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Secrets of the "mop-up guy." A legendary Spetsnaz Alpha Group officer on spies and traitors

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"Capture" of the traitor Adolf Tolkachev by Vladimir Zaitsev's Alpha section, 1985 © / Igor Atamanenko / From his personal archives

Female tricks



“Recently I received a letter from former American **intelligence officer Michael Sellers**.^{*} He left the CIA and is now working in Hollywood, preparing to shoot a film about the battle between Soviet and American intelligence services,” says **Vladimir Zaitsev**. “I took part in the operation to detain Sellers in Moscow in 1986. Now it turns out that I am a celebrity there. And in the 80s, the CIA considered me the main "mop-up guy." ...

This year another "friend" of mine, **Martha Peterson**,^{**} who retired quite a while back, wrote a book about her work as a CIA officer in Moscow. I also figure in her memoirs. She then, of course, did not know that the man in the police uniform, whom she skillfully fought off on the Krasnoluzhsky bridge using karate techniques accompanied with choice Russian swearing, was me.

Back then it took a long time for us to figure her out. First, female intelligence officers had not worked in our country before. Secondly, she intentionally created a cover image of a high-spirited floozy by hanging around hugging the marine guards and resting on the stairs with a bottle of whiskey...

And recently a leading member of one of the American structures for the development of military technology came to visit us (in due time **the traitor Tolkachev** passed classified data to them on the electronic package of Soviet fighters, including what allowed them to elude American planes and radars, and Soviet MiGs ceased to be invulnerable). This American directly admits that the KGB was one of the strongest structures in those days, everyone was afraid of it.”



Spy Wars. Why Putin's phone is not available for CIA wiretaps More details

Yulia Borta, *AiF*: “Are they not afraid of the FSB now?”

Vladimir Zaitsev: “They are afraid, but the situation has changed. When the USSR ceased to exist in 1991, and with it the KGB, there was such confusion that American intelligence officers walked around the country as if they were at a buffet. During this time, they could acquire sources of information among our citizens which they still count on for intelligence. In addition, travel abroad is not limited now. It is difficult to predict who they might recruit there and for what purpose...”

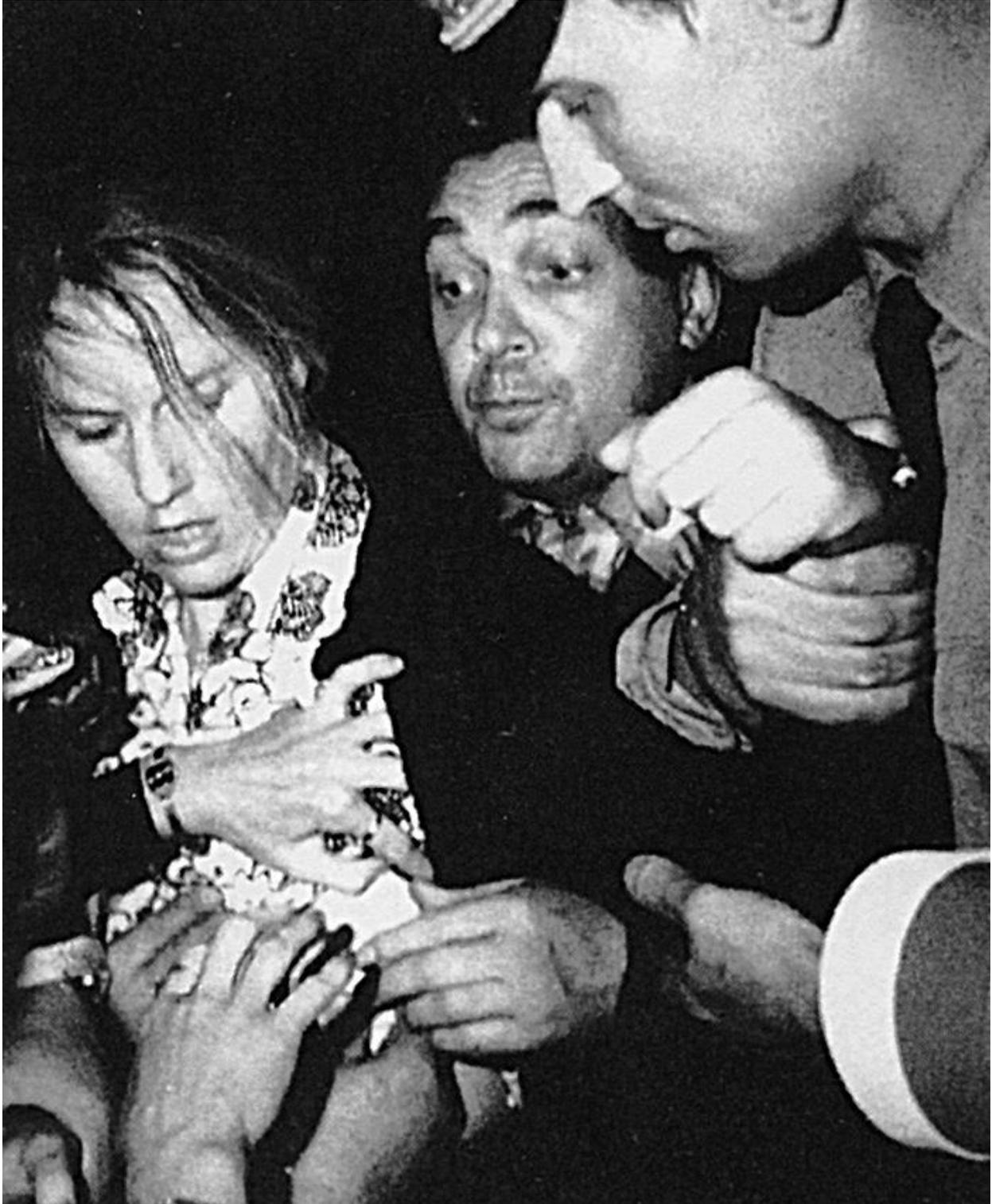
“But have the working methods also changed? Previously, spies had wigs and fake mustaches. And now?”

“These methods still work. Three years ago, an American spy was caught using a wig and a fake mustache. Then an indignant howl arose in the press: they say, the FSB is telling us fairy tales – what’s this wigs and mustaches in our time! How else should they modify their appearance? That same Sellers liked to go out on espionage operations in a ski hat with his hair glued under it and with a fake mustache. I even have a photo where he, first with a mustache and a hat, and then without them - a completely different person (the paraphernalia of a spy caught by the FSB in 2013 was very similar to what was once seized from Sellers, which led our intelligence officers to the idea that they are still manufactured by the same company. - Ed.).



“In the mid-80s, Americans were very fond of using inflatable mannequins, and for some time they managed to fool our surveillance. This trick was done in the following way: as soon as the car with the American intelligence officer was in a "dead zone" and broke away from surveillance for a moment, he jumped out of the car, and his partner, who was sitting behind the wheel, pressed a button, and ... a rubber doll jumped out of the seat. American agents had an incredible passion for masquerades. They even used rubber masks like the one in the famous [Fantômas](#) movie. They also loved to dress up in women's dresses. True, this did not save them. Experienced surveillance detectives always first memorized the gait of the target, and then all the other external signs.

“There are also many tales about intelligence officers. But It is only in the movies that surveillance is the "tail" and follows the alleged spy. But in fact, 20-30 cars could work on one target.



Arrest of Martha Peterson. Photo: From the personal archive of Igor Atamanenko
[Translator: Marti; KGB officers (Colonel) Sharovarov and Captain Vladimir Zaitsev]

“How did you feel about the foreign special services officers?”

“Respectfully. They did their job, we did ours. Traitors are another matter: such people deserve neither justification nor leniency. Especially when they began to actively use ampoules with poison. For example, the **traitor Ogorodnik** poisoned his wife with poison received from American intelligence when she began to guess about his espionage. And he himself, during the arrest, according to one of the versions, committed suicide with the help of poison hidden inside the pen. After that, all the suspects in espionage immediately after arrest had their clothes changed and their personal belongings were taken away. So, when they took another traitor, Smetanin, they noticed that he was always reaching for his glasses, although he was not at all myopic. It turned out that there was also poison in the temples of the glasses: if he touched them with his hands, the poison would instantly penetrate the skin and kill him. In such cases, when innocent people could also die, we had to act harshly.”



The people don't lie

“Was your work at “Alpha” not limited to catching spies?”

“The range of missions was very wide. They helped the criminal investigation department catch bandits, went on KGB-military operations and neutralized terrorists. They even collected information among the population. For example, the Central Committee makes a decision and the party leaders need to find out how people react to it. The reports that the district and regional committees sent from the localities were little believed. For example, he receives information from the district committee that there will soon be disorder at a plant but does not want to show the authorities that he is not coping, and in the report he writes about 2-3 renegades who are disturbing the people. And there, in fact, the entire work collective is close to rebellion. He sent employees “to the people”: someone on a long-distance train started a conversation with fellow travelers, others “walked” around Moscow ... And we passed information firsthand, without smoothing it, so that adjustments could be made and people reassured.”

** Michael Sellers, a CIA agent working under the cover of 2nd Secretary of the US Embassy, was arrested on March 10, 1986 during a meeting with KGB Major S. Vorontsov. Sellers gave the Americans samples of the "spy dust" that Soviet counterintelligence officers used to process the cars of American diplomats suspected of espionage.*

*** Martha Peterson was caught in 1977 while laying a cache for the traitor A. Ogorodnik, an assistant to the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs. The intelligence services followed her directly from the embassy. In the cinema, where she went in as a spectator, the spy managed to put on a black suit over her bright white dress, completely transforming her appearance. Experts identified her by her gait and caught her red-handed.*

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https://aif.ru/society/history/tayny_chistilshchika_legendarnyy_alfovec_o_shpionah_i_predatelyah