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My Trial in Russia

An American Tourist Is Accused of Spying

The author reported from Russia three weeks after being taken to a Soviet espionage base, continued in the Soviet Union, and now in the West. He is a former member of the West Coast Communist Party.

By MAURICE KAMINSKY
As Told to Peter Hahn

WE WERE STRIPPED in the Russian customs house a few miles from Uzhgorod, worn out by a month-long motor trip across western Russia and the Ukraine. After a series of annoying border difficulties, we were finally to get clearance to leave the country. We already had been delayed more than half a day by frontier guards.

The customs men had stated as it would be only another few minutes until we could drive across the no-man's-land separating us from Czechoslovakia. We were alone in the room. But all of a sudden, all five of them trooped back in. A customs man, who acted as their spokesman, glared at me for a moment. He said: "Because of the material we have found in your possession, we have decided to give you a personal search. Kaminsky is first—follow, Bennett."

'Humiliated and Helpless'

The guards continued examining my clothing and personal effects. They got more and more excited, giving me the impression that their "discoveries" were the biggest thing that had ever happened to the border detachment near Uzhgorod.

When they had satisfied their curiosity, they motioned me to get dressed again. Then they ordered me out of the room and gave Harvey Bennett, my companion, the same treatment.

There is nothing like such a procedure to make a man feel humiliated and helpless. I didn't know what they wanted with me. By now I was frightened, and I demanded that we be allowed to contact the nearest U. S. representative.

At that moment, some American tourists coming from Czechoslovakia entered the border station. They were being processed outside, and I sidled outside the building and started talking to them in English. They were an elderly couple, and seemed to understand Russian. They looked at me rather strangely when I explained our predicament and asked them to contact the U. S. Embassy in Moscow. I told them Harvey and I were being detained because we had been accused of taking forbidden pictures.

They didn't say anything. Meantime, a Russian guard who understood some English heard my efforts to talk to them and approached us. He ordered me roughly to "get back inside, and away from these people." He said I wanted to make "nothing but trouble."

I felt deserted. The American couple perhaps didn't want to ruin a vacation trip by getting involved in an "incident" just as they entered the country. In any event, I doubted whether they would carry my message to the embassy.

As it turned out, when the American press carried the news that we were missing, they contacted the State Dept. in Washington and told of seeing us at the border station.

After Harvey Bennett had been searched, the Russian officials made us sign papers saying that our passports and my notebook had been taken from us, and that we held no material claim against them for the treatment.

A tall man in a blue suit came into the

room where we were being held and told us that "unfortunately" we could not be able to leave Russia until the matter was cleared up, which might take until the next day.

I insisted once again that either we be allowed to contact the U. S. Embassy in Moscow or we be released immediately. The tall man said we could call the consulate from Uzhgorod.

We were taken back to Uzhgorod and ordered to check into the Summit Hotel. A man from the Soviet travel agency, had been summoned to the scene in the meantime. The tall man showed him our passports and he took custody of them (which is standard procedure in all Russia). In spite of the Inspector's smiling courtesy, I didn't like the look of things.

The first thing we did once we were back at the hotel was to go to the post office to call the embassy. Two men followed us and sat in the lobby. The operator told us we would have to wait at least an hour until our call could be completed.

We decided we would also send a letter to the American consulate explaining our predicament. When we went back to the hotel, the two men who had followed us stayed in the room.

When we returned at the end of an hour to find out the long distance call, the operator told us we could not contact the embassy. We could not



The author is greeted by his mother, Mrs. Ignace Kaminsky, at family home in Edwardsburg, Mich., when he arrived there Oct. 24 after being released by the Russians.

try to get the embassy and Bennett, who knew one of the consular officials in Moscow, tried to reach his residence. But all our efforts were futile. We never did get through to the embassy nor, incidentally, did our telegram ever reach its destination.

By the time we went to bed that night, Moscow seemed the remotest spot in the world. As for the U. S., my hometown, my family—they seemed on another planet entirely.

The next morning (Aug. 26) we were awakened by the Intourist man. He and the blue-suited official, who just "happened to be strolling by," told us that we would have to be interviewed by a "representative of the Soviet government," to clear up the matter, and that it wouldn't take long until we could continue our trip.

Around noon, Bennett was called into the office of the Intourist manager. I sat down outside the door to wait for him. A few moments later, the man in the blue suit came out of the office and ordered me to sit across the room, out of earshot of the proceedings inside.

Harvey came back two and a half hours later. He

had no chance to tell me what had happened. Now, I was told, it was my turn to step into the office. Inside, I found the "representative of the government," a dark blond man with penetrating eyes and an angular face. He was a pleasant-looking individual, about 45 or 50 years old. He just looked at me from behind his desk without getting up or introducing himself.

In front of the desk there was a narrow typewriter table, jutting edgewise into the room, and at the end of it an uncomfortable wooden chair. The man in the blue suit and an interpreter sat on either side of the government representative, whom we later began calling "Grindstone." I can't remember his real name nor many of the others.

"Grindstone" beckoned me to sit down on the chair and started asking my personal history. He began with my date of birth and went on through my upbringing and education—I received my master's degree from the University of Michigan earlier this year. He asked about my military history, and seemed interested when I said I served four years in Korea with the U. S. Air Force.

A Friendly Little Chat

He also asked about our itinerary and whether I had ever been in the Soviet Union before. I answered him truthfully, that I had worked as a guide during the U. S. exhibition in Moscow last year, and told him which cities we had visited during our current motor trip.

Right after these preliminary questions, I demanded again to be allowed to contact the U. S. Embassy in Moscow. His answer: "We don't think the embassy wants to have anything to do with the likes of you." We were in deeper trouble than I had suspected.

When I asked him why we hadn't been able to reach the embassy on the phone the night before, intimating that he had stopped our communications, he just smiled.

I asked whether I was under arrest. He replied quickly: "No, no; we are just having a friendly little chat with you fellows, trying to clear up all these matters." He also added that we were free to "take a walk, or something," whenever we pleased. When I asked how much longer we would be detained in this manner, he replied, "maybe another few hours."

The same pattern of interrogation lasted for nine days, with one exception: Bennett's sessions with "Grindstone" grew progressively shorter, while mine stretched out until, with a morning, afternoon and nighttime grilling, they occupied most of my day.

In the meantime, the Russian secret police had translated my diary, notebook and photo-log. On the first day that "Grindstone" had this translation on hand, he began asking me why I had taken these notes. When I countered that I had the vague idea of writing a book at the end of my trip, he belittled: "You had no such intention; you are an intelligence agent."

"You came here last year," he went on, "and you came back again because we did nothing to catch you. You are a wolf trying to get into the manger so that you can hurt the peaceful sheep. But we won't let you."

'We Are Hitting Pay Dirt'

As he continued his accusations, day in, day out, he had a habit of acting out every one of his statements in comic opera fashion, lurking in the shadows, photographing imaginary secrets and taking furtive notes.

The pressure of the interrogation increased as the days went on. When he finally got to a photograph I had taken of a radar installation and the corresponding notation in my diary, his eyes lit up and he exulted, "Now we are hitting pay dirt." He accused me of being a spy, of being sent by Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, to ferret out Soviet military secrets.

These accusations, incidentally, seem to have been picked up by the American press from Russian press releases. I would like to state once again for the record that I was not an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency or any other intelligence organization.

As the interrogation pressed on, "Grindstone's" manner seemed to change. He grew friendlier, more paternal. And, strangely, I began to accept him as a voice of authority. He seemed to be pleased and found me "cooperative" when, under pressure of his tutoring, I admitted that the book I had intended to write might not have been friendly toward the Soviet Union.

He even suggested a title for it: "The Soviet Union Talks of Peace and Prepares for War." And when, dead tired, I admitted that I might have called it that, he entered it into the record as a fact.

I was unaware of what was going on. Was I being "brainwashed"?

Continued Tomorrow.

CPYRGHT