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PALLBEARERS CARRYING STALIN'S BODY IN 1953*

Khrushchev: Showdown in the Kremlin

FOR sheer drama, few periods in modern history can match the years just before and after the death of Joseph Stalin. It was a time of Byzantine intrigues, some engineered by the old dictator, others conceived and carried out behind his back. It was a time of brutal purges and bitter battles within the Kremlin hierarchy that led to Nikita Khrushchev's startling "destalinization" speech at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. This week the former Soviet Premier, who emerged from those years as the Kremlin's new boss, provides the only first-person account of those fateful struggles ever recorded. His reminiscences, excerpted from the forthcoming book, *Khrushchev Remembers*, are appearing in LIFE and 19 publications abroad.

Khrushchev wastes no sympathy on Lavrenty Beria, the rival he deposed and destroyed. He pictures Stalin's secret-police chief as a cruel and cynical man whose favorite remark was "Listen, let me have him for one night, and I'll have him confessing he's the King of England." In later years, says Khrushchev, even Stalin grew to fear his fellow Georgian and the power he wielded as absolute master of the vast Cheka, or secret-police, organization. The sweeping postwar purge of the Leningrad party, Khrushchev believes, was part of a scheme masterminded by Beria and his "battering ram," former Premier Georgy Malenkov; the object was to wreck the careers of a troika of promising young men whom they regarded as a threat to their own eventual ascendancy. Two of those men, N.A. Voznesensky and A.A. Kuznetsov, were arrested and shot. The third, says Khrushchev, "was hanging by a thread. I simply can't explain how he was saved from being exterminated." His name: Aleksei Kosygin, now Soviet Premier.

Doctors' Plot. Stalin's growing derangement resulted in the "cruel and contemptible" affair called the Doctors' Plot. Khrushchev traces its beginning to a letter charging that Andrei Zhdanov, the Leningrad party boss, had been

murdered by his physicians. Western experts have explained the plot as a calculated effort by Stalin to destroy Beria, whose security men would presumably have to be part of the scheme. In any case, Stalin ordered many doctors, particularly those who were treating Kremlin officials, arrested and mercilessly interrogated. Two were tortured to death, and the number would surely have risen had Stalin lived. But on March 1, 1953, Stalin suffered a massive stroke. He lingered for two days, during which the members of his "inner Presidium" took turns watching over him—in pairs.

Before Stalin's death was announced, a meeting was held to carve up his power. As Khrushchev feared, "Beria immediately proposed Malenkov for [Premier]. Malenkov proposed that Beria be appointed his first deputy." Khrushchev, who was made in effect First Party Secretary on the Central Committee, had far higher ambitions. But he and his main ally, Minister of Defense Nikolai Bulganin, had to bide their time. "If Bulganin and I had objected, we would have been accused of starting a fight before the corpse was cold."

It was not long, however, before Khrushchev began lining up other allies for a showdown. He took Malenkov aside and told him: "We're heading for disaster. Beria is sharpening his knives." When Malenkov asked what could be done, Khrushchev replied, "The time has come to resist."

What followed was a bold and secret plan to arrest Beria within the very walls of the Kremlin. The most sensitive problem was finding a way of holding Beria once he was under arrest. Explains Khrushchev: "The Presidium bodyguard was obedient to him. His Chekists would be sitting in the next room, and Beria could easily order them to arrest us all. We would have been quite helpless."

Khrushchev enlisted the support of General K.S. Moskalenko, the air-defense commander. He was soon joined in the plot by ten other generals and mar-

shals, including Georgy Zhukov, who was later to become Khrushchev's Defense Minister. "In those days all military personnel were required to check their weapons when coming into the Kremlin, so Bulganin was instructed to see that the marshals and generals were allowed to bring their guns with them," says Khrushchev. "We arranged for Moskalenko's group to wait for a summons in a separate room." On the appointed day, the conspirators and their allies assembled for the fateful session of the Central Committee Presidium.

Secret Button. "I requested the floor and proposed that we discuss the matter of Beria," says Khrushchev. "Beria was sitting on my right. He gave a start, grabbed me by the hand, looked at me with a startled expression, and said, 'What's going on, Nikita?' I said, 'Just pay attention.'" Khrushchev then delivered a speech denouncing Beria. He concluded by saying: "I have formed the impression that he is no Communist. He is a careerist who has wormed his way into the party for self-seeking reasons." Khrushchev formally moved that Beria be stripped of his titles.

"Malenkov was still in a state of panic," Khrushchev continues. "As I recall, he didn't even put my motion to a vote. He pressed a secret button which gave the signal to the generals who were waiting in the next room. Zhukov was the first to appear. Then Moskalenko and the others came in. Malenkov said in a faint voice to Comrade Zhukov, 'As Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., I request that you take Beria into custody.' 'Hands up!' Zhukov commanded Beria." The police boss seemed to be reaching for his briefcase, says Khrushchev. "I seized his arm to prevent him from grabbing a weapon in the briefcase." When searched, however, Beria proved to be

* From right: Lavrenty Beria, Georgy Malenkov, Stalin's son Vassily, Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin, Lazar Kaganovich, Nikolai Shvernik.

unarmed. Six months later, after summary proceedings, he and about half a dozen subordinates were shot. Among the charges against Beria was the rape of more than 100 women and girls, one a seventh-grade student. "He had used the same routine on all of them," says Khrushchev. "He gave them some dinner and offered them wine with a sleeping potion in it."

Ask Mr. Dulles. After three years, Khrushchev had not yet gained complete supremacy over Malenkov. In a bold gamble, he delivered a sensational 20,000-word speech before the Party Congress denouncing Stalin and his methods in mordant detail. Other members of the Presidium were opposed to Khrushchev's move. Fearfully they asked him, "What will we be able to say about our own roles under Stalin?" Khrushchev went ahead anyway. When he rose to speak, he recalls, "it was so quiet in the huge hall you could hear a fly buzzing. You must try to imagine how shocked people were by the revelations of the atrocities to which party members had been subjected." In preparing for the speech, says Khrushchev, he asked the state prosecutor to investigate whether the purge trials of the 1930s were founded on actual crimes. The reply he received: "From the standpoint of judicial norms, there was no evidence for condemning or even trying these men."

The speech was never publicly confirmed, but it was later circulated to party committees throughout the Soviet Union and deliberately leaked to the Western press. Says Khrushchev, wryly referring to the man who directed the CIA at the time: "I remember when journalists would ask me, 'What can you tell us about this speech?' I used to say they'd have to direct their questions to Mr. [Allen] Dulles."



VIETNAMESE MOTHER & AFRO-ASIAN SON
SAIGON HAVEN FOR BLACK G.I.s

Always a hustle or a hassle.

TIME, DECEMBER 14, 1970

SOUTH VIET NAM

Soul Alley

Just after the 1 a.m. curfew one day last week, 300 heavily armed American and Vietnamese MPs, civilian police and militiamen, supported by 100 armored cars, trucks and Jeeps, swooped down on a narrow dirt alley in Saigon and sealed it off. As their house-to-house search began, G.I.s groggy with sleep and drugs scampered in every direction, a few over rooftops, trying to escape. Their women followed, some stark naked, some wearing only pajama bottoms, as spotlights from two helicopters above played on the bizarre scene. When the roundup ended four hours later, 56 girls and 110 G.I.s, including 30 deserters, were hauled off into custody.

Known as Soul Alley, this 200-yr. back street is located just one mile from U.S. military headquarters for Viet Nam. At first glance, it is like any other Saigon alley: mama-sans peddle Winston cigarettes and Gillette Foam Shaves from pushcarts, and the bronzed, bony drivers of three-wheeled cycles sip lukewarm beer at corner food stalls as children play tag near their feet. A closer look, however, shows that Soul Alley is a very special place. The children being bounced on their mothers' hips have unmistakably Afro-Asian features. A sign in the local barbershop proclaims: THE NATURAL LOOK HAS ARRIVED. Green Army fatigues hang from balcony railings to dry in the sun. Black G.I.s talk and laugh, their arms around slight young Asian girls.

No Whites Allowed. Soul Alley is home for somewhere between 300 and 500 black AWOLs and deserters. They escape arrest by using forged ID cards

and mixing with the even greater number of G.I.s who are still on active duty but prefer spending nights here, away from the drabness of their barracks. There were roughly 65,000 cases of AWOL last year, and the Army estimates that about 1,000 soldiers will become deserters this year (no racial breakdowns are available).

Whites who venture into Soul Alley do so at their own risk, as two military policemen learned a month ago. Five minutes after they drove in at mid-morning in their Jeep, they walked back out—minus the vehicle and their weapons. The Army has known about Soul Alley and its deserters ever since the haven sprang up three years ago, and MPs have frequently staged minor raids and roundups. The incident with the Jeep sparked the biggest raid yet. But even if the brass cleaned up Soul Alley, its residents, rather like the Viet Cong, would soon drift back or relocate in another, similar spot.

Easy Living. For many Soul Alley AWOLs, the living is easy. Explained one: "You get up late, you smoke a few joints, you get on your Honda and ride around to the PX, buy a few items you can sell on the black market, come back, blow some more grass, and that's it for the day." Rent for the second floor of a brick house rarely runs to more than \$40 or \$50 a month, including laundry and housekeeping services. Hustling is the name of the game here. This gives everyone plenty of money for anything from soul food at a restaurant called Nam's to hi-fi equipment, television sets or even heroin. Here is how the system works:

From an army of papa-san forgers, the AWOL gets his phony ID and ration cards. He goes to the PX, buys an expensive item, such as a refrigerator, for

