

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 71READER'S DIGEST
September 1982

A READER'S DIGEST EXCLUSIVE REPORT

This investigation of the elaborate international plot to murder Pope John Paul II is the work of one of Europe's most respected journalists—American-born Claire Sterling, who has lived in Italy for the past 30 years. Such investigative reports as last year's *The Terror Network*, which *Foreign Affairs* called a "landmark book on terrorism," have earned Sterling an international reputation. They have also opened doors for her to primary information sources available to few in her field. Working on assignment for Reader's Digest, Sterling traveled for four months, tapping these sources in Turkey, West Germany, Italy, Tunisia and other countries. The evidence she has assembled casts sinister new light on last year's events in St. Peter's Square. A key element in the complex web: the Bulgarian connection. □□□

THE BY CLAIRE STERLING
PLOT TO
MURDER
THE POPE



On Wednesday, May 13, 1981, a young man in St. Peter's Square shot and nearly killed Pope John Paul II. The gunman, captured at the scene, was soon identified as Mehmet Ali Agca (pronounced *Ahjah*), a 23-year-old Turk. Within hours the world learned that he had escaped from an Istanbul prison while awaiting a death sentence for the terrorist murder of a Turkish journalist. Front-page stories around the globe described him as a fascist thug working for Turkey's neo-

(RIGHT) FOTAM TIME MAGAZINE

CONTINUED

Nazi Gray Wolves. It was presumed that the Gray Wolves had sent Agca to Rome to kill the Pope—or that he was a right-wing crackpot acting on his own.

But Mehmet Ali Agca was neither Gray Wolves hit man nor crackpot. And he did not act alone. As I learned in months of investigation, there is hard evidence that Agca was an instrument in an elaborate international plot. Whether through negligence, nearsightedness or indifference, not a single country concerned has pressed an investigation to the end.

Agca's trial in Rome in July 1981 lasted just 72 hours. Testimony was limited strictly to his guilt in actually firing the two gunshots that grievously wounded John Paul II, the first Polish pope in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Agca was sentenced to life imprisonment, but not a word was said in the courtroom about a plot. Two months later, however, in a report explaining the sentence, the judge referred to "hidden forces" and "the existence of a high-level conspiracy."

Italian belief in the existence of such a conspiracy was formally confirmed in June of this year with the arrest in Switzerland of a Turk named Omer Bagci. In asking for extradition, Italy accused Bagci of "direct participation in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II."

Long before this development, however, there was proof of a plot. At the scene of the crime, Agca had at least two accomplices. One, not identified, was photographed from behind (by an ABC-TV newsman) as he fled the crowd with a gun in his hand. A second, clutching a black dispatch case, was seen racing for a bus on the edge of St. Peter's Square. Several witnesses noticed him because he jumped off the bus at the next stop. On the basis of their descriptions, a composite portrait was made that bore a striking resemblance to a half-hidden face next to Agca's in a snapshot taken by an Italian photographer. At the close of Agca's trial, Turkish police tentatively identified this second man as Omer

Ay, also a terrorist fugitive.

Agca's conspiratorial ties with Omer Ay were subsequently traced through a passport office in the Turkish town of Nevsehir. Both men had been provided with perfectly counterfeited passports issued there on the same day (August 11, 1980), with consecutive numbers (136635 and 136636). Although these passports carried photographs of Agca and Ay, they bore the names of two Nevsehir residents (Faruk Ozgün and Galip Yilmaz). Agca was still using his Ozgün passport when he arrived in Rome.

Still more suggestive of a conspiracy are notes, jotted in Turkish, that were found in Agca's pocket at the time of his arrest. A "control" must have given him these last-minute instructions:

Friday between 7 and 8 a.m.
telephone.

May 13, Wednesday, appearance in the Square.

May 17, Sunday, perhaps appearance on the balcony.

May 20, Wednesday, Square *without fail.*

Choose a bag carefully.
Hair dye is essential.

If necessary, wear a cross.
Short jeans, sports shoes,
Montgomery jacket.

After Wednesday, round trip to Florence or nearby station. Be careful not to be seen around Vatican or places where attract attention.

Necessary: *tear up postcards.*

Finances: 600,000 lire (180,000 hotel, 20,000 telephone, 200,000 daily expenses, 100,000 for shoulder bag, pants and shirt, 100,000 reserve for emergencies.)

Tomorrow, money for three days in hotel.

Necessary: trip to Naples, purchase bag and hair dye.

Check if train ticket valid.
Be very careful about food.

Breakfast *here* at 9 a.m.

"Here" was the Pensione Isa in Rome, where his room had been reserved by somebody speaking fluent Italian; Agca does not. The hair dye for his getaway disguise

was found there. He had dutifully torn up postcards of the Pope riding in an open jeep. The bag, carefully chosen to contain his bulky Browning automatic, was with him at the Vatican.

New Breed. These scattered leads were not much to go on, but others were furnished by Agca himself. Although he refused to testify at his trial, he had previously told his interrogators a great deal—much of which turned out to be true. In this and other ways, he was full of surprises.

He fit into none of the common slots: religious crackpot, nationalist fanatic, mere hired mercenary, fascist hit man or communist agent. Tall and gaunt, with deep-set dark eyes framed by cropped black hair and high cheekbones, Agca displayed quick intelligence and a confidence close to arrogance. With cool skill, he faced down his Italian questioners, who had no doubt that he had been coached by experts.

Judge Domenico Sica, who has cross-examined scores of terrorists, assured me that he had never experienced one like Agca. "From the start, he dominated the interrogation," Sica said. "He would lead me where he wanted to go and then, when I confronted him with contradictions, he would just stop talking."

According to Nicola Simone, of DIGOS, Italy's anti-terrorist police, "He could even put himself to sleep in a chair and wake up refreshed. He was always in control."

Showing no signs of guilt or fear, Agca was at once secretive and oddly talkative. What he cared about most was terrorism for its own sake. While insisting it was his own idea to kill the Pope, he boasted of getting help from various terrorists abroad—"Bulgarians, English and Iranians."

"I make no distinctions between fascist and communist terrorists," he told his interrogators. "My terrorism is not red or black: it is red and black." He called himself an "international terrorist," one of a

CONTINUED

new breed emerging after a decade of planet-wide violence. From what I could confirm in his story, this self-assessment seems close to the truth.

If any country offered ideal conditions for development of that new breed, it was Agca's homeland. Eastern outpost of NATO and for years one of the few Islamic democracies, Turkey was singled out for systematic demolition by the Soviet Union as early as the mid-1960s. At that time, according to high-ranking KGB defector Vladimir Sakharov, a few young Turks were handpicked for training in the Soviet Union, and in Syria under Soviet supervision. With their return home, there began what Sakharov called "a violent campaign of urban terrorism, kidnapping and assassination."

Left-wing violence started in 1968 in the universities, eventually striking sparks on the right. Each side then inflamed the other, and the killings spread from big cities to remote villages. By September 1980, when the military took over to stop the turmoil, Turkey was enduring terrorist murders at a rate of about one every hour.

Favorite Son. Out of this ungovernably wild environment stepped Mehmet Ali Agca. Born in 1958, near Malatya, an ancient provincial capital, Agca was ten when the troubles began. Leftists held the city of Malatya, rightists the outlying shantytowns, including Yesiltepe, where Agca grew up. Friction flared between the right-leaning Sunnite and left-leaning Alawite Moslem sects, fanned by calculated provocation on both sides.

The Agcas were Sunnite. But Mehmet Ali showed no special grudge against the Alawites and seemed to have little religious commitment. "He went to the mosque—sometimes," his younger brother Adnan told me. He also drank alcohol, which is unthinkable for a pious Moslem.

At the Yesiltepe high school, Mehmet Ali is remembered as a model student. "He was very bright and conscientious," said the principal. His teachers recalled that he was "always thinking about his personal problems."

Mehmet Ali had plenty of those. His father was a drunk who beat his wife; he died early in the marriage, leaving her with three small children. Living on a tiny pension, Mezeyyen Agca leaned heavily on Mehmet Ali, her eldest and favorite son. He, in turn, seemed to adore his mother. To help support the family, Mehmet Ali worked after school, peddling water and hauling bricks and cement.

Last December, Mezeyyen Agca received me in her sparsely furnished two-room home and talked about her son. Nothing was wrong with him until he went away, she said. It was during his years at Ankara and Istanbul universities that "those villains got him." At home, he'd been "so loyal, so respectful—I'll never understand it." A solitary adolescent, he had no girlfriends, went alone to sports events or movies, took no interest in politics. "The only thing he cared about was reading," his mother told me. "He would read until three in the morning."

But before Agca left for Ankara in 1976, he did make some friends in Malatya. Nearly all were rightists, but a few were leftists, or so Agca wrote later in his Rome prison cell: "In 1977 I decided to go to Palestine on the recommendation of a schoolmate from Malatya, Sedat Sirri Kadem. Sedat and I went to Damascus. There I met Teslim Tore, who went with me to Beirut. After a 40-day course at a secret guerrilla-training camp, Teslim Tore helped me get back into Turkey."

Though we have only Agca's word for this, it cannot be dismissed out of hand. Sedat Sirri Kadem, who was arrested in 1981, turned out to be a member of Dev-Sol, one of Turkey's deadliest left-wing terrorist bands. He has admitted knowing Agca. Teslim Tore, also from Malatya, was chief of the THKO (Turkish People's Liberation Army), a virulent communist group. Police in Ankara said that, at last report, he was an instructor at a Palestinian guerrilla camp in Lebanon.

THKO is a sister group of one of five clandestine groups Agca said he "maintained relations with" between 1977 and 1979. Two of the others, Emegen Birliigi and Halkin Kurutusulu, are also hard-core Marxist. Agca named as well Akin-cilar, on the extreme religious right, and Ulkuculer, which stands for the neo-Nazi Gray Wolves. The fact that these leftist and rightist bands had been killing one another off for years did not necessarily mean they were hopelessly at odds. The two sides were committed to the same immediate objective: the dismantlement of the Turkish democratic state. Both leftists and rightists thus flocked to Palestinian training camps. An aspiring "international terrorist" like Agca would have had no scruples about shutting between one side and the other.

Volunteering to Hang. Whether or not he did go to Beirut for training in 1977, Agca's life took a mysterious turn soon afterward. On December 13 of that year, an account was opened in his name at an Istanbul branch of the Turkiye Is Bankasi, one of Turkey's major banks. The first deposit of 40,000 Turkish lire (around \$2000) was a fortune for a hard-up student in Turkey, and much more was to come. These mysterious payments are a master key to the Agca case.

At the time, however, nobody in Turkey knew about Agca's generous paymaster—or much of anything about the young man from Malatya. He had passed unnoticed through his university days, unremembered in class, inactive in student politics, unknown to the police.

Then, on February 1, 1979, Abdi Ipekci, editor of the moderately leftist newspaper *Milliyet* and the nation's most influential commentator, was shot and killed while driving home from work. Five months after

CONTINUED

the murder, an anonymous caller told Istanbul police that Ipekci's assassin, named "Ali," was at a right-wing student hangout, the Marmara coffeehouse. The police raided the place and arrested Agca.

Although *Milliyet* and the Turkish Journalists' Union had offered a reward of six million Turkish lire (\$120,000 at the time—a truly fabulous prize in Turkey) for the capture of Ipekci's killer, the anonymous caller never showed up to collect. And while the only evidence against Agca was his resemblance to a composite drawing made of one of the three men seen running from the murder scene, he confessed readily. "I did it; I killed Ipekci," he said at a nationally televised press conference—speaking as if he were discussing the weather.

Agca had come to the press conference after 15 days of secret interrogation at security police headquarters. Looking jaunty and fit, he had joked with reporters and showed no sign of police torture.

The story of Mehmet Ali Agca's arrest, interrogation and confession was told to me personally by Hasan Fehmi Günes, the man responsible for Turkey's security forces during the Ipekci affair. Minister of the Interior at the time in Premier Bulent Ecevit's Socialist Republican government, Günes was a radical well to the left of Ecevit, ardently committed to the incrimination of the far right for the worst of Turkey's terrorist crimes.

Nobody outside a tight little circle knew of Agca's arrest for days, Günes told me. "I didn't even tell Premier Ecevit," he said. Present in person during the interrogation, Günes conceded that Agca's ready confession was surprising. There had been no witnesses against Agca

until he himself named two. "Maybe he knew he'd be tortured and beaten into confessing, anyway," said Günes.

By freely admitting his guilt, Agca in effect volunteered to get himself hanged—and went still further by putting the blame on the far right for this sensational killing. First he named as the driver of the getaway car a right-winger called Yavus Caylan. Then he said he'd gotten the murder gun from a notorious Gray Wolf, Mehmet Sener. He also recalled returning the gun to Sener at a branch office of the (Gray Wolves') National Action Party.

Yavus Caylan swore on the witness stand that he drove Agca to the murder scene knowing nothing of the latter's intentions; he was sentenced to three years, later increased to 15. Mehmet Sener slipped away to Europe unhindered. (He is currently in a Swiss jail, on a passport-falsification charge. No more is likely to be learned from him unless Switzerland permits his extradition to Turkey.) The gun was never found. Above all, the faceless paymaster who had financed Agca since late 1977 was never pursued.

Sending Signals. The existence of this mysterious figure was first brought up in court at the end of the trial by the Ipekci family lawyer, Sahir Erman. Setting out to identify Agca's possible backers, Erman established that a series of bank accounts in different cities had been opened in Agca's name by somebody forging his signature. Amounting to 260,000 Turkish lire (about \$12,000 at the time), paid in over 12 months, the funds deposited in any one city were invariably withdrawn in another by the real Agca. The disparity between the forged and genuine signatures was obvious, Sahir Erman assured me.

Confined in the Kartal-Maltepe prison, Agca waited in what appeared to be the expectation of getting sprung. On October 11, he sent out a cryptic signal from the witness stand. "After I was captured," he told the court, "the Minister of Interior, Hasan Fehmi Günes, came to Istanbul and talked with me. His proposal was that, if I would say a high official of the National Action Party ordered me to kill Ipekci, or state that I was a member of that party, Günes would help me."

We may never know how much of this statement was blackmail or bluff. Günes himself told me about Agca's allegations, and added, "If all the charges made against me were true, I'd have been hanged long ago."

Agca may have been laying a false trail that first time, but there was no mistaking his blackmailing intent when he took the stand again. "I did not kill Ipekci, but I know who did," he told the court on October 24, adding that he would reveal the true assassin's name at the court's next sitting. It was an explicit warning to his patrons to get him out, and that is what they did.

On November 25, 1979, Agca walked out of Kartal-Maltepe military prison, donning an army uniform and passing through eight successive doors, each heavily guarded. He could not have done it without high-level help.

The day after his escape, he sent a letter to *Milliyet* about Pope John Paul's impending visit to Istanbul: "Western imperialists, fearing that Turkey and her sister Islamic nations may become a political, military and economic power in the Middle East, are sending to Turkey the Commander of the Crusades, John Paul, disguised as a religious leader. If this visit is not called off, I will definitely kill the Commander-Pope."

CONTINUED

Coming from a youth seldom seen in a mosque, the Islamic zealot's tone is unconvincing. In Rome, Agca brushed the letter off as a ruse to distract police from pursuing him while they concentrated on protecting the Pope. But this is a quite illogical explanation. A likelier version is that Agca was advised to write the letter for future use.

At this point in Agca's career, the setting shifts. After his prison break, his patrons handed him over the border and up the line to somebody else. The key to this next phase lies in a lengthy stopover Agca made in Bulgaria on his way to Western Europe.

To have stayed in Bulgaria for some 50 days, as Agca did, is enough in itself to raise suspicions about his future actions. Apart from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria is Europe's most inflexible communist police state; it is also one of Moscow's principal surrogates for terrorism and subversion. Bulgaria has serviced Western Europe's terrorist bands since the early 1970s, providing guerrilla-training facilities and a sanctuary, and acting as a prime staging area for trans-shipment of Soviet-bloc weapons.

The latest proof of this role came after Italian police liberated kidnapped American Brig. Gen. James Lee Dozier last winter and put his Red Brigade captors on trial. Their team leader testified that, as part of the effort "to destabilize Italy," Bulgaria offered the Red Brigades "money and arms" while they were holding Dozier.

One of Bulgaria's more pressing assignments for the Soviet Union has been to help destabilize neighboring Turkey. The Bulgarian secret service knows everything about Turks crossing the frontier, legally or otherwise. No Turk could loiter for long unobserved in Sofia, the capital—especially not somebody like Agca, a convicted fascist murderer whose picture had been featured on Tur-

key's front pages for weeks on end.

According to Agca's handwritten account, he entered Bulgaria on a less-than-perfectly forged *Indian* passport as Yoginder Singh. He stayed at several expensive tourist hotels before checking into the deluxe Hotel Vitosha. There, he said, he picked up the Browning 9 mm. he used to shoot the Pope, from some "Syrian" whose name he conveniently forgot. He also acquired the perfectly counterfeited passport issued to "Faruk Ozgün" from someone whose name he surprisingly *did* remember.

"At the Hotel Vitosha," Agca stated, "I made the acquaintance of Omer Marsan, whose name was given to me in Turkey." Marsan was a Turk living in Munich and "involved in black-market operations—cigarettes, liquor and occasionally arms." For \$1500 in deutsche marks, according to Agca, Marsan undertook to procure the Faruk Ozgün passport from Turkey and deliver it in Sofia within a month. In Room 911 of the Vitosha, Marsan also introduced Agca to a Bulgarian named Mustafaeof, otherwise unidentified but later to be accused of playing a key role in "running" Agca.

Whether or not Marsan acted as the courier, the Ozgün passport was given to Agca in Sofia, under circumstances directly implicating the Bulgarian secret service. The passport was stamped at Edirne on August 30 with a Turkish exit visa. That visa was a fake. But the Bulgarian entry stamp, dated August 31, was valid. Thus someone must have smuggled the Ozgün passport from Turkey to Bulgaria—someone who did not match Agca's photograph on the passport but who was able to have it stamped on the Bulgarian side. A courier must have rushed the passport to Agca in Sofia, since he used it to leave for Yugoslavia that very day.

From Yugoslavia, Mehmet Ali Agca embarked on a bewildering tour of the Continent, passing through 12 countries, never staying long, often doubling back. At 22, having spent all but three years of his life in a poor peasant home in a remote part of Turkey, and with no foreign language save halting and heavily accented English, he moved with apparent ease around urbane European capitals. He shopped at Yves Saint Laurent boutiques, drank champagne at fashionable Biffi's in Milan, and wintered elegantly in Tunisia and Palma de Mallorca.

From the time of his escape to his capture in Rome, he spent some \$50,000 on plane fares and first-class hotels. Not once in his travels did Agca cash a check. Yet he was never short of cash.

Apart from his stay in Bulgaria, Agca offered his Italian interrogators details of only one other stopover on the road to St. Peter's Square—a visit he made to Tunis. There, on instructions from Marsan, whom he had telephoned often in Munich, he claimed to have had another meeting with the Bulgarian Mustafaeof. But for all his reticence on some matters, Agca has plainly gone out of his way to volunteer information the police are unlikely to have found on their own. For instance, the very existence of Omer Marsan and his whereabouts might still be unknown had Agca not revealed them.

On May 22, 1981, nine days after the Pope was shot, Rome's DIGOS teleaxed Agca's revelations about Marsan to West Germany's *Bundeskriminalamt*. The German police brought Marsan in for questioning, and he admitted that he had stayed in the

CONTINUED

Hotel Vitosha in Sofia during the summer of 1980. He also conceded that he had met Agca there, but said he had known him only as "Metin." He agreed that Metin had phoned him "many times" in Munich. But he asserted that he had no idea Metin was Agca until the Pope was shot.

The German police released Marsan in 24 hours. He had answered questions "fully" and "openly," they told me, and had committed no crime in West Germany. Free to go, he dropped out of sight.

Agca's connections with Marsan, and with a German named Horst Grillmeier, are crucial to understanding the plot to murder the Pope. Both men are associates of Abuzer Ugurlu, the boss of an enormous gunrunning ring based in Sofia and known as the Turkish arms Mafia. Grillmeier, moreover, is known to have acquired—on July 9, 1980—the Browning automatic that Agca claimed to have picked up from the unnamed Syrian in Sofia later that summer. An Italian secret document describes Grillmeier as a "frequent visitor" to East Germany, Syria, Lebanon, Libya and Bulgaria. "We believe he has been supplying weapons to international terrorists," the report noted. Questioned by Austrian police after Agca's arrest, Grillmeier was also released in 24 hours, and vanished. Italian intelligence officials believe he is now hiding out in an Eastern bloc country.

It was former Interior Minister Günes who first conveyed to me the immensity of Abuzer Ugurlu's clandestine realm. "Ugurlu," he said, "he is the Godfather!" His smuggling trade with Turkey runs into millions of dollars. A Turkish citizen, Ugurlu also travels on a Bulgarian passport. He has a spa-

acious villa in Sofia, a privilege generally reserved for high-ranking Communist Party leaders.

Obviously, Ugurlu has earned these privileges by performing invaluable services for Bulgaria in its drive to dismantle Turkey. Large quantities of arms found in the possession of Turkish terrorists—both rightist and leftist—during the past two years have come through the network operated by Ugurlu, with Bulgaria's help. A defector from Ugurlu's ranks has stated unequivocally that the Turkish Mafia "is under the control and supervision of the Bulgarian secret service."

The long and short of it, then, is that Ugurlu worked for the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians, in turn, do what the Russians want them to do. No secret police organization has more intimate links with the KGB than Bulgaria's. What is more, the KGB keeps tabs on all terrorists as a matter of course. It is inconceivable that the KGB would not have known all there was to know about a terrorist as closely involved with the Bulgarian secret service as Agca was.

By leaving it to Godfather Ugurlu's men to take care of Agca's needs in Sofia—providing him with a gun, a passport, contacts like Marsan and Mustafaeof—the Bulgarian secret service could stay one degree removed from Agca. The Soviet KGB, yet another degree removed, might then truthfully say it had never laid eyes on the man who would shoot the Pope.

Inexplicable Bungle. We would surely know more about the whole affair if the police of West Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey had coordinated their efforts. Their poor teamwork in the case of Omer Marsan was even worse in that of Omer Ay. His arrest in the West German seaport of Hamburg last February—for a traffic violation—caused a ripple of excitement.

Starting on May 25, 1981, Rome's DIGOS, via the Italian branch of Interpol, had sent a series of communications concerning Omer Ay to Interpol headquarters outside Paris for worldwide distribution. They included the composite drawing of the man with the black dispatch case, the photograph of the half-hidden face next to Agca in St. Peter's Square, and a photograph of Omer Ay himself. An accompanying DIGOS report noted "a strong resemblance" between the latter two. Written beneath the composite drawing was a detailed physical description tallying closely to the real Omer Ay.

On June 4, Turkey issued an international arrest warrant to the Interpol agent in Ankara for "all-country circulation," formally accusing Omer Ay of helping to procure Agca's and his own counterfeit passports.

Yet Interpol headquarters denied that they had ever received the half-face photograph and Omer Ay's picture from Italy. Turkey's June 4 arrest warrant was not actually sent to Interpol until September 4; they received it only on December 7. The Hamburg police did not receive the DIGOS documents and the arrest warrant until the following February—nine months after the assassination attempt in Rome. By then, of course, the trail was cold. Omer Ay flatly told the German police that he did not know Agca and claimed he had never been to Rome. The Italians did not ask to interrogate him. The Turks did ask, but still have not obtained extradition.

It is hard to account for these mix-ups and lost chances, or for official indifference. In West Germany, for instance, a high-ranking police official handling the Agca case told me, "Our police simply do not take this case as seriously as you do."

Key officials in every Western country concerned have told me privately that they believe the Soviet Union was behind the hidden forces that "ran" Agca. "His control was probably the Bulgarian secret agent Mustafaeof," says Francesco

CONTINUED

Mazzola, head of an Italian parliamentary watchdog committee overseeing Italy's secret services last year. Without naming names, several high Vatican officials appear to share this view. After talking with Vatican sources, Francesco D'Andrea of *Giornale Nuovo* wrote about "a plan elaborated in collaboration between the Soviet KGB and a certain sector of the Turkish secret services, tied to a powerful group in their country that wants to force Turkey out of NATO and into the Soviet zone of attraction." Vatican officials reached this conclusion, he said, on the basis of "precise indications . . . passed through diplomatic channels."

For all Agca's moving in rightist circles, there is no evidence that he was ever a Gray Wolf. Portrayal of him as a rightist assassin does not really make sense. Why would rightists in or out of Turkey want to assassinate the head of the Roman Catholic Church, especially under communist Bulgaria's auspices? One might equally ask, what good could have come of it for the Turkish left? Among Turks close to the case, a widely credited theory holds that Turkey's right-wing forces were infiltrated and manipulated in the Soviet Union's interest. Here is what they believe then transpired:

Mehmet Ali Agca was spotted early on and recruited for future use on the turbulent domestic scene. He may never have known who really paid and controlled him. Familiar with right-wingers since Malatya, Agca was probably encouraged to keep moving in their company to build up a rightist persona. Whether or not he was also encouraged to help murder Abdi Ipekci, he was probably persuaded to confess to that killing, covering for others and pinning the blame on the right.

Once freed, he was too notorious to keep in Turkey, and evidently too useful to be terminated. His Turkish patrons therefore passed him on to other forces more directly accountable to the Soviet Union.

Many Turks believe that a number of their own security police were involved with these patrons toward the end of Agca's Turkish phase. As Interior Minister at the time, Günes has been under close investigation. His position has been complicated by his brother's arrest as a local leader of the underground Turkish Communist Party and the arrest of his two sons as members of the left-wing terrorist Dev-Sol.

Meant to Be Caught. A widespread assumption in the West is that the Pope must have been shot because he is a Pole. This could be true. Though Pope John Paul II is by no means an aggressive anti-Soviet hawk, he is undeniably the spiritual father of Poland's Solidarity trade-union movement, which could never have been born without his blessing. As we have seen since martial law was declared in Poland, Solidarity is an intolerable threat to the very foundations of the Soviet empire.

If that was the Russians' sole motive, however, why would they pick a *Turk* to fire the gun?

The Turk was there at St. Peter's to signal Christendom that Islamic Turkey was an alien and vaguely sinister country that did not belong in NATO. A Turk who happened also to carry the brand of a convicted fascist murderer was all the better for the part.

There is reason to believe that Mehmet Ali Agca was not only used but betrayed, that he was counting on his two accomplices to create a diversion at the Vatican so he could slip away. Instead, they ran away themselves, on orders. His right-wing persona firmly established, Agca was meant to be caught. "He was not in much of a position to bargain after that," said a high DICOS official. "If he talked, he would just be left to rot in jail. If not, maybe his patrons would spring him again."

As in Istanbul, Agca talked and did not talk, revealing just enough information—about his contacts with Marsan and Mustafaeof, for instance—to his Italian interroga-

tors to send a defiant and desperate message to his patrons. He is still waiting for an answer, from backers who may have no further use for him, whose faces he may never have seen, and whose true connections, perhaps, he never knew.



Mehmet Ali Agca at Rome police headquarters

CONTINUED



PHOTOS: (TOP) WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Assassin aims his weapon (circle, above) over the heads of spectators seconds before shooting



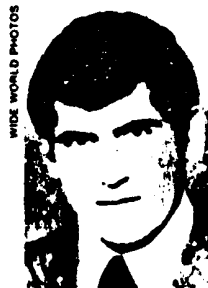
Abuzer Ugurlu, "The Golfather"



Hasan Fehmi Günes, former Turkish Interior Minister



Mehmet Sener



Omer Ay