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Journal: Mysteries of History №13, October 2020

Heading: Secrets of the Special Services

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CIA officer Martha Peterson, the first American female spy in the USSR, had long remained above suspicion, playing the role of a goofy simpleton. But her arrest went down in the history of the Soviet Special Services.

### The Spy Martha Peterson



In the 1980s, during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, Martha Peterson, the first female American spy in the history of political confrontation between the two powers, was exposed in Moscow.

"I hate these commies!"

Martha Jane Denny (Peterson) was born on May 27, 1945, in Kansas City, Missouri. After graduating from Darien High School in 1963, Martha entered Drew University, a private liberal arts university in Madison, New Jersey, one

of America's oldest and most prestigious universities, founded in 1867 by industrialist Daniel Drew as Drew Theological Seminary. In 1967, she successfully defended her diploma and two years later married John Peterson, whom she met at the university in the first days of classes. It was a love marriage. After graduating from the university, Martha waited two years for her fiancé to return from the Army: John served in the special forces.

Her husband chose a career as a professional military man. Back then America was fighting just about everywhere. In 1972, Martha was widowed. John Peterson died on October 19 in Vietnam in a helicopter crash. Later in her memoirs book, she wrote that her husband was shot in the jungle by Russian Kalashnikovs and from that day on she hated all communists and wanted to take revenge on them. The fact that her husband fought against the communists and that there was a lot of blood of peaceful civilians, women, children and the elderly on his hands did not embarrass Martha. For her, all communists, regardless of race and nationality, had become enemy number one. They killed her John, and they have to pay for it! So Martha Peterson, having learned Russian and undergone special training, became a CIA case officer. On November 5, 1975, she flew to Moscow under the guise of an officer of the US diplomatic consulate. She herself had asked that they send her "to the most dangerous place on the planet for an American intelligence officer." The USSR at that time was considered just that.

The KGB immediately put the new embassy officer on watch and she was under 24-hour surveillance. But the surveillance officers did not notice anything incriminating. After work, Marta had fun in the "National" and "Metropol" restaurants, where she drank without measure and could, after dinner with abundant libations, go home late at night with a new acquaintance whom she had just met in a restaurant. In a word, she led a life in the fast lane without the slightest hint of a desire to meet anyone who had access to Soviet state secrets.

The *Office*\* attempted to get Peterson to reveal her true nature by "dangling suitors" before her. But they were unsuccessful and gave up on her, wondering how the US State Department could tolerate such indecent behavior of its employee, who, after getting drunk as a lord at a diplomatic party could fall asleep on the steps of the embassy while waiting for a car came for her to take her to her official apartment.

*\*[Translator: Kontora, the KGB Seventh Directorate, responsible for surveillance of foreigners]*

However, this is what Peterson wanted. The Soviet secret services would have to write off her as a possible CIA agent. And after the removal of surveillance,

Martha finally found her desired freedom of action. True, her owners did not immediately believe this, and for some time they checked for themselves whether she was being followed. And when they were convinced that she was really no longer being surveilled, they realized that they had found an invaluable agent.

## Operation Setun-2

Martha categorically did not like Moscow. She didn't like the climate and was annoyed by the eternal shortage of food. In her book of memoirs, she later wrote that sometimes she could only buy cabbage and since then she hates it. She did not like the living conditions, did not like the constant atmosphere of suspicion around (Soviet people were mostly wary of Americans). In general, everything around her was disgusting and vile. But she endured because she came here to avenge her beloved husband. Martha tirelessly wandered around the city at night, checking for the resumption of surveillance, and left parcels in hiding places. One of Peterson's tasks was to liaise with CIA agent *Trianon*, for whom she conducted dead drops and left money, new instructions and contact lenses, to which he had become accustomed while working abroad, and took away the "packages" left by him – microfilms of [secret documents of](#) the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The CIA-codenamed *Trianon* was the Soviet diplomat Alexander Ogorodnik, who in the 1970s often went on short official trips to Bulgaria, Costa Rica and Colombia. He was recruited in Colombia and caught "in heat." Ogorodnik began a love affair with an employee of University of Colombia, Pilar Suarez, who according to one version was a CIA agent. The intimate meetings of this couple were secretly filmed and used to recruit Ogorodnik. He, having seen the photos, immediately agreed to cooperation, not wanting to ruin his diplomatic career. So the Soviet diplomat became an American spy.

Ogorodnik did not like the new role, he was afraid of exposure and arrest, and he complained constantly in reports to the CIA that he suffered from insomnia and was tormented by severe abdominal pains. Medicines were left for him at cache sites, but Ogorodnik continued in the same spirit. He asked for a poison ampoule, disguised [in a] fountain pen, in case of failure. Then he begged for another, the first allegedly hrown in a panic into the river (Martha Peterson passed him the second fountain pen with poison). The CIA was clearly losing its agent, who more and more often did not pick up packages from hiding places and did not get in touch.

The espionage activities of the diplomat Alexander Ogorodnik ended exactly as he feared - exposure. On June 21, 1977, during his arrest, he managed to use the poison capsule, and as a result, the KGB officers got a corpse. During a search of his apartment, materials were found that made it possible to determine the map of his meetings with the messenger and the location of the covert cache sites with the parcels. Thus began the KGB operation "Setun-2" to identify the Trianon liaison. Information about his death was highly classified.

Martha Peterson was deceived by the lack of information about the failure and death of Ogorodnik. They zeroed in on her as the one who would appear at one of the drop sites, so they tracked her constantly to make sure that there would be no mistake.

### Skirmish on the bridge

On July 15, 1977, at 10:35 pm, the unsuspecting Martha Peterson went to the cache site on Krasnoluzhsky Bridge to leave a package disguised as a cobblestone. As usual, she took heightened precautions and took the subway for several hours, changing routes. Surveillance officers followed her from the embassy building, but Martha almost outwitted her pursuers. Having bought a ticket at the Rossiya cinema for the last screening of the film *Red and Black*, she changed without embarrassment right in the auditorium, pulled on trousers and a blouse over a light dress, and completely changed her appearance. So, if it were not for the awareness of the leadership and participants in the operation to arrest the spy, Peterson might well have escaped. But the KGB had the American sketches for the movement of their contact at the bridge and the place where the container was placed in the cache. And this place was totally surrounded - the fly could not slip through! They even installed a tank night vision device on a crane standing near a building under construction on the opposite bank of the Moscow River. The entire operation took place in the strictest radio silence. But back to Martha Peterson, who managed to leave the theater unrecognized.

First, she took a bus ride, then caught a taxi and drove to the Krasnoluzhsky Bridge. The bridge seemed deserted, and Martha calmed down a bit. True, when she began to climb the stairs leading to the railway crossing, the observers hesitated: they did not recognize her. They thought it was a man. Leaving a "parcel" in one of the arches of the bridge, Peterson reached the middle of the bridge and turned back, starting down the stairs! At this moment, the silent walkie-talkies came to life, and the conditional command "Yes!" sounded, meaning her capture.

Despite the fact that the KGB officers were dressed in police uniforms so that Peterson would immediately understand that she was dealing with representatives of the authorities and should not offer resistance, Martha had to be taken by force. She skillfully fought off the trained men and shouted loudly throughout the street, warning the agent who might come to pick up the container. They subdued her with difficulty, breaking her watchband, which later became a reason for a protest note from the US State Department.

Information about the arrest of the spy did not appear in Izvestia, along with a photograph of Peterson, until June 13, 1978.

Magazine: *Mysteries of History No. 13, October 2020*

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