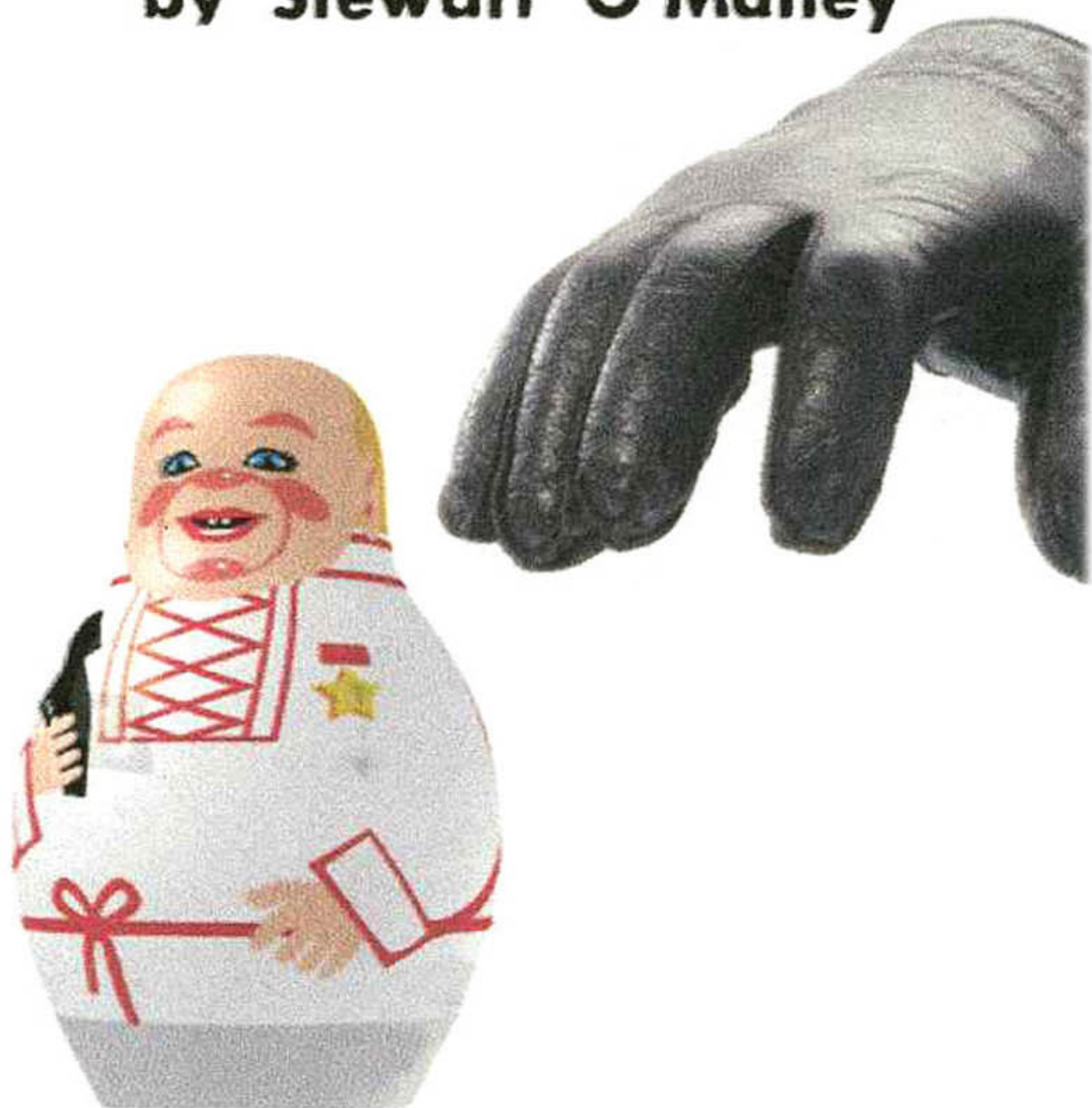


The Plot To Kidnap KHRUSHCHEV

Told here for the first time
is the inside story of a coup
so fantastic it rivals an Ian
Fleming mystery - except for
the ending

by **Stewart O'Malley**



A S THE FIRST rays of sun touched the walls and towers of the Kremlin last May 16, guards opened the small steel door to the inner courtyard of nearby Lubyanka Prison.

A slim, graying man emerged, surrounded by uniformed police. He wore an expensive civilian suit, polished black shoes and a dark blue necktie. His hair was brushed straight back from a broad, intelligent forehead. His dark eyes blinked at the morning sun.

Flanked by impassive policemen, he marched across the courtyard to the high concrete wall at the far end. The wall, pockmarked by bullets, was shrouded in shadows.

Col. Oleg Penkovsky walked with the brisk, military stride of an old soldier. He might have been going to his office or a Kremlin ceremony, instead of to his death.

At the wall, he turned and faced the courtyard; his escort marched back to the opposite side of the yard to join the firing squad assembled there. Their black-uniformed leader, a captain of the Committee for State Security, better known as the K.G.B. or secret police, consulted his watch, glanced impersonally at the erect figure against the far wall, then shouted an order. Twelve riflemen took aim. At his second command, they fired.

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Nikita Khrushchev

Colonel Penkovsky sank slowly to the ground, writhed for a moment, then lay still.

The K.G.B. captain drew a pistol from his black leather holster, walked to the fallen form and shot him through the base of the skull.

That afternoon, the Soviet news agency, Tass, announced that the 43-year-old colonel had been executed as a traitor and spy. The two-paragraph announcement gave no details. And it left unanswered several important questions raised at his espionage trial.

Seymour Topping, The New York Times correspondent in Moscow, reported: "Many Westerners and Russians familiar with the case felt that the prosecution did not satisfactorily establish why Mr. Penkovsky risked his life . . . to pass military, political and economic secrets to British and United States intelligence services."

Another Times story said: "Shocked Russians shared with Western observers an impression that the trial did not produce an adequate explanation of the Russian official's motives for espionage."

Penkovsky himself did not reveal his true motives. In a statement read at the trial he was quoted as saying:

"I had many defects . . . I was envious, selfish, vain, career-minded. I liked to court women and had several mistresses. I frequented restaurants and liked an easy life.

"All these vices corrupted me and I fell . . . became a worthless man and a traitor."

But Western intelligence sources contend Penkovsky was a loyal Russian who turned spy not for personal gain, but to expose the corruption and excesses of the present Kremlin regime.

The real reason he was shot, they say, is because he was the mastermind behind a plot to overthrow Premier Khrushchev.

Penkovsky's influence was far greater than his rank of colonel in the Red Army Reserve would indicate. Actually, he was one of the most powerful members of the Soviet establishment. A war hero, he

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Col. Oleg Penkovsky

fought gallantly in both the Finnish campaign and World War II. He became a lieutenant-colonel at 26 and received a dozen decorations for valor, including the Order of the Red Star, two Orders of the Red Banner, the Order of the Patriotic War and the Order of Alexander Nevsky.

After the war, he became a high official of Soviet Military Intelligence—G.R.U. He served as assistant military attache to the Soviet Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, in 1955 and 1956. There he made many Western diplomatic contacts. To his new friends, he privately expressed his hatred of Khrushchev and his contempt for the Kremlin administration.

He later was appointed Deputy Director of the Foreign Department of the State Committee on Scientific Research and Coordination. In this new post, he traveled extensively in Western Europe to arrange for the exchange of scientific displays and information.

His real job, however, was his undercover work as a G.R.U. officer. But the more Western officials he met, the more he became convinced that Russia's destiny was entwined with that of the Western Allies.

To this end, he began working against the Khrushchev dictatorship. He had many high-placed friends in Moscow, leaders of the political, military, scientific communities. They shared his anti-Khrushchev views and fell in with him readily. What they did not know was that he was working with U.S. and British intelligence.

In October, 1962, secret police arrested Penkovsky in his Moscow apartment and tossed him into a maximum security cell at Lubyanka Prison. No reason for his confinement was given at this time.

In the weeks that followed, hundreds of Soviet intelligence agents were recalled to Moscow from posts all over the world. They were questioned extensively about their dealings with Penkovsky.

One of those who was summoned home, and subsequently placed under house arrest, was Soviet naval

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Capt. Yevgeny Ivanov

Capt. Yevgeny Ivanov, the Kremlin agent who shared Christine Keeler's affections with Britain's War Minister Profumo. Contrary to published reports, it was not the Profumo scandal that caused Ivanov's downfall—but his relationship with Penkovsky. The two were old friends and classmates for four years at Moscow's Military Diplomatic Academy, Russia's top espionage school.

Penkovsky finally was charged with espionage. But no mention was made of the plot against Khrushchev. Nervously, his co-plotters waited until the investigative furor died down. Then, at a secret meeting in Moscow last winter, they decided to go ahead with their plans.

It was now a case of necessity. All had a great deal to lose if Penkovsky were brought to trial. At the very least, they would be accused of protecting him and failing to report his suspicious activities. For among the conspirators were such formidable figures as Marshal Matvei V. Zakharov, Chief of Staff of all Soviet military forces; Gen. Ivan Serov, former chief of the K.G.B., the secret police; Marshal Sergei S. Varentsov, commander of Red Army artillery and rocket forces; and D. H. Gvishiani, one of Russia's top scientists.

Gvishiani was Colonel Penkovsky's boss in the State Scientific Committee. General Serov was Penkovsky's chief in the G.R.U.

A former deputy to secret police chief Lavrenti Beria, Serov had become head of the Soviet security service after Beria was executed in 1953. He held this post for five years and was in charge of security arrangements on many of Khrushchev's trips abroad.

In 1958, during a secret police shakeup, Serov lost his job as head of the K.G.B. He was placed in charge of military intelligence operations, as Deputy Chief of the General Staff. His immediate superior was Marshal Zakharov.

Gvishiani, Serov, Zakharov and the others felt it might be possible to save Penkovsky and get rid of Khrushchev at the same time. Gen.

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Khrushchev & General Serov

Serov, an old-time executioner in charge of many Kremlin blood baths, favored assassinating Khrushchev. But cooler heads prevailed.

They pointed out that if Khrushchev were murdered the Soviet Union would be split by a political crisis even worse than the one which followed Stalin's death. Hard-core Stalinists, moderates and liberals all would be thrown into a furious power struggle. Therefore, they voted for a bloodless coup, backed up by the guns of anti-Khrushchev military and security units.

It was decided to undermine Khrushchev's position by a propaganda campaign against him. Then political pressures would be brought to bear in hopes of forcing his retirement. If he refused to step down voluntarily, he would be arrested and held prisoner until he agreed to resign.

As his successor, the conspirators selected First Deputy Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, who also happened to be Gvishiani's father-in-law.

Apparently, Kosygin knew nothing about the plot. Or if he did, he took no active part in it. An old conspirator himself, he was the only survivor of a Leningrad group that had once plotted against Stalin. All his associates in the Leningrad affair were shot.

The plan to oust Khrushchev had the secret endorsement of Marshal Georgi Zhukov, the old war hero and former Defense Minister. Downgraded and kicked out of office by Khrushchev, Zhukov had been living quietly on his country estate outside Moscow. If the conspiracy succeeded, he saw a chance to return to power.

The plotters, on the other hand, wanted Zhukov's support because he still was tremendously popular with both the Soviet public and the armed forces.

In March, Khrushchev left Moscow for his palatial estate at Gagra on the Black Sea. As soon as he left town, the conspirators got busy.

General Serov, relieved of his G.R.U. command shortly after Penkovsky's arrest, contacted trusted

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cronies in the secret police and military intelligence.

Marshal Zakharov prepared orders to pull Red Army troops out of Moscow and send them south on spring training maneuvers.

In this way, the plotters intended to get rid of tank and infantry commanders loyal to the Kremlin. During training exercises, Moscow was to be guarded by Marshal Varentsov's artillery forces and by K.G.B. and G.R.U. troops.

There was nothing suspicious in the troop movements. Artillery and rocket forces had to remain in the Moscow area as part of the Soviet capital's anti-aircraft and anti-missile defenses.

Meanwhile, a whispering campaign against Khrushchev started in Moscow and spread rapidly throughout the Red empire and the free world. Soviet citizens were told the government had failed to keep its promise to give them more consumer goods, shorter work hours, more pay. Farmers were reminded of the failures of Khrushchev's agricultural program.

The Premier was criticized for backing down to President Kennedy during the Cuban crisis and for antagonizing Red China.

No one seemed to know exactly where the criticism sprang from, for no central source was apparent. Along with the rumbles of discontent rose another rumor:

Premier Khrushchev was about to resign.

This report started in early April and swept the Soviet Union like the spring winds. By mid-April, every Western embassy in Moscow had heard it. Ambassadors and intelligence agents gave the rumor top priority in their dispatches home. Political pundits speculated that something big was afoot behind the Kremlin's walls.

But Khrushchev, sunning and swimming at Gagra, said nothing. Then, suddenly, he made two swift moves that caught the plotters off balance.

He fired Marshal Zakharov. And he summoned Cuba's bearded dictator, Fidel Castro, to Moscow.

Zakharov was replaced as Chief of Staff by Marshal Sergei S. Biryuzov, a staunch Khrushchev supporter. One of the new chief's first acts was to change the spring maneuvers schedule, so that troops removed from Moscow would be replaced instantly by other loyal, combat-ready units.

The conspirators were stunned. Fearing Khrushchev's aides had dis-

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Marshal Zakharov

covered their plans, they braced themselves for an epidemic of arrests. But nothing happened. They then decided to delay their scheduled coup until after Castro's visit.

Meanwhile, the retirement rumors flew thicker and faster than ever.

On April 17, Khrushchev celebrated his 69th birthday quietly at Gagra. The Soviet press made no mention of it, but the Western press used the occasion to speculate on his successor.

Three days later, Khrushchev abruptly returned to Moscow and immediately went into a huddle with his top advisers.

In a dispatch from London, The New York Herald-Tribune reported: "Premier Khrushchev will use the May 28 meeting of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee to announce his retirement 'within two years,' according to sources inside the party."

The Moscow bureau of The New York Times noted:

"Premier Khrushchev grappled today with a complex of critical foreign and domestic problems that have inspired new rumors of his impending retirement."

Other influential papers throughout the free world carried similar stories indicating Khrushchev was on the way out.

Izvestia, the Soviet Government newspaper, did not mention the retirement rumors. In reporting on a Kremlin meeting on April 23, however, it listed First Premier Kosygin, the conspirators' candidate, ahead of his colleagues, instead of following the usual alphabetical order. To students of Kremlin intrigues, this special treatment indicated Kosygin had suddenly assumed a new importance.

Khrushchev's own choice as his

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successor was another First Deputy Premier, Frol R. Kozlov. But the Izvestia listing seemed to indicate Kosygin somehow had managed to nose out the favorite.

On April 24, a week after his birthday, Khrushchev dumped new fuel on the rumor bonfire.

"I am already 69," he told an industrial conference in Moscow, "and I cannot hold for all time the positions I now have in the party and in the state."

"His statement," said The New York Times, "seemed designed to prepare the country for his eventual retirement. The Premier appeared to be acting the part of an elder statesman seeking to impress on his followers that he was not indispensable."

Khrushchev's foes were jubilant. Despite the shake-up of the Red Army's top command, they had been gathering political and military strength. Now it seemed they would be able to force Khrushchev out without resorting to violence. Their only remaining worry was that Khrushchev would insist on Kozlov, rather than Kosygin, as his replacement.

This stumbling block was removed on April 26 when Kozlov suffered a stroke at his home in a Moscow suburb. He was rushed to a hospital, suffering from a heart ailment and partial paralysis.

That night, before the conspirators could take advantage of Kozlov's misfortune, Khrushchev held an emergency conference with Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky and a few loyal military and secret police commanders.

The Kremlin guard was doubled. Moscow was placed under martial law. Thousands of rifle-slinging soldiers and Tommygun-toting police swarmed over the city. Throughout the night, unmarked police cars sped through the streets.

General Serov was home asleep when the knock sounded on his front door. He awoke instantly, his brow beaded with cold sweat. There was no need to ask who had come calling at 3 A.M. In his 30 years as a secret policeman, he had made thousands of such calls.

But only now did he realize the terror that a knock on the door can bring.

He reached for the pistol beneath his pillow, then decided that wasn't the answer. He went to the door and let the policemen in.

They were new ones, mere boys. He didn't know them. But they saluted him with the respect due Lav-

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renti Beria's successor. Panic-stricken, Serov recalled how he had double-crossed Beria and turned him over to his enemies to be shot.

And now it was Serov's turn. The policemen watched him carefully while he put on his uniform. Then they took him away.

Throughout the night, the police vans rolled up to Lubyanka Prison, made their deliveries and roared off for a fresh load. In a maximum security cell in the prison's main building, Colonel Penkovsky slept soundly despite the bright light from a naked bulb in the ceiling. He was not aware that his friends had arrived.

When foreign correspondents noticed the beefed-up military and police units in Moscow next day, they were told security measures had been tightened in connection with Fidel Castro's visit.

The Castro invitation had achieved what Khrushchev wanted. It had confused the plotters and stalled their plan of action. It had given Khrushchev the time he needed to crush the conspiracy. And it provided a smokescreen to cover his retaliatory moves.

Before anyone outside the Kremlin knew what was happening, it was all over.

On May Day, Khrushchev appeared in the Red Square reviewing stand with Castro at his side. The Russian ruler was smiling, suntanned and confident. Western newsmen noticed the absence of Frol Kozlov (his illness had not yet been announced) but apparently did not realize other Soviet V.I.P.s also were missing.

Almost as soon as the May Day celebration ended, the long-delayed trial of Colonel Penkovsky began.

The thin, graying defendant pleaded guilty to high treason. He confessed he had turned over nearly 5000 photographs of top-secret documents to American and British diplomats. In all, he said, he had delivered 105 or 106 reels of film from a Minox camera, each reel containing 50 frames.

He said he had transmitted information on Soviet rockets, Red Army troops in East Germany, economic plans for East Europe and Soviet-Chinese relations, as well as other classified material.

The prosecution pictured Penkovsky as a high-living spy who had sold out his country for whiskey, women and American dollars. He had been promised, they said, a \$2000-a-month job in either American or British intelligence when he

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left the Soviet Union. On one visit to London, he tried on American and British military uniforms, tailored especially for him.

"I liked posing in an American colonel's uniform," he was reported to have said.

The five-day trial ended in a death sentence for Penkovsky. His co-defendant, British businessman Greville Wynne, was sentenced to eight years—three in prison, five in a labor camp—as a courier who took secret data from Penkovsky to U.S. and British intelligence services.

On May 16, five days after his sentencing, Penkovsky was marched into the execution yard of Lubyanka Prison and shot.

"Penkovsky is dead," Prosecutor A. G. Gorny later confirmed in an Izvestia interview. "He died like a despicable coward."

As many high-ranking Reds vanished mysteriously from the Moscow scene, a jovial Khrushchev hosted a huge reception for Fidel Castro. At the same time, he put an end to the rumors that his resignation was imminent.

"My position is good," he announced in a hearty booming voice. "May God grant that it shall be so to the very end of my days."

"The old man is himself again," one ambassador observed. "He intends to die in harness."

There was no mention, in diplomatic circles or elsewhere, of the purge that restored Khrushchev's political health.

This purge hit at least 200 Soviet politicians, intellectuals, scientists and military officers. Some were fired from their government jobs or shifted to insignificant posts. Others were tossed into prison or placed under house arrest. Still others were executed in secret.

Among the purge victims were Gen. Serov, Marshal Zakharov, Marshal Varentsov, D. H. Gvishiani. Other important figures were Col. V. M. Buzinov, Varentsov's chief aide; Maj. Gen. A. R. Pozovny, chief of political intelligence for air and missile forces; Col. D. B. Peyroskino, aide to Pozovny; V. Petrochenko, another top official of the Scientific Committee.

Though demoted and disgraced, most of these men are still alive. Penkovsky's swift trial and execution was a pointed warning to his influential friends. Now under strict surveillance, they can expect the same fate if they step out of line.

A small group of military officers who were in on the plot escaped across the Black Sea to Turkey, in a

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stolen launch. American intelligence agents in Turkey learned of the plot from these men.

The Red refugees were interrogated for several days by U.S. and Turkish intelligence. Then they were transferred, under heavy guard, to a secret location in the West.

Meanwhile, back at the Kremlin, Khrushchev was able to joke about his handling of the plot to force his retirement.

“It is good to keep our friends and enemies in suspense,” he told an East European diplomat recently. “I find it most interesting to read their speculations.”

Coronet

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