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POPOV

## The Conformist Who Failed

"My other piece of advice, Copperfield,"  
said Mr. Micawber, "you know. Annual income  
twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen  
pounds, nineteen six, result happiness.  
Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure  
twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.  
The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered,  
the God of day goes down upon the dreary scene,  
and -- and in short you are for ever floored.  
As I am!"

To make his example the more impressive,  
Mr. Micawber drank a glass of punch with an air  
of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled  
the College Hornpipe.

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"Copperfield," said Mr. Micawber, "Farewell!  
Every happiness and prosperity! ...In case of  
anything turning up (of which I am rather confident),  
I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my  
power to improve your prospects."

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So he put on his hat, and went out with his  
cane under his arm; very upright, and humming  
a tune when he was clear of the counting house.

--Charles Dickens' David Copperfield.

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1. On January 1, 1953, an American Vice Consul was entering his automobile with a lady friend in the International Sector of Vienna when he was approached by a short, neatly dressed man who asked in German for directions to the offices of the American Commission for Austria. The Vice Consul offered to drive him there, but the stranger refused the offer and instead handed him a letter, then walked away.

2. The letter, which was dated December 28, 1952, was in cyrillic. As translated later in the day, it read as follows:

"I am a Soviet officer. I wish to meet with an American officer with the object of offering certain services. Time: 1800 hours. Date: 1 January 1953  
Place: Plankengasse, Vienna I. Failing this meeting, I will be at same place, same time, on succeeding Saturdays."

3. When he finally revealed his identity, the stranger was Major Pyotr Semyonovich Popov, who had been assigned to one of the GRU residenturas in Vienna since November 1951. For nearly six years, beginning on New Year's Day of 1953 and ending in November 1958, he worked for CIA as an agent within the GRU, first in Vienna and then in Berlin, thus establishing a record for longevity and becoming one of our most productive Soviet sources.

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adult life, and at the same time he was given every support that our Agency could afford him within the limits of security.

41. On many occasions, Popov commented on the difference between our Agency's treatment of him, and that which he received in his own organization. "The way they (the GRU) treat one here in one's work causes much nervous strain. If one does not complete his assignment, he is treated almost as if he were a traitor to his country..." And on another occasion: "From the very beginning...you were never concerned about what I would bring, but you always stressed that I should be careful about my own security..." For this I am very grateful. In the work of our organization, they are never concerned about how dangerous an assignment may be for a man. They are only interested in squeezing all they can out of a person..." Finally, in August, 1955, at the last meeting before he left Vienna, as he and his case officer had a farewell vodka, he said: "This is what I like about your organization. You can find time to drink and relax. It is an entirely human approach. You have respect and regard for an individual... With us, of course, the individual is nothing, and the Government interest is everything."

50. The recontact, however, did not go exactly according to plan because, although he was briefly sent to Moscow, by 1 October 1955 Popov had been transferred to Schwerin in the northern reaches of East Germany. We were therefore completely out of contact with him from 18 August, 1955, the date of the last meeting in Vienna, until early January 1956.

51. Popov was obviously as anxious to reestablish his link as were we. Details of how he did finally recontact us are contained in a torn and tattered memorandum in our files, which is worth quoting at length. It is headed "Report by a British Officer" and reads as follows:

"On 10th January, 1956, I was reading in bed in my room in the BALTIC Hotel, STRALSUND, when, at 10.30 p.m., there was a knock at my door and a small, dark man in plain clothes looked in. He apologised, asked if I was English and if he might come in, to which I agreed. He then asked if I would help him, to which I replied that I would be delighted.

His description was as follows:

Age (apparent): 32

Very dark; sallow skin; slightly Jewish in appearance despite fact that he claimed to be pure Russian; hair thinning.

Height: approximately 5 ft. 5 ins.

He spoke fluent Russian and German.

"He then explained that he was a Soviet Lt. Col. and stated that he worked at the Intelligence H.Q. in SCHWERIN and that his office was in a building next to the KOMMANDATURA in the Werder Strasse, i.e., on the left of the KOMMANDATURA as you look towards the lake. He said that since he had been in SCHWERIN he had seen a number of American Mission cars and that he had been anxious to make contact with American officers, but had not had the opportunity.

"He had come to STRALSUND informally with his chief, a full Colonel of the Soviet Army. He had later told his chief that he was going out for a walk and a drink in the town and, on coming back to the hotel, had noticed a British Mission car. He had asked which rooms the British officer had occupied and had come to see him without the knowledge of his chief.

52. Popov's approach to the British officer was promptly reported [REDACTED], and an effort got under way immediately to set up a secure communications system. With approval of the U. S. Army Command, two members of the U.S. Military Liaison Mission, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], who normally visited points in East Germany, were coopted for the purpose of acknowledging Popov's message and setting up regular contact with him. They were to meet Popov in a hotel cafe in accordance with arrangements which the British officer, with considerable presence of mind, had set up during his unexpected conversation with Popov in Stralsund. [REDACTED]

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~~\_\_\_\_\_~~. The next step involved an elderly German from West Berlin who for the next six months, wearing the Dulles cuff-links, served as a courier to Pyotr in East Germany. A letter which he carried in late March '56 gave Popov advice on how to get to West Berlin: "Soviets travel to East Berlin from the DDR freely and frequently for various reasons... Some go in civilian clothes from East Berlin to West Berlin and their normal documents are valid. All normal Soviet documents are simply glanced at, in case of a check, and one proceeds with no questions asked." He was also given a letter drop to which he could write "to Uncle Ossip in Russian from any country outside the bloc of Peoples' Democracies and the USSR." But we would not use Mili as a channel, the worried case officer wrote, because "the situation seems too risky and obscure. ...Tell me how often you wrote to your girl and exactly what you told her." The courier runs were carefully planned, and Popov soon lost any nervousness he may originally had concerning them. During a late April contact, the courier noticed that Pyotr hummed throughout the meeting; when the courier commented on his good cheer, Popov replied that "on some days he felt cheerful, and other days not so much so; but that this was one of his good days."

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64. Almost comical, had it not been so serious, was his propensity for forgetting the details of meeting plans in Berlin. He arrived in West Berlin, for the second meeting there, having forgotten the location of the safehouse as well as having left behind in Schwerin his notebook containing emergency telephone numbers which the Base had given him; he had to return to the Soviet headquarters in East Berlin and call his wife in Schwerin by long distance phone to get them. The efficiency of meeting

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arrangements was slow to improve, even though the Base installed a red-lettered name plate on the door of the safe apartment, to ensure that he did not enter the wrong dwelling. By the fifth meeting, he had still not mastered the Berlin public transportation (S-Bahn) system. "He had taken the rush-hour S-Bahn express at Friedrichstrasse by mistake, and ridden non-stop through West Berlin to Potsdam. There he was accosted by a Soviet soldier who was on duty and Subject showed him his official udostovereniye. The soldier stated that he had better call the senior sergeant on duty, which he did." The sergeant permitted Popov to board the S-Bahn back through West Berlin, but reported the incident through military channels. Popov was later reprimanded by his Soviet superior for having transited West Berlin without authorization.



67. With all h<sup>h</sup> Approved for Release: 2022/08/25 C00144075less an invaluable agent, and we naturally did everything we could to further his career in the GRU hierarchy. Even before Popov's transfer from Schwerin to East Berlin, we had become involved, at his request, in providing him with some intelligence on his targets, and then in providing him with an agent to whom such intelligence could be sourced. "If you found a man, you could control the information he passes to me... I don't need any extensive information; just a little bit will do... It isn't the information that is important. It is just to record having accomplished my mission -- as we call it, to chalk up a point."

68. Such discussions eventually led to the idea of an American agent asset for Popov. "If you can get me a good American student," he said, "this would be far better than even several West German officials." The upshot was that the Base undertook to look for an American student with a technical background, who would be willing to serve as a double agent. The operation was immensely complicated in conception, since both the student and his Agency case officer were to be kept totally ignorant of our connection with Popov, but we did succeed in finding the proper person within a short time. Putting the young man, a highly-qualified chemist with bright prospects in a field certain to be of interest to GRU Headquarters, in contact with Popov was more complicated, however. Pyotr was unsure of himself, and had to be guided at every step. "Mike", as the agent was known, was the first American he had known other than his operational handlers in Vienna and Berlin, and to Pyotr everything about him was a mystery. For example, Mike had a French name, and the Deputy Base Chief had to explain that this was due to his French extraction. Nor did Pyotr know just what requirements he could levy on Mike. His superior could not give him

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much assistance, perhaps because Pyotr had been able to provide little information on his prospective agent. "I would like to ask you this question about Mike," said Popov. "We were considering this morning what type of work or what type of information we could logically request Mike to get for us, something entirely innocent. He is studying in a higher technical university. Could he be asked to write a brief report about this university merely to inform us about it -- what type of teaching program they have, and what courses they offer?"

Later in the same conversation, Popov learned for the first time about the existence of the military newspaper, Stars and Stripes. "Let me ask you this," he said. "Would you object if I asked Mike to bring me this paper? I could tell him that I have a friend who reads English... This would show my superiors that my American contact is bringing me material."

69. As the operation involving Mike began to show promise from the Soviet standpoint, Popov's superior decided to add another case officer. "Leonid Ivanovitch desires to inject Nikolai Grigoriyevitch into this operation...because he speaks English and has previously been in the USA." Would the injection of a second officer not undercut Popov's position? the case officer asked. "Maybe to a slight degree..." Pyotr replied. "But on the other hand it seems to me that this may be good. ...In case of a flap or a break-off it can be said that after all I am not working alone on this. There are two of us...

75. The fin Approved for Release: 2022/08/25 C00144075ember, Popov requested an urgent meeting that night. When he arrived at the safe apartment, he was weeping and muttering incoherently.

"Probably it's all over... I'll probably be sent back... It's all because of Mili." After being seated, he dried his eyes.

"Excuse me for behaving this way... Let me get hold of myself..."

76. In late October, an incident had taken place which brought Popov's continued relations with Milica to the attention of GRU Headquarters. A GRU officer assigned to the Soviet Embassy in Vienna, Maksimenko by name, had while drunk tried to enter Mili's apartment and, when denied entry, created a disturbance. When he then tried to drive away in his own car, the Austrian police arrested him and turned him over to the GRU deputy rezident, who came from the Embassy to get him. Maksimenko was promptly sent home, and an investigation was initiated. File traces were performed, and it was determined that Mili had formerly been employed operationally by Popov.

77. At this time according to one of Popov's superiors the GRU illegals Directorate in Moscow, to which they were both ultimately responsible, was under fire from the CPSU Central Committee for lack of accomplishment. Perhaps because of this pressure, there may have been a tendency to exaggerate the role of Milica and, by extension, Popov in the GRU's current difficulties. On orders from Moscow, Popov was questioned regarding his relations with Mili. "I was asked if I was acquainted with her and I had no choice but to say yes. Then they asked about any correspondence with her, how many letters were sent, what the contents were... Worst of all, a hint was made to me this

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way, 'Do you not think that possibly all these unpleasantnesses which we have had in our work could have been caused by her?'" Here though they were wrong in trying to connect Mili with the affair of the illegals in Brooklyn, they were on sound ground in believing that Mili might be "working for someone," since there was evidence that in 1957 she had become an informant for the Austrian police. This, together with the fact that she had broken with the Austrian Communist Party after having publicly exposed its involvement in an election fraud, made her continued relations with Popov a security problem of the first magnitude.

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