

What the Russians say

The TRIGON case is much better known in Russia and former-Soviet Union countries than in the U.S.

In June 1978, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* published an article ***For Whose Benefit?*** by Julian Semenov about the death of an unnamed Soviet run by the CIA and the capture of his CIA handler Martha Peterson. Newspapers and magazines in the US and around the world immediately published translations. Incriminating photographs showed Marti caught red-handed. Taken to KGB headquarters at Lubyanka, she was pictured sitting in front of spy paraphernalia and instructions for “Trianon.” The article ***The Two Faces of Martha Peterson***, written by *Izvestia* Washington correspondent M. Sturua, followed a few weeks later. The articles were a mixture of fact, speculation, and propaganda.

[Semenov’s name is also transliterated as *Yulian Semyonov*]

In 1979 Semenov wrote a spy novel, ***TASS Is Authorized to Announce***, a fictionalized account based loosely on Marti’s case. The CIA agent’s codename was said to be TRIANON, but names and events were changed: the agent recruitment took place in an African country and the CIA villain, who worked out of the US embassy in Moscow, turned out to be an elderly male. He was caught as the result of great detective work by the KGB. The book was quite popular in the Soviet Union.

Semenov followed in 1984 with a 10-part Soviet TV action series of the same name and subject. The advisors for the TV screening were actual KGB veterans of the TRIGON capture operation. The series gained immense popularity and still replays on Russian TV. *TASS Is Authorized to Announce* is widely available in Russian on a number of streaming sites.

Few people outside high levels of the Soviet and US governments knew the true details of the case. Much later, a few books appeared in the US, including some written by retired CIA officers, summarizing the case. After the breakup of the Soviet Union retired KGB officers associated with the TRIGON case began to write books and articles about the operation. Videos with interviews appeared. Some details were true, others not. The CIA had actually recruited Aleksandr Ogorodnik

in Colombia, not a fictional African country, and the CIA officer at Krasnoluzhsky Bridge turned out to be Martha Peterson, not an old man.

In fact KGB surveillance had no idea who she was. She had slipped through their cracks and vigilance. New information about the case that had not appeared in the TV series included the fierce fight Marti had with the elite KGB professionals who seized her. She sent at least one to the hospital with a severe groin injury.

Imagine how popular the TV series would have been if Semenov had been allowed to portray the CIA officer as she was: a beautiful, vivacious young woman skilled in martial arts!

In subsequent books, articles, and videos, much of the propaganda and many of the incorrect details from the Julian Semenov's book and TV series were repeated as fact, and authors repeated their own erroneous information and speculation.

One book, ***Agent Codename TRIANON***, written by retired KGB Colonel Igor Peretrukhin, deals almost exclusively with the case. This book provides many interesting details about how the KGB actually or purportedly conducted the Ogorodnik investigation, but it includes a number of contradictions and factual errors. The author - unconvincingly - describes the investigation and capture of Ogorodnik and Marti as a success and rationalizes the KGB's failure to surveil Marti. Fooled by her effective use of cover, he made excuses and set forth character assassination. The KGB was too busy watching the "men" who were known or suspected CIA officers and had no time for a "drunk" and a "party girl."

In 2012 Marti Peterson wrote her book ***The Widow Spy***, describing her life and events leading up to joining the CIA as well as her training and assignment to Moscow. She detailed how she played her cover as "just a party girl," allowing her to escape surveillance, and how she handled TRIGON/Ogorodnik until her capture in July 1977 by the KGB.

Some Russian writers have even written articles detailing the reasons they believe the entire case is a coverup by both the KGB and CIA.

Interest in this subject by Russian journalists and others has continued up to the present, and more recently Russian writers who have read ***The Widow Spy*** in English have referenced and incorporated Marti's material.

Times have changed, and some former KGB officers who took part in the case have even written parodies of all these books and articles about the operation to catch Marti. They poke fun at themselves, their blunders, and mock the KGB bureaucracy. In ***Catch Them in the Act***, published in online journal *Spetsnaz Russia and* written by former KGB Spetsnaz Alpha Group officers who were there, Marti is depicted as a one-woman wrecking crew: she is the US national champion in karate, holding a black belt with six dans [*Ed. there are only a few martial arts experts in the world at that level*]. One of the officers, a WW II veteran with “more than 300 combat sorties behind German lines,” patriotically volunteers to perform the ultimate sacrifice and confront her at the bridge. ***He was convinced that he and his partner were vastly outnumbered and had no chance to come out alive. After trying to grab her from behind, Marti knocked him out with a karate kick. He woke up in time to see the KGB’s own karate expert subduing her.***

Interest among Russians is such that a translation of ***Widow Spy*** into Russian is planned for September 2020.