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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 15 July 2015

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(U) The Cold War was filled with stories of Soviet retaliation against prominent defectors; Walter Krivitsky (perhaps) and his friend Ignace Reiss, Georgi Markov, and, most prominently, Leon Trotsky.

(U) Krivitsky was a Soviet agent who defected in Europe in 1938 and was found dead in highly suspicious circumstances in New York in 1940; Krivitsky's friend and colleague Reiss had been killed by Soviet assassins months after defecting in 1937. Bulgarian emigre Markov was killed in London in 1978 with a ricin-laced pellet fired from a trick umbrella. Trotsky, a hero of the Soviet revolution, became Stalin's rival to succeed Lenin, lost out in the power struggle, left the country, and was eventually assassinated in Mexico in 1940.

(U) But one didn't have to be prominent or involved in intelligence work for the Soviets to spend months, even years, hunting the person down. Even the second mate of a merchant ship who deserted would get that kind of effort, as we know from VENONA.

(U) VENONA was a project that took advantage of an encryption error that allowed the U.S. to exploit Soviet espionage communications; U.S. cryptanalysts found that a fraction of Soviet communications from 1940 to 1948 could be broken into. Some of the communications from Soviet spy agencies told of efforts to track down merchant seamen who jumped ship. The [History Today of April 29, 2015](#) revealed how the KGB had whole networks of agents on ships. What might not be obvious was how much of their time was spent tracking down deserters from merchant ships.

(U) Even a mere second mate would merit months of pursuit, as shown by these VENONA excerpts about Elizaveta Kuznetsova, who deserted in February 1944:

(U) San Francisco to Moscow, [VENONA 65](#), (pictured):

"On the 9th of February of this year [1944] in Portland second mate Elizaveta Mitrofanovna Kuznetsova, born 1910, deserted from the SS Pskov. Kuznetsova without receiving permission from the immigration authorities to remain in the USA went into hiding. On this matter we are sending Mazhor [KGB officer V. A. Misluk] to Portland."

(U) San Francisco to Moscow, [VENONA 151](#) on March 30, 1944:

"Mazhor [KGB officer V. A. Misluk] [4 groups unrecovered] March 1944 in a report writes that Kuznetsova is still hiding in Portland.... K-13, E-14, and Igor [all unidentified] have been co-opted for the search."

(U) San Francisco to Moscow, [VENONA 293](#) of July 11, 1944:

"According to rumor Kuznetsova has married a taxi driver and is living in San Francisco [9 groups



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unrecovered] Portland [3 groups unrecovered] is [REDACTED]
being carried out. [2 groups unrecovered] to establish where she is living."

(U) San Francisco to Moscow, [VENONA 166](#) of April 16, 1945:

"According to our information, the traitor Kuznetsova is in a hospital in the Portland area (Kuznetsova [D% she has tuberculosis]) [11 groups unrecovered] probationer [agent] "Brams" ["Brahms"; in August 1944, the cover name referred to an agent on the SS Baku] with the aim of sounding out the frame of mind of Kuznetsova and the possibilities of getting her out. Brams is an old [C% family] acquaintance and enjoys her confidence."

(U) "C%" was a validity indicator, a way for the translator to indicate "maybe/possibly"; "D%" indicated somewhat less confidence.

(U) San Francisco to Moscow, [VENONA 295](#) of June 1, 1945 (pictured; the message is addressed, by the way, to a cover name pronounced "Sim-yoan"):

"We are reporting available information concerning the whereabouts of traitors to the fatherland: Kuznetsova is in a tuberculosis hospital in the Portland area."

(U) It is difficult to understand, much less justify, chasing down defectors and emigres, even those who speak out against the regime. We are even less likely to think that there is any way a woman in her mid-thirties, without secret knowledge, ill with deadly tuberculosis, newly married, and trying to start a new life deserved to be dogged like this.

(U) But the Soviet Union and KGB had their own priorities.

(U) From San Francisco to Moscow [VENONA 568](#), November 7, 1945:

"On 4 November this year the traitor to the Fatherland Kuznetsova was shipped to Vladivostok on the tanker Belgorod. Details in a supplement [unavailable]."

(U) It appears that Kuznetsova was kidnapped, taken aboard that tanker, and sent to the USSR, probably to her death, although we don't know her ultimate fate once she was returned to Soviet territory.

(U) Ironically, in Kuznetsova's flight to liberty, the ship she deserted from, the Pskov (pictured), was a Liberty ship. Both the Pskov and the Belgorod were built in the United States and given to the Soviet Union as part of the World War II Lend Lease program.

(U) For additional information about the KGB hunt for Leon Trotsky, go [here](#).

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Contact us at [DL cch](#) or [REDACTED]

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