

MAY 16 1964

LAS VEGAS SUN

PERS: HAMMERSTEIN

THE SPY WHO NEVER WAS — Part II

'Dumped' by C.I.A., Singer Outwits

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

EDITOR'S NOTE: — This is the second installment in the amazing, exclusive account of the author's experiences at the hands of Communist agents. Miss Hammerstein was released on March 26, after serving 27 months in Russian and East German jails.

GABRIELE HAMMERSTEIN
(As told to Peter Hahn)

NEW YORK (NANA) — December, 1960, was the gloomiest month of the year in West Berlin. A pall of cold, clammy fog had settled over the city, and my mood matched the weather.

I had arrived there four months earlier, to start rehearsing for an engagement at the State Opera House in the Soviet sector. It was the first big break in my singing career as a Wagnerian soprano, and now—only a short time later—I found myself involved in a dangerous cloak-and-dagger game between East and West.

Appealing to my loyalty as an American citizen, U. S. intelligence had asked me to report on my meetings with Russian diplomats and officers whom I met while performing in East Berlin. Then, the Russian KGB—state secretary service—also asked me to work for them. And when I reported this to our side I had been "dumped."

"We can't protect you. Either get out of Berlin, or you're on your own," I was told. This was a bitter choice. I didn't want to leave Berlin and my big chance for a singing career, so I decided to string the Reds along "playing it by ear"—without doing anything that might harm the West.

Russian Captors

The Soviet officer who was pressing me to spy for the KGB was Evgeni Khedrov. As a political officer with influence in cultural matters, he had got me signing contracts in Leipzig and Dresden, while I was rehearsing for my role as Brunhilde in Wagner's "Ring of the Nibelungen." Now he was counting on my gratitude as a "progressive, peace-loving American citizen" to give him details of the personal habits and government jobs of my friends with the U. S. military in West Berlin.

CIA WON'T COOPERATE

My contact with U. S. intelligence was Robert Bennett. He had sought me out when I told U. S. authorities that I had been asked to sing at the Russian embassy in East Berlin. After that, he had asked me to continue my friendly contacts with Soviet officials, and to report to him about them.

When I told Bennett of Khedrov's request, he refused to give me false information I could feed the Russians. But I knew that one word from Khedrov could nullify my chance to sing at the Staatsoper. So I simply invented a list of names, descriptions, and non-existent jobs. Khedrov trusted me, because he felt he had convinced me of the "benefits of socialist life."

My meetings with Khedrov—later learned that his name is Colonel Evgeni Alexeyevich Zaostrovstev of the KGB, once

oust from the U. S. for espionage — always took place in East Berlin, and was arranged by a complicated code. I would write him a post card to a cover address, ask him for a date, and then meet him exactly one week later than indicated. Our rendezvous spots were numbered. If he didn't appear within 20 minutes, I was to return in two-hour intervals. I also had been given several secret numbers to memorize, through which I could call him from East Berlin.

Evgeni, as he insisted I call him, had never attempted to pay me for any of the tidbits of information — all of them pure fiction, of course — I fed him. But just a few days before Christmas, as we parted company after one of our talks, he said:

"I'd like to give you a Christmas present, Gabi. But I don't know your personal taste. This is why I'm giving you this instead," and he handed me an envelope. "Buy yourself some perfume," he added. On the way home in the elevated railway to the Western sector, I opened the envelope, expecting to find something like a gift certificate. But it contained 800 East German Marks (nearly \$200, at the then going rate).

PERPLEXED BY "GIFT"

I was so perplexed by this "gift" that I called Bennett, even though there was no further reason for me to contact him, and asked him what to make of Khedrov's money. He explained that this was a "token," in spy language a sum of money which the Russians could hold over my head for information. I decided that things had gone

far enough, and sent the money back to Khedrov with a note saying: "This is too much for a Christmas present, and I have no price for treason." I hoped this would stop him from pestering me further.

The next day I got an unexpected phone call from Bennett who "had to see me urgently." When I arrived at the private West Berlin address he gave me, I was taken to a room which was bare except for a table and chair. "I want you to sit down," Bennett said, "and write me a complete report of your dealings with the Russians, repeat the information you told us about them previously, and explain why you persisted in disregarding official advice to end your involvement with the KGB."

He gave me pen and paper and it took me until 4 a.m. to finish the report. At the end,

I wrote: "I do not intend to sacrifice my opportunity at a legitimate singing career. I am not afraid of the Russians, and I intend to stand up to their efforts at recruiting me as a spy." As soon as I had signed the statement, Bennett took me home. I was relieved, for I thought that somehow I had written "finis" to my career in espionage.

The next few weeks went by peacefully. I crossed into East Berlin every day, unmolested by anyone. The East German Ministry of Culture was on the line, telling me that the date for my concert in Dresden had been set. A few days later, I filled the engagement. After the curtain closed, I went back to my dressing room, and there—cool as a cucumber—was Khedrov.

CPYRGHT

"You sing beautifully," he said. But the reason for his visit was the same as ever: he wanted "information." I balked. He persisted. "I know you are a progressive, peace-loving girl," he said. "So am I. But sometimes things happen which can't be helped." Then he started telling me about persons who "had dropped dead in the streets of New York," and intimated that his country had a long executive arm. Though he never spoke a direct threat, his inference became crystal clear when he started asking me solicitously about my mother, then 70, but still practicing medicine in New York.

I was frantic with worry.

Somewhat, I had to get out of this mess.

Back in Berlin, I went through the motions of making frequent visits to U. S. headquarters in West Berlin, bringing Khedrov "reports" on the activities of my—imaginary—friends. All the time, I was feverishly seeking an "out" which would convince even Khedrov that I could be of no further use to him as a spy.

Then I had an inspiration: How about telling Khedrov that I was being "questioned" by an "American intelligence agent" named "Mr. Smith," who wanted to know "whether I had met any Russians in East Berlin." With the CIA in the picture, I was sure, Khedrov would have no further use for me. The idea seemed fool-proof.

It turned out to be the most disastrous mistake I could have made.

When I told Khedrov of "Mr. Smith," his eyes lit up and he said: "Splendid, Gabriele! Now we're getting somewhere. Your next step is to make Mr. Smith interested in you as a possible agent. I'm sure he will want to recruit you. Then you can report to us what the other side is up to."

I had jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

(Next: How I Fooled my Spymaster with (Home-Made "Secrets").

CPYRGHT



GABRIELLE HAMMERSTEIN