

Espionage**Cold-War Riddle: A Most Unusual Spy**By **MICHAEL WINES**

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 22 — From the day in 1961 that he first met F.B.I. agents in Manhattan, Donald F. seemed a most unusual spy.

He knew secrets of the Soviet Union's military intelligence network and its nuclear arsenal that could be found nowhere else. He tipped the Americans and the British to Soviet agents who might otherwise have never been detected. In a job where longevity is rare, he was a grand old man, juggling two careers — globetrotting Soviet diplomat, American agent — for at least two decades.

When Pravda, the Soviet Communist daily, reported last week that Donald F., "one of the most important" spies of recent years, had been captured and sentenced to death, an American official privately called it a major loss.

Code Name Top Hat

The official may be right. Although Pravda did not identify Donald F., a review of Soviet diplomatic records shows that he is a senior Soviet Army officer, Lieut. Gen. Dmitri Fedorovich Polyakov. That conclusion is confirmed by former American intelligence officials.

General Polyakov, who served in the military from the 1950's to the 1980's, was known to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency by the code name Top Hat, the former officials said.

According to Pentagon records, General Polyakov last served as a lieutenant general in the Soviet Army Air Defense Command. That is a top post in the force, charged with defending the Soviet Union against nuclear attack.

Mystery and Suspicion

But beyond agreeing that General Polyakov held what Pravda called "a very important position," the report of the spy's downfall remains shrouded in a half-light of mystery and suspicion. Despite his decades of ostensibly faithful service to the Western cause, some American experts have never been satisfied that General Polyakov was not at heart an agent of deception for the Soviet Union.

The Pravda account provides new grist for the debate. While much of the newspaper's report accurately tracks General Polyakov's diplomatic career, experts say, the article veers from the truth at enough points to leave analysts puzzled and skeptical.

For example, the Dmitri F. Polyakov known to American officials was not recently captured and sentenced to

death, but has been dead for several years. Experts who believe in General Polyakov's genuineness say he was apparently swept up and executed in a wave of arrests of American agents in the mid-1980's, shortly after a series of security lapses rocked the C.I.A.'s Moscow station.

"A couple of years ago, for reasons that aren't clear to us, the Russians got a bunch of our guys and killed them," said a former official. "The consensus of the community is that he was one of them." That conclusion was later confirmed by Government experts.

Perhaps a Double Agent

Others say General Polyakov has retired from espionage and could not have been caught in the act of sending messages to the C.I.A., as the Pravda account reported.

Equally mysterious is why Pravda would admit that an American agent duped the K.G.B. at all. Some say it seeks to bolster the sagging career of a K.G.B. colonel, Aleksandr Dukhanin, who Pravda says captured General Polyakov. Colonel Dukhanin has been accused of bungling a corruption inquiry involving a Politburo member, Yegor K. Ligachev, who is a conservative critic of President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

Others say the aim is to burnish the image of the K.G.B. at a time when other Communist secret police agencies, from Rumania's Securitate to East Germany's Stasi, are being disbanded. The article on Donald F., which also praises the K.G.B.'s attacks on internal corruption, is one of many recent reports that cast the agency in a favorable light.

Still others contend that he was not an American spy at all, but a Soviet "dangle" whose 20-year mission was to spread false information and foul the trails left by other Soviet agents in the C.I.A. and F.B.I. In that view, General Polyakov either died peacefully or has retired with honors, and the Pravda report is but a final twist intended to convince the United States of his loyalty.

Among those holding that view are Peter Wright, the former assistant director of British intelligence and author of the book "Spycatcher," and Edward Jay Epstein, an American writer on intelligence issues, along with a legion of former C.I.A. officials who analyzed Top Hat and other Soviet "moles" of the 1960's.

The Washington Post _____
 The New York Times A10
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
 USA Today _____
 The Chicago Tribune _____

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"I never believed he was genuine," said one of the former C.I.A. officials. The official, like others interviewed, declined to be identified. The former official said he reviewed Top Hat's credentials in the mid-1970's as part of an analysis of Soviet informers ordered by William E. Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence at the time.

'The Guy Was Legit'

General Polyakov's defenders are equally adamant. "The guy was legit absolutely," said an F.B.I. expert on the Soviet Union from the 1960's. "There was never any controversy about it."

Although Mr. Wright and others say the F.B.I. and C.I.A. decided in 1978 that Top Hat was a Soviet double agent, Government officials insist that he was genuine and that "there has never been a legitimate debate" about his loyalties.

Legitimate or not, the debate has been never ending. The C.I.A.'s legendary spymaster of the 1960's, James Jesus Angleton, concluded early on that Top Hat and a second Soviet agent recruited at the United Nations, Fedora, were fakes. Their mission, he believed, was to discredit evidence provided by a Soviet defector, Anatoli Golitsin, that a Soviet spy had penetrated the C.I.A.'s highest levels.

Mr. Angleton never found the spy, and the turmoil that his search caused led to his dismissal from the C.I.A. But the debate over Top Hat and Fedora did not end. His successors conducted a review that appeared to clear Top Hat, but concluded that Fedora was in fact a double agent for the K.G.B.

Casey Reopens Debate

In the early 1980's, President Reagan's Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, reopened the debate. His own inquiry, mounted by a team of former agency officials, concluded somewhat weakly that "the charge of being a plant could not be substantiated," a former C.I.A. official said.

The public record, pieced together from books and the Pravda account, settles nothing.

Diplomatic records show that General Polyakov served in the Soviet Mission to the United Nations in New York in 1956 and again from 1959 to 1962, when he was promoted to the rank of colonel. After a stint in Moscow, he was posted in 1966 at the Soviet Embassy in Burma, where he was the military attaché.

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In the early 1970's, he moved to the Soviet Embassy in New Delhi and returned for a second tour in 1980, with the rank of major general, before returning again to Moscow.

Classified Conversations

The diplomatic cover masked at least two other secret lives. John Barron, an author and intelligence expert, wrote in 1974 that General Polyakov was a Soviet spy while at the United Nations. Former American officials say he was an agent for the military intelligence agency, G.R.U.

Pravda reported that he first approached the F.B.I. in November 1961 and later met American agents several times at the "Kamerun Hotel," apparently a reference to the old Cameron Hotel on West 86th Street. Pravda said the C.I.A., which assumed control of him in Burma, later communicated through personal ads in the classified advertising section of The New York Times, all addressed to "MOODY-Donald F." Such an ad appeared in The Times for 10 consecutive days in May 1964.

American officials of that era said General Polyakov seemed invaluable, providing names of Soviet spies, details of G.R.U. operations and political information on the Government in Moscow.

"Back in those days, there weren't too many defectors, and he was the best the bureau had," an official said. "It was pretty big stuff."

Who Misled Whom?

Mr. Wright said Top Hat provided the F.B.I. with copies of stolen British defense documents, leading to the arrest of a major Soviet spy, Frank Bosard, by the British secret service.

But Mr. Wright dismissed the tip as a Soviet attempt to generate rifts in the British-American alliance, since the documents in question contained top United States defense secrets.

Other authors, including Mr. Epstein, say Top Hat and Fedora gave the F.B.I. and C.I.A. data suggesting that Soviet nuclear missiles were far less accurate than they actually were. The misleading data, fed to the United States through the 1970's, misled the Nixon and Carter Administrations into making seriously flawed agreements with Moscow on limiting nuclear weapons, those writers contend.

But another C.I.A. official said that Mr. Casey's review of the evidence refuted those charges, and that "the record was pretty good as far as the analysis and conclusions" about Soviet nuclear abilities were concerned.