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# Declassified: American Agent Trianon was actually Trigon

The story, familiar to us from the novel and film *TASS is Authorized to Announce*, was described in her memoirs by Martha Peterson, a CIA officer who worked in Moscow with a recruited Soviet diplomat.

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COMMENTS (4)



June 13, 1978. Martha Peterson, US Vice Consul in Moscow, a CIA officer working under cover of the US State Department, and Embassy Counselor [Cliff] Gross, who was called to identify the spy  
Photo: TASS photo chronicle

The victories and failures of intelligence agencies of various countries of the world are usually kept under the classification "Top Secret" for a long time. This fully refers to the era of confrontation between the CIA and the KGB. But the Cold War often dictated its own rules. In June 1978, the newspaper Izvestia published a sensational article: KGB officers exposed and arrested 32-year-old CIA agent **Martha Peterson** in Moscow.

This story, which actually occurred a year before publication, might have never been learned if it hadn't been for the arrest of three Soviet intelligence officers in the United States. The KGB had to take a hit. It was only later, on the personal order of Yuri Andropov, **Yulian Semenov** wrote his famous novel ***TASS is Authorized to Announce***, based on which a TV series of the same name was filmed.

But unlike her Soviet colleagues, Martha Peterson talked about the details of her work biography, bragging about her exploits. First, she shared her experience of her operational work with one of the CIA schools, and in her old age - with the general population, having published her memoir *The Widow Spy*.

## **SHE DECIDED TO GET REVENGE ON THE COMMUNISTS**

At the age of 27, Martha lost her husband, John, who was a CIA agent. This happened during his tour of duty to Laos, where she went along with her husband. He was sent to train anti-communist armed groups. This was a tense time, as the Vietnam War was going on. During one of his operations, John was on a helicopter which came under fire from local partisans and crashed into the jungle.

- "John is dead:" the words of our chief of our headquarters were drowned in my unwillingness to understand what he was saying. I was shocked. It seemed to me that I was absolutely alone. I didn't cry, but kept repeating "no," Peterson writes in her memoirs.

After the death of her husband, she returned home, where she decided to start life anew. Thanks to her husband's friends, Martha managed to hire on at the CIA, undergo training, master the Russian language (in 44 weeks, 8 hours a day) and get a referral to work in Moscow.

Martha was a determined lady: she resolutely refused her first appointment to one of the Asian countries, risking nothing better in the future. And, as a result, she became the first female agent assigned to the Soviet capital. By her own admission, she was motivated by a desire to take revenge on the communists for the death of her husband.

## **STRIPTEASE FOR THE KGB**

The spy immediately didn't like Moscow. She writes that she was annoyed by the gray tones of the Sheremetyevo-2 airport, the miserable furnishings of the rooms in the Peking Hotel and faceless sleeping areas, "everything around reeked of smelly Soviet tobacco." Muscovites matched the city: "tastelessly dressed women and repulsive-looking men."

Peterson was seized with paranoia: all the time it seemed that KGB officers were following her everywhere, and video cameras were hidden in the room.

"When I started to undress, before going to the bath, I suddenly had the thought that perhaps the KGB was watching me," the spy shares her unpleasant memories. – "At that moment I thought - why not dance a striptease? I grinned and decided that I could show myself as a clown on the very first evening."

The head of the CIA station gave the new agent three or four months to get to know the city. Martha settled in Moscow quickly and freely cut through the capital and the surrounding area in her orange Zhiguli: she visited the

Kremlin, the Bolshoi Theater, the Trinity-Sergius Lavra, and Yasnaya Polyana.

“The parade on Red Square on November 7 made a great impression on me. Soviet military equipment was presented, army crews marched perfectly in step. The parade was attended by officers of the military attaché section of the embassy. They figured out the types of new weapons. And the staff of the political section assessed who was at the Mausoleum and in what order, informing Washington about possible changes in power.



*Right away the spy didn't like Moscow*

## **KISS A POLICE OFFICER**

Of course, the official place of work of the CIA operative in Moscow was the American embassy, where she was listed as a vice-consul.

As Peterson assures in her book, ordinary employees of the diplomatic mission did not know what she was really doing: she did not associate with her direct colleagues in intelligence outside work, but at the same time she attended all the parties.

Peterson practiced relatively free morals, and never refused a drink: in her memoirs, she now and then recounts how she drank at the American Club and had fun with the Marines who guarded the diplomatic mission.

“Before returning to the embassy after celebrating the New Year on Red Square, we approached the police officers who were standing in front of our building and kissed everyone on the cheek. Then we laughed, remembering this, because most of the police were almost two meters tall [six feet], and because of this they had to bend down to get a kiss.

It was her frivolous lifestyle, according to Martha, that confused the KGB officers, who watched her for the first six months, just like all the new employees of the US Embassy. The security officers decided that Peterson was not suitable to be a CIA agent, but a girl who was placed in a good position by a friend was more likely. Therefore, Martha could easily move around Moscow without "tails," finding new places for dead drops and meetings with agents who had been recruited.



*Peterson (right) preached relatively free morals, and never refused a drink*

## **HE WAS CAUGHT IN A "HONEY TRAP"**

Peterson arrived in Moscow at a time when the Station was waiting for its new informant, Soviet diplomat Alexander Ogorodnik, to get in touch. The CIA recruited him in Bogota, Colombia, using a woman to catch him. In intelligence slang, the trick is called a *honey trap*.

For a member of the CPSU, a diplomat and a family man, such behavior was unacceptable. It was enough to intimidate Ogorodnik and, at the same time to play on his ambition, and the new CIA agent began work, which was also well paid.

"The CIA paid exceptionally well for the services of Trigon (Ogorodnik's codename, *Trianon* in Julian Semyonov's novel ) - his remuneration was many times higher than the salary he received at the USSR Foreign Ministry," Peterson said.

Ogorodnik was going to move to the States, and not return from Colombia to the USSR. But in the United States, oblivion and a much more modest pension of a former agent would await him. And the CIA needed him in Moscow to continue to ferret out Soviet secrets through him.

Before returning to Moscow, Trigon received training, learned to understand special equipment, encryption and, as indicated in the book, could find "a fake brick in a whole pile of bricks and a hollow log among all the other logs in the forest." Such containers were used by the CIA to receive and transmit information.

The Americans soon realized that they were lucky. In Moscow, Ogorodnik received a position in the Foreign Policy Planning Directorate of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he had full access to classified correspondence of the Soviet embassies.

## **CAPSULE WITH POISON**

Ogorodnik became a treasure trove of classified information for Washington. "Trigon photographed nearly a hundred documents from the Soviet government. We hit the jackpot — headquarters had fun days of

reading intelligence, ”Peterson recalled when the station received the first packet of tapes.

Trigon regularly supplied the Americans with classified information. The communication and material transfer system was complex and multi-level. CIA agents feared being exposed and losing Trigon.



*Ogorodnik became a treasure trove of classified information for Washington*

Since "surveillance" was not conducted on Peterson, she became his main liaison. Martha was prohibited from having personal contact with the informant. She was trusted only to leave transmissions for Ogorodnik in secret places, and then take his messages, hidden in a milk bag.

“Trigon wanted the CIA to provide him with 'insurance' —a surefire way to commit suicide if caught red-handed. He asked for a deadly pill. At first, the headquarters opposed, considering it immoral and inappropriate. But then everyone realized that slow and cruel torture awaited him,” the former agent scares the readers.

As a result, Peterson gave Trigon a special fountain pen, which contained a capsule of poison. Before using this poison to commit suicide during his arrest, he poisoned his bride, who suspected something was wrong in the behavior of Ogorodnik. The doctor who performed the autopsy of the girl also died of poisonous fumes.

Due to eternal fear for a year and a half of working for the Americans, Ogorodnik's condition worsened - in his letters he constantly complained of colds, insomnia, and chest pain. The CIA, believing it to be nothing more than nerves, handed him a sedative. But the medicines did not help: Ogorodnik began to disrupt tasks more and more often, the quality of his work decreased.

“We feared the worst, and the worst became more and more real. Trigon may have been under the control of the KGB,” Peterson admits.

## **FAKE RED LABEL**

Trigon's story ended on July 15, 1977, becoming one of the largest CIA failures in the USSR. In the film *TASS is Authorized to Announce*, the scene

of the arrest of an American intelligence agent lasts no more than 5 minutes, in fact, the special operation was much larger.

By July, changes had taken place in the Moscow Station: a new leader arrived and part of the intelligence officers changed, who, according to Peterson, did not understand with whom they were dealing. Martha herself was also preparing to return to the States. And she hoped that this time someone else would go to lay down the dead drop to Trigon. But the new chief wanted to curry favor with his superiors in Langley and sent the experienced Martha.



*Martha was forbidden to have personal contact with the informant*

“Deep down, we all suspected that the KGB officers had left the red mark (Trigon's signal to accept the container. - Ed.), But at the meeting no one

expressed these doubts aloud," Peterson recalls. "I didn't want my colleagues to think that I wasn't ready to go on a mission or I'm dead."

Before going to the scene of the operation, Peterson rode around Moscow for a long time to throw off her "tail" and even changed clothes so she could merge with the crowd. She was sure that no one was watching her. But the spy was closely tracked along the entire route.

At 22:35, Martha arrived at Luzhniki and left the package in the niche of the Krasnoluzhsky bridge. The American believed that there was not a soul around, although about 100 KGB officers who had been watching her for several months took part in the special operation. And at the moment when she was descending from the bridge brawny officers in civilian clothes attacked her.

"There were two possibilities: either they knew about Trigon, arrested him, and set up an ambush, or I led them to the bridge and the KGB saw me making a dead drop. But the second was unlikely."

### **300 PIECES OF SILVER**

The footage of Peterson's detention and the protocols of her interrogation are now in intelligence history museums in Washington and Moscow.

"The photographer began to shoot with a flash as the rough hands of the KGB officers searched me. The picture shows me struggling while being pawed under my blouse, and my fist is pulled back, as if I want to make a left hook," - bravo describes Martha the moment of the search and the discovery on her chest of an SRR-100 - a device for listening to the communications of the KGB surveillance service.

During the arrest, Peterson resisted, kicked, and shouted, demonstrating a good knowledge of Russian obscenities. She only screamed in order to warn Trigon, who might be nearby. At that moment Martha did not know yet that Ogorodnik had already been discovered and arrested by the KGB for a month.

After the arrest, Peterson was taken to Lubyanka in a black minibus, which Martha compared to the Stalinist "Black Maria." The first interrogation took place there, which was attended by employees of the Soviet Foreign Ministry and a diplomat from the US Embassy. The Americans thought that they had detained someone else because of confusion - Miss "Paterson" (our intelligence officers, sending a message to the embassy, made a mistake in Martha's name).

"Our diplomat Cliff probably thought I was a regular clerk in the CIA office. He did not know that in the evenings I was conducting an operation. He went to the table and was speechless, although this rarely happened to him," recalls Martha.

The KGB officers began to demonstrate the things found on Peterson and opened the "package." Martha could barely look at this.

"I wanted to scream, 'They are not supposed to open this! This is classified information! They cannot open the package and examine it. They don't have access!' But the KGB officers didn't care. Martha began to behave defiantly, in particular, when one of the officers began to read a letter for Trigon from the CIA, mentioning his fee for the work done.

"In the last package you asked us to calculate how much money you earned working with us. The amount is ... ". He stopped abruptly. The amount was colossal (over 300 thousand rubles). He suddenly realized that as soon as he voiced it to the KGB officers present, there would be a line of those who would decide to become an informant for the CIA.

Yes, you see, the poorly self-confident spy studied her opponents from the KGB. That's why I fell asleep.

## **PERSONA NON-GRATA**

Martha Peterson left the USSR just a couple of days later, having been declared persona non grata. "The KGB officers didn't know who I was, and, most importantly, they didn't understand what damage I had done to the Soviet regime during my tour of duty," the American boasts.

In the Soviet press, Peterson was accused of espionage and the transfer of poison to kill a Soviet citizen. In response, the Americans presented a claim to the Soviet authorities for ... a broken watch strap and bruises on Martha's wrists.

Upon her return to the States, Peterson was bathed in glory - she was received by the US President himself, and thus she became, according to the American press, "the only person who in three days managed to meet face to face with both the KGB and President Jimmy Carter." ...

After retiring, the plump 75-year-old Peterson now lives in North Carolina. She has outlived three husbands, raised two children, and is now babysitting her grandchildren.

## **WHAT THE CIA DIDN'T KNOW**

### **Czech "mole" handed over the spy**

In the Soviet counterintelligence case, Ogorodnik figured as "Agronomist." Information about the traitor came to the KGB from

colleagues in Czechoslovak intelligence. An officer of the special services of a friendly country at that time, Karel Köcher, managed to infiltrate the analytical department of the CIA and received information about the recruitment of a Soviet diplomat in Colombia under the codename Trigon. The traitor was quickly identified and taken under a hood in Moscow. All his manipulations with caches took place under the control of the KGB. They were in no hurry to arrest Ogorodnik. Moreover, he was planted with "top-secret documents" that were in fact cleverly crafted disinformation. But the KGB did not suspect that the Americans had given poison to Trigon.

*Stills from the film "TASS is Authorized to Announce"*

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Source: [kp.ru](http://kp.ru)