

SF Chron 28 Jan 69

Our Man in Moscow 33

The Cosmonaut Shooting Mystery



Edmund Stevens

Arthur Hoppe is ill.

Moscow

THE DRIVER of the car in the cosmonaut motorcade that was fired upon last Wednesday reportedly died of his bullet wounds in the hospital late Friday. The member of the motorcycle escort who was hit at the same time is still on the critical list.

Meanwhile, the Soviet capital buzzed with rumors and guesses about the sensational incident. Despite conflicting accounts it seemed fairly certain that the shooting did not occur as the vehicles were approaching the Kremlin's Borovitsky Gate, as the original official version implied.

According to credible sources the attempt took place a few yards inside the Kremlin entrance. As the motorcade advanced at a walking pace a figure in a militiaman's (policeman's) uniform darted out and drawing two revolvers fired almost pointblank through the windshield of the third car, a Zil 111 limousine, narrowly missing Cosmonaut George Beregovoi who was seated next to the driver, hitting the latter three times.

Beregovoi received a light cut on the neck from a fragment of glass. The remaining three passengers, Cosmonauts Alexei Leonov, Andrian Nikolayev and his wife, Cosmonette Valentina Tereshkova were unhurt. A total of six shots were fired, one of which went wild striking the motorcyclist.

★ ★ ★

THE OFFICIAL account confirms that the killer was caught but gave no indication of his identity or motives beyond implying that he was mentally unbalanced.

At the same time it is almost the irony of history that the Russians who have consistently refused to accept the claim that President Kennedy and Senator Robert Kennedy were shot by isolated crackpots

and who have insisted on the conspiracy theory should ~~not seek to minimize~~ ^(now?) Wednesday's incident as the work of a solitary "schizophrenic. Even at this stage the indications are that the deed was carefully planned.

The 64-ruble question would seem to be: why did the gunman choose vehicle number three in the motorcade? In the heavy frost it was virtually impossible to identify the occupants of the closed cars, all of them in fur caps and heavy overcoats. The exceptions were the four heroes of the occasion, Vladimir Shatalov, Boris Volynov, Alexei Yeliseyev and Evgenyi Khrunov of the Soyuz 4-5 docking mission who at this point were riding in a Zil convertible with the top down at the head of the procession. They had switched over to the open job a few minutes previously before crossing the Moscow River bridge leading to the Kremlin.

★ ★ ★

AFTER THEY transferred to the open convertible for the final stretch the closed car continued to follow in line right behind them as second car in the motorcade. The car in which Beregovoi and his companions were riding which had previously been number two in the line thus became number three. The following car in which top leaders were riding including party chief Leonid Brezhnev and President Nikolai Podgorny now became number four. This change in sequence may have caused the gunman to miscalculate.

None of this offers any clue as to the killer's identity or how he managed to impersonate a member of the Kremlin guard all of whom were presumably handpicked and known to each other. Also amazing is the circumstance that the incident hardly caused any perceptible delay in the program of the day's festivities.

Chronicle Foreign Service