through their meeting when she had met Saratov the night before.

The affair did not produce what we wanted, which was something specific in the way of a lead, some desire, some weakness, some interest of Saratov's on which we might build a recruitment pitch. Then we learned he was being

transferred to Chile. Allende had been chosen president by the Chilean congress and we couldn't imagine what Saratov was going to do in a country with a Communist president who was committed to reducing, if not entirely removing, American interests from the country. Washington became excited and decided a recruitment pitch must be made before he left Mexico. The decision was based on the belief that this would be the last time for a while any CIA officer would have a chance and on the hope that if recruited before he left for Chile, he would be an invaluable source on what was transpiring there.

Headquarters sent one of its cockiest young officers to do the job. He had already decided how he was going to do the recruitment even though he had only read the headquarters file on the case and lacked a lot of information on his target. His plan was to make what is known as a cold approach, which means going up to the Soviet, telling him you are a CIA officer who can offer him a sizable sum of money, and hoping the shock will give you a clue as to how to proceed. Sometimes a cold approach works. I made one to Roberto Noble. But I never heard of one working on a Soviet. This self-confident young man was sure it would. He considered himself as good-looking as Saratov and possessed of as many talents. I had no idea whether or not this was true in one important respect, but I felt that, even generally speaking, he was no match for the Soviet.

Because of my past experience, I had been working on the Foreign Correspondents Club. My years of dealing with press people were considered sufficient credentials for this. I had obtained diplomatic membership in the club, which had a very loose membership policy since the club management hoped thereby to find some people who would pay their bills. Our eager recruiter had decided he would meet Saratov there and sought my advice as to the best time to try.

I thought this was a bad idea. The club was used sparingly except for a few habitués who gathered there in the afternoons to try to impress each other with tales of imaginary scoops they were on the track of. I never had met Saratov there. I told our recruiter that I thought this was a poor place to try a recruitment. The club consisted of three small connecting rooms on the ground floor at the