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**“I Was”:**

**The Oleg Penkovsky Story and the Important of Human Intelligence in Cold War Crises**

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**Abstract:**

Looking at the debriefing transcripts from double-agent Col. Oleg Penkovsky reveals a wealth of information. This information proved useful in two Cold War crises: the Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis. While technology provides insight into what one's opponents are doing, it lacks the distinctly human factor necessary for a full assessment of a given situation. Looking at the case of Oleg Penkovsky, we see what might drive one to defect, the importance of human intelligence, and its effects on Cold War crises.

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## **Glossary.**

Brush Pass- A method of exchanging information in which two parties exchange information while seeming to accidentally brush past each other in public.

Chicken Feed- Initial information passed by a potential defector. It is used to establish credentials and trust between the two sides.

GRU- Soviet Military Intelligence service. Main focus was military, especially nuclear, but would gather any information.

KGB- General Soviet intelligence service. Main focus was political, especially nuclear, but would gather any information available.

*Persona non grata*- someone being told to leave a country, and not return. This is usually due to the person doing something illegal or worsening relations between the two countries. It can also be used as a verb.

*Rezident*- A Soviet or Russian Chief of Station in the intelligence services.

Savchenko- Military Attaché Penkovsky worked with in Turkey. Disliked Penkovsky.

Serov, Ivan- Head of the GRU during Penkovsky, previously KGB. Liked Penkovsky.

Varentsov, Sergei Sergeivich- Marshal of the Rocket Artillery. Penkovsky's patron.

## **Introduction:**

Spy satellites do not feel, spy planes do not need food, and drones do not drink water. Technology does not generally have the failings and frailties that humans do. It is ideologically incorruptible. However, technology has shortfalls of its own. This is where human intelligence, HumInt, becomes highly important. HumInt provides insights into the minds of the enemy, and provides necessary context for the full analysis on information gathered by technology. One is incomplete without the other.

By examining the information Oleg Penkovsky passed during debriefing sessions more closely we can see just how important his position was and the absolute necessity of human intelligence in the Nuclear Age, along with what may drive someone to defect. Penkovsky is one of the most important spies of the Twentieth Century, according to Peter Deriabin and Jerrold Schechter's *The Spy Who Saved the World*, but authors tend to overlook the uses of his information. Most authors focus on other more colorful personalities, or the operational aspects of Penkovsky. This leads to a footnoting of Penkovsky. Authors choose to focus on parts of his story, or those around him. They do not give the information he passed the full attention it deserves.

In 1960, a Russian intelligence officer approached the West offering information. This officer was Oleg Penkovsky, a colonel in the Soviet Military Intelligence, or GRU.<sup>1</sup> One finds Penkovsky's reasons for defecting in his time in Turkey. In this time, Penkovsky became heavily dissatisfied with the Soviet system, and even considered defecting on the spot. However, as we shall, see it was to the West's benefit that he did not. What he offered, and learned after

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<sup>1</sup> The official name of the GRU is "The Second Chief Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff".

this period, was beyond the West's wildest dreams: details on the Soviet missile program. He passed much of this information when he exited the Soviet Union in 1961 as part of his cover position in a different Soviet bureau. These trips took him to England twice and Paris once. There he met with his handlers, and, in a series of discussions lasting several hours each, debriefed the team on a wide variety of internal workings of the Soviet Union.

Penkovsky was active from April 1961 to October 22, 1962. In these years, there were two Cold War Crises, which set the tone for the beginning of the next phase of the Cold War: the Berlin Crisis of 1958-1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Berlin Crisis began in 1958 with Khrushchev threatening to sign a peace treaty with East Germany and lasted until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Both sides were readying for war in on this issue, and even the slightest edge could mean the difference between victory and defeat. The Cuban Missile Crisis is the closest the world has come to nuclear annihilation. The information Penkovsky passed allowed for the identification of the missiles the Soviets installed in Cuba. With a precise knowledge of the limits and capabilities of the weapons the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) to make rational decisions by knowing the stakes.

The nature of this study requires working in multiple areas; the first is the field of CIA history. There is also a much, much smaller field of study on individual spies. As this study shows, one must also consider the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and, lastly, East Germany because the information Penkovsky passed was directly related to the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis of 1958-1961. As we shall see, the literature on the CIA and Oleg Penkovsky lacks the attention of academics, the literature the Cuban Missile Crisis has only recently begun changing due to the waiting period for declassification, and the literature on the Berlin Crisis of 1958-1961 is well developed, but lacks mention of Penkovsky.

Studying the CIA is a fairly new area of research due to the CIA's tendency to overclassify. One of the most recent books on the history of the CIA is *Legacy of Ashes* by Tim Weiner. In this book Weiner argues that the CIA has been a failure from the start. Even when the CIA succeeded, it managed to fail. HumInt against the Soviet Union was a major failure that machines, such as the U2 spyplane or corona satellite, could not mitigate. Ultimately Weiner's argument is that, in order to maintain the national security of the United States, it is necessary to reform the CIA so the nation's leaders can know what those who threaten America are plotting.<sup>2</sup>

Weiner's call to reform is echoed in Joseph J. Trento's *The Secret History of the CIA*. Trento issues forth a litany of failures, as did Weiner. He also expresses similar concerns over national interest.<sup>3</sup> Joseph J. Trento seems to challenge Penkovsky's motivations. However, he wrote nothing outright and there is no direct evidence given.<sup>4</sup> When addressing the Penkovsky operation, Trento ventures to the edges of the historiography. He describes Penkovsky as a hardline conservative, who believed that Khrushchev was going to destroy the Soviet Union, and possibly the World, in nuclear war. While Penkovsky did believe that Khrushchev could lead to nuclear war, his professional frustrations also played an important role in his decision to defect. Thus we can conclude Trento represents an outlier in the historiography.

There is much less scholarship focusing solely on Oleg Penkovsky. One sees the standard treatment given by Gordon Corera. Corera dedicated approximately 50 pages to the Penkovsky operation in his book *The Art of Betrayal*, whose main focus was a larger history of MI6, the British secret intelligence service. Placing Penkovsky as a sub-plot in a larger narrative of the

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007) xiii-xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph J. Trento, *The Secret History of the CIA*, (Roseville, California: Prima Publishing, 2001), xi-xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph J. Trento, *The Secret History of the CIA*, 235-248.

CIA or MI6 is the most common way of discussing him. It is accepted that Penkovsky was a walk-in who genuinely wanted to work for the West.<sup>5</sup>

The original works on Penkovsky are *The Penkovsky Papers*, which he wrote himself, the other is *The Spy Who Saved the World* by Jerrold Schechter and Peter Deriabin. Most of the information in *The Penkovsky Papers* is contained within the debriefing transcripts. The debriefing transcripts provide the basis for any study on Penkovsky, this one included. In the transcripts, Penkovsky is noted as “S”, and the debriefing team leader is noted as “G”. *The Penkovsky Papers* appears to be a sort of manifesto by Penkovsky. Peter Deriabin smuggled the document out sometime later.<sup>6</sup> There was some debate over the authenticity of the document, but the CIA accepted it as legitimate.<sup>7</sup> *The Spy Who Saved the World* was the first work on Penkovsky, and provides an outline for most later works on Penkovsky. The most recent work on Penkovsky is *Dead Drop* by Jeremy Duns. The newest point this work brings to the literature is a different theory on Penkovsky’s arrest, which is addressed later in this article.<sup>8</sup>

There are a great many sources for the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is a subject which has been covered by academics and non-academics alike. Many of those involved have published memoirs. The most important of these is that of Robert Kennedy. However, there is a changing historiography as new documents have become available.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Corera, “Moscow Rules” in *The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2011) 135-183.

<sup>6</sup> Oleg Penkovsky, *The Penkovsky Papers*, trans. Peter Deriabin, ed. Frank Gibney, (New York: Double Day, 1965.).

<sup>7</sup> Unknown. “Concerning Penkovsky Memoirs”, Lt. Col. Oleg Penkovsky: Western Spy in Soviet GRU Collection. CIA Freedom of Information Act Reading Room Archive (henceforth FOIA) Doc. No FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012426.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Duns. *Dead Drop: The True Story of Oleg Penkovsky and the Cold War’s Most Dangerous Operation*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> James G. Hershberg, “The Cuban Missile Crisis” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* vol. II, ed. by Melvin P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 86-87.

Robert Kennedy's memoir *Thirteen Days* was the first work on the Cuba Crisis. Essentially, what Kennedy did is record an hour-by-hour analysis of the Crisis as it unfolded. Kennedy establishes two main camps: War Hawks v. Doves. The Doves, according to this book, were Robert Kennedy, President John F. Kennedy, and Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. This opinion was eventually successfully argued to the majority. The War Hawks were everyone else, largely the top commanders of the military. Essentially, Kennedy is breaking down what/how the Cuba Crisis happened.<sup>10</sup> The second main line of the literature of the Crisis comes from the October Crisis White House tapes, which record the conversations held by the ExComm. With Kennedy's book as the basis of all studies of the Cuba Crisis for the next several generations of historians, we see a stable scholarship due to classification of information. There were only minor changes as new information became available. We see many of these in a recent publication of James G. Hershberg.

Hershberg's article is found in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Therein, he describes the changes in the scholarship, of which there are several. Interestingly the role of Robert Kennedy is one of the subjects that has changed over the course of the historiography. Kennedy placed himself firmly next to his brother, in favor of the blockade. However he is now known for exhorting the CIA to give the US a more direct reason for invading Cuba. Hershberg is also able to more accurately trace the effects of the resolution of the crisis due to the time that has passed.<sup>11</sup> At the end of his essay, Hershberg points out how the scholarship is continuing to change. Russia is opening archives, and the CIA is declassifying documents. These allow historians to see a much broader picture. However, since these have only recently begun to

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Hershberg, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 65-85.

happen, the literature has yet to fully absorb the information.<sup>12</sup> Even with all of these works, Penkovsky's importance is debated.

*A Hard and Bitter Peace* by Edward H. Judge and John W. Langdon traces the entirety of the Cold War from its origins to conclusion with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This includes a section on the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis of 1958-61. The authors incorporate many of the changes, which Hershberg points out.<sup>13</sup>

The scholarship on the Berlin Crisis is highly stable. Scholarship from the earliest, *The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962* by Jack M. Schick to the most recent *First Steps Towards Détente: American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1963* by Richard D. Williamson. The origin of the Berlin Crisis goes back to the division of Germany in World War II.<sup>14</sup> This was a very tense issue in the Early Cold War.<sup>15</sup> The new works have a distinct advantage because they are able to place the Berlin Crisis in its full context.<sup>16</sup> None of the works reference Penkovsky. From the political perspective, this omission is acceptable. However, from the intelligence perspective it is absolutely necessary to include Penkovsky, as he passed large amounts of information related to this event.

There are problems in all the concerned historiographies. The literature on the CIA lacks an academic touch, as does the historiography of Oleg Penkovsky, the literature on the Cuban

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<sup>12</sup> Hershberg, *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 86-87. MI6 is still highly secretive, and has not declassified its documents yet.

<sup>13</sup> Edward H. Judge & John W. Langdon, *A Hard and Bitter Peace: A Global History of the Cold War*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.) 169-179.

<sup>14</sup> Jack M. Schick, *The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) ix-xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Robert M. Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin, June-November 1961*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps Towards Détente: American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1963*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2012) 1-12.

Missile Crisis does not quite give human intelligence the credit it deserves, and the Berlin Crisis has no mention of Penkovsky.

### **“They Deceived Me”: Penkovsky’s Early life and Career.**

Biographies are highly important in situations such as the West saw with Penkovsky. It reveals how a potential defector or double agent gained access to the information they did as well as their motivations. By looking at Penkovsky’s early life and career one sees how he got to be in a position to gather as much sensitive information as he did, and why he decided to give this information to the West.

Penkovsky was born in 1919 in the Caucus region of Russia, and his father left when he was four months old, leaving him to be raised by his mother alone. He went on to finish his classes and attend the Second Kiev Artillery School, graduating in 1939. At some point in this period he joined the Komsomols, desiring to enter the Communist Party in 1939.<sup>17</sup> During his candidacy, the Stalinist Purges were in full swing. He participated in these as a Political Commissar, a position he held for four years.<sup>18</sup> He was a good young Communist.

Immediately upon his graduation, he went on a 20-day assignment in West Ukraine in the direction of Tarnopol-Lvov as part of the invasion of Poland in World War II. He reported that there were few losses. Following this, he went to Finland as part of the Winter War with the 91<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division. The fighting virtually destroyed the unit. Only 10% of the original strength survived the action, and all the regimental commanders were killed. Penkovsky stated that the only reason he survived was because he was an artilleryman and they were somewhat behind the lines. With the destruction of his unit, he was transferred to the Moscow Military District; at this

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<sup>17</sup> Ultimately he was accepted in 1940.

<sup>18</sup> “Meeting No. 1 April 1961” FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012392, 3-4.

point he was twenty-three years old. Here Penkovsky joined the Military Council of the Moscow Military District, Extraordinary Missions Section. Through this, he met his future father-in-law, Dmitri Afanasyevich Gapanovich.<sup>19</sup> Gapanovich mentored Penkovsky, though not as much as his patron, Varentsov, whom he met shortly afterwards.

In 1943, Penkovsky went to Ukraine on assignment. Here he asked for front line duty. He was seeking glory and recognition because the war was almost over and all he had received for his service in Finland was a commendation and a silver cigarette case.<sup>20</sup> This was not good enough for the ambitious and vain Penkovsky.

Penkovsky received assignment to a subdivision under Sergei Sergeyeovich Varentsov, the Chief of Artillery of the Ukrainian Front, and a future patron of Penkovsky. Penkovsky worked under him for three months as the commander of a training reception center for anti-tank artillery regiments.<sup>21</sup> Penkovsky's career was off to a dazzling start.

Ultimately, Penkovsky's desire to go to the front was realized, and his orders transferred him to 323<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Brigade under General Tikvich. However, Tikvich was a drunkard and a womanizer, so he was removed and replaced with Penkovsky. Penkovsky received wounds and doctors sent him to Moscow for treatment and recovery in 1944. This was fortunate for him because he met many friends during his period of recuperation. At this point, he held the rank of Major<sup>22</sup>. Little did Penkovsky know his career would not advance much further.

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<sup>19</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 3-5.

<sup>20</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 6.

As Penkovsky was preparing to return to the front, he heard a tank accident injured General Varentsov. Penkovsky decided to visit him and brought gifts. Varentsov then promised Penkovsky his old regiment back and named Penkovsky his front line liaison. For his work, Varentsov also rewarded him with a recommendation to the military academy.<sup>23</sup> Varentsov was clearly taking Penkovsky under his wing and assisted Penkovsky's rise.

Penkovsky also assisted Varentsov by making arrangements for the funeral of Varentsov's daughter after her suicide. The military police arrested and executed her husband, a prominent military man, for his role in a black market ring while occupying Poland. The other Soviets ostracized Varentsov's daughter. One day, while working in a military hospital as a nurse, she grabbed the pistol of a passing officer, and shot herself in the head. When Penkovsky heard this, he sold his watch to buy her a dress and coffin, and made all the necessary arrangements. This greatly indebted Varentsov to Penkovsky.<sup>24</sup> Varentsov was quite the patron to have. The Central Committee made him the Marshal of Rocket Artillery after the War, and then later Chief Marshal of Artillery.<sup>25</sup> His friendship or enmity could make or break a career.

Penkovsky went back to the front in time for the end of the war, and Varentsov requested that he remain for a year with the occupation forces. However, Penkovsky desired to return home as his wife had just graduated from her ten year classes. Varentsov made arrangements for Penkovsky to attend the Frunze Military Academy, which Penkovsky entered in 1948 after passing the entrance exams. His classes took three years, and then he worked for a year based on

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<sup>23</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 7.

<sup>24</sup> Oleg Penkovsky, "The Penkovsky Papers," trans. Peter Deriabin, (New York: Double Day and Co., 1965), 27-58.

<sup>25</sup> "Meeting 6 Leeds April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012396, 2-3.

the advice of Gaponovich, his father-in-law.<sup>26</sup> His powerful friends and connections were beginning to prove useful.

In 1949, Penkovsky then entered the Military Diplomatic Academy, MDA, which he attended until 1953. The MDA was the spy school for those entering the Soviet Military Intelligence, or GRU. It was during his time at the MDA that Penkovsky received a promotion to the rank of Colonel. Penkovsky was the chief of class due to his experience and rank, yet another award for the ambitious Penkovsky. Upon graduation, Penkovsky went into the 4<sup>th</sup> Directorate of the GRU.<sup>27</sup> This Directorate was interested in Asia and the Middle East, and because of this Penkovsky went to Turkey.

Penkovsky rose and rapidly became a trusted official. This was largely due to the favoritism which was prevalent in the Soviet system. Through this system, Penkovsky gained access to many military secrets that would have been otherwise unavailable. This rise also shows the origins of his dissatisfaction with the Soviet system, which ultimately pushed him to defection.

### **“I am your soldier now.”: Penkovsky’s Decision to Defect**

In the previous section one clearly sees how Penkovsky rose to the position he did. However, to fully understand Penkovsky’s motivations to defect, one must fully explore his background, specifically his time in Turkey. Through inherent flaws in the Soviet System, its mishandling of Penkovsky, and Penkovsky’s personal arrogance, his defection becomes not a possibility, but rather a certainty.

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<sup>26</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 9-10.

Oleg Penkovsky, a professionally frustrated man, made the decision to betray the Soviet Union due to events that occurred after he went to Turkey as the *rezident* and acting military attaché beginning in July of 1955.<sup>28</sup> Seven months after his arrival, General Major Savchenko went to take over the position of military attaché. Penkovsky became his assistant, but continued to work as the *rezident*. Savchenko was an old man, and the two worked together for three months. However, after this period many problems began arising between them stemming from the actions of the other GRU officer stationed in Ankara, Lieutenant Colonel Nikolay Ionchenko.<sup>29</sup> Ionchenko was a poor officer to begin with. Penkovsky related:

[Ionchenko] was simply approaching Turks in restaurants, and offering them money to work for him. S: IONCHENKO was attempting to purchase military manuals from Turks in this crude manner. Naturally, the Turkish Counterintelligence was efficient and they noticed this. Now I will confess to you the following: My relations with the General and with IONCHENKO were extremely bad; they were trying to undermine me along Party lines. I will tell you the details of this later. ... I made an anonymous telephone call from a public booth to the Turkish Counterintelligence informing them of IONCHENKO's activities and specifying where his agent contacts were made.<sup>30</sup>

Savchenko and Ionchenko had become friends in Moscow. Savchenko worked to ensure that Ionchenko appeared to be a better officer than Penkovsky. Also, Ionchenko was bitter that Penkovsky was above him because Ionchenko had learned Turkish, and Penkovsky had learned English.<sup>31</sup> This conflict of interests and personalities was creating maelstrom which none of the parties involved could survive unscathed.

As time wore on and Penkovsky became more frustrated, he decided it would be best to transfer to a different station. The GRU Headquarters denied this request however. This greatly displeased Penkovsky and helped push him towards his decision. Penkovsky shows his

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<sup>28</sup> A *rezident* is a Soviet or Russian Chief of Station for the Intelligence services.

<sup>29</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 10-11.

<sup>30</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 11.

<sup>31</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 11.

arrogance in his own words: “By nature I am a vengeful person but at least on a basis of fairness. Even then I saw how unjustly I was being treated I had already decided to come over to [the West].”<sup>32</sup> The final nail in the coffin of Penkovsky’s loyalty to the Soviet Union was yet to come, and things came to a head with Savchenko over Ionchenko shortly afterwards.

When the Shah of Iran visited Turkey, orders went out from Moscow that all intelligence operations in Turkey were to be suspended. Ionchenko ignored this, and carried out an agent meeting anyway. Due to the heightened security and the fact that Turkish Counterintelligence was aware of Ionchenko being an intelligence officer, Turkish police arrested him, and, ultimately, declared *persona non grata* (png).<sup>33</sup> This event caused the storm brewing Penkovsky and Savchenko to break.

Before Ionchenko was png-ed, Savchenko ordered Penkovsky to go and pay Ionchenko’s bail. Naturally, Penkovsky was not happy about this because the operation should not have happened in the first place. To have received official operational funds would have meant going through Penkovsky, who would have rejected the request. So Savchenko paid for the botched operation out his own pocket. This act of deception led to a large fight between the two men, which culminated in Penkovsky accusing Savchenko of lying about his Communist beliefs.<sup>34</sup> Essentially, Penkovsky was accusing Savchenko of the ultimate betrayal in the Soviet Union. The die was cast.

Penkovsky, unable to report Savchenko via GRU lines, was forced to report him via the KGB *rezident*. This report made all the way up the chain to the head of the KGB, Ivan Serov. He

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<sup>32</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 11.

<sup>33</sup> “Meeting 1 London, April 1961”, 11. The term “*persona non grata*” refers to someone being told to leave a country, and not return. This is usually due to the person doing something illegal or worsening relations between the two countries.

<sup>34</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 12.

then brought it to Khrushchev because all compromises had to be reported to the Presidium. However, the head of the GRU brought in a report on Penkovsky from Savchenko. Khrushchev demanded that the liar be found. No-one reprimanded Penkovsky, not even along Party lines, but he was removed from his post. Marshal of the Armed Forces and World War II Hero, Zhukov reprimanded Savchenko for incompetence in duty, on the other hand. Shortly after Penkovsky's recall, the Soviet's also recalled Savchenko.<sup>35</sup> Penkovsky won the first round of this fight, but the second round was yet to begin.

Even though he won his bout with Savchenko, Penkovsky did not escape unscathed. GRU Headquarters recalled him to Moscow shortly after the argument. When he arrived at the train station in Moscow two of Savchenko's powerful friends, both of whom were generals in the GRU, confronted him. These two thought that Penkovsky wanted to be the military attaché, while Penkovsky believed he could have done a better job as attaché, he did not desire the position. They told him that no general in the GRU wanted to work with him because he made the GRU look bad in the eyes of the KGB, and he was a "tattle tale."<sup>36</sup> He went to see General Shtemenko, the head of the GRU, several times. Shtemenko claimed to not know him, and that he could do nothing for Penkovsky. Part of this was because one of Savchenko's friends was a deputy, who Shtemenko relied on for his experience in intelligence matters. Savchenko's other friend was preparing to retire, so things were expected to blow over. While waiting, the GRU Headquarters kept Penkovsky in the reserves.<sup>37</sup> This was a gross mishandling of such a vain and ambitious man.

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<sup>35</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 11.

<sup>36</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 15.

<sup>37</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 15-16.

In the recall of Penkovsky, we see further mishandling by Soviet authorities. He expected to go on leave, and then return to his position. This was not the case. Instead, the GRU Headquarters kept him in Moscow for the time being. In the debriefing transcripts, he says quite plainly, “They deceived me.”<sup>38</sup> Penkovsky had reached the peak of his disappointment and dissatisfaction.

To make it more likely that he would be sent abroad, Penkovsky entered the Dzerzhinsky Academy in September 1958 to learn about the rocket program, and what we see here is that as Penkovsky’s frustration and disappointment with the Soviet system grew, so did his access to sensitive information. During this time, Khrushchev removed Shtemenko as head of the GRU due to tension between Khrushchev and Zhukov, part of which included a sabotage school run by Zhukov and Shtemenko. Serov succeeded Shtemenko as head of the GRU.<sup>39</sup> This change of leadership alleviated some of Penkovsky’s frustration.

It was then that the GRU higher-ups considered Penkovsky for a post in India because of his background in rockets. Serov, the new head of the GRU, considered India a good place for operations, and it was possible that India would receive rockets. Penkovsky began preparing for the station by studying the codes, and other necessary information. The KGB denied him, however, much to his dissatisfaction due to a problem with his family history.<sup>40</sup> It was the rejection of his exit visa that sounded the death knell of his Soviet/Communist loyalties.

The problem with his family history, which led to the rejection of his visa, goes back to his father and grandfather. Vladimir Florianovich Penkovsky, Penkovsky’s father, was a mining engineer, and joined the White Army when the Revolution came, ultimately achieving the rank

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<sup>38</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 2.

<sup>39</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 16.

<sup>40</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 17-18.

of First Lieutenant. He either died of illness or was shot during the Revolution. Penkovsky and his mother developed a myth that his father had died in 1919. It was possible to overlook Penkovsky's father being a White Army Officer due to the circumstances. However, Penkovsky's grandfather was also a problem. He was a well-known jurist, and therefore nobleman, in Stavropol. Both of these were major problems, though most of the controversy seems to have focused around his father.<sup>41</sup> This was problem that had to come to the surface eventually.

With the dissatisfaction of the rejection of an exit visa due to his family history, Penkovsky began looking for an opportunity to defect. His first opportunity to contact the West occurred in August of 1960. He was on a train with his wife and daughter coming back from a vacation in Odessa, and spotted a group of American students. However, there was an Armenian with the group, who Penkovsky knew as a KGB spy. He began watching the American Embassy carefully, but impatiently, waiting for his chance.<sup>42</sup> He did not need to wait long:

S: These two instructors, one was tall and one was short. G: They delivered everything properly and you can see here your original letter. S: I had noticed them in the railroad car and remembered their appearance. I arrived in Moscow on the tenth of August and on the twelfth I spotted them as they were walking down to the river from Red Square. The tall man had an umbrella since it was raining. They were going to the bridge and I approached them. At first they were frightened, but I spoke to them at length and told them what a coincidence it was to see them again. They spoke Russian very well. I was so interested in the conversation, that, as an intelligence man, I made an error. I didn't say farewell to them. I had already given them two envelopes, and it was high time to end the conversation. As we approached a PEREULOK, I saw two militiamen by accident. One was talking to a woman, and the other was walking. I told the Americans to go with me to an entrance way so at least we could say farewell and I could shake their hands, but they were frightened and started to walk away.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 35.

<sup>43</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 35-36.

The students were right to be wary because the KGB enjoyed using similar tactics in operations known as a “dangle” operation.

In a dangle operation a Soviet, in this case, operative approached Western personnel offering to provide information or to defect. If the Westerner accepted, they were immediately arrested and declared png. The Soviets used these as propaganda victories, and acted as if they uncovered a Western provocation attempt.<sup>44</sup> Penkovsky was clearly not a dangle.

One of the students delivered the package to the Embassy. It made its way into the hands of John Abidian, the CIA’s man in Moscow. He immediately took it up to a secure room at the top of the American Embassy. This room, known as “the Bubble,” was made of Plexiglas, and was suspended within a larger room. It was air conditioned, but this did not help. It was still unbearably hot.<sup>45</sup> There was no way the KGB could bug this room, as they commonly did to foreign embassies. This is important because if the KGB found out about Penkovsky at this point, the operation could be over before it began.

Abidian opened up the package, and read the letter inside.<sup>46</sup> In his letter Penkovsky refers to himself as “a friend” and “your soldier-warrior for the cause of Truth, for the ideals of a truly free world and of Democracy for Mankind, to which ideals your (and now my) President, government, and people are sacrificing so much effort.”, and a sincere desire to work for the

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon Corera, *The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2011) 135-183.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Duns. *Dead Drop: The True Story of Oleg Penkovsky and the Cold War’s Most Dangerous Operation*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013) 51-52.

<sup>46</sup> Duns, *Dead Drop*: 53.

West becomes evident.<sup>47</sup> Abidian came to the conclusion that Penkovsky was a genuine defector, and passed the information on to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

At Langley, the information ended up in the hands of Jack Maury, the head of the Soviet Division in the Directorate for Plans. Maury passed the information to Joe Bulik, the head of Operations inside the Soviet Union. Bulik faced the task of discovering who wrote the letter and deciding if the author was genuine or a provocation. While Bulik did not circulate the letters themselves, he passed around the basic facts, and the unanimous consensus was that the author was genuine. Bulik then set up a meeting with Maury, Paul Garbler, the Moscow Station Chief, and Richard Helms, the director in charge of covert operations, to determine the author's motivations.<sup>48</sup> At this time, such a process of acceptance was necessary because both the Soviets and the CIA were smarting from the CIA's first big operation, Pyotr Popov.

In 1953 Popov, another GRU officer, approached the CIA in Vienna. Popov held the rank of Major, and fed the information on the GRU's structure and information.<sup>49</sup> This operation lasted until 1958, when the KGB forced him to become a triple agent, and pass false information. When he alerted his CIA handlers of the new state of affairs, the Soviets arrested him and his handler. They threw his handler out png. The Soviet courts sentenced Popov to death. One story says he was cremated alive before an audience of other GRU officers.<sup>50</sup> Such was a traitor's fate. Penkovsky knew what the stakes were, and what terrors awaited in failure. This operation caused

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47 Oleg Penkovsky, "Letter to be Passed to Appropriate Authorities of the United States of America", FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012268.

<sup>48</sup> Jerrold Schechter and Peter Deriabin, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, (New York: Scribner, 1992), 8-16.

<sup>49</sup> This makes the information Penkovsky passed redundant, but still necessary as it provided what is known as "chicken feed". Chicken feed is information which the other side already knows, but the subject does not know this. By providing truthful and accurate information, the subject builds trust from those he talking to.

<sup>50</sup> Schechter, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, 16-17.

major damage to both sides, as the CIA did not know what information was false, and the KGB had missed a spy right under their noses.

Despite these fears, the CIA dispatched an officer meant to contact Penkovsky. COMPASS, as he was codenamed, was a miserable failure, and has never allowed his name to be de-classified. COMPASS, a single man, grew paranoid and depressed during under his time in Moscow, and took to drinking heavily. He was tasked with developing an operational plan, and contact Penkovsky. His suggestions were to use the original dead drop developed by Penkovsky, or to have Penkovsky toss information over the walls of the America House, housing for bachelors in the American Embassy, at a specified time, on a specified day. CIA Headquarters approved neither of these plans. COMPASS did attempt to contact Penkovsky.<sup>51</sup> Penkovsky reported during one session:

... A Sunday, at 11 o'clock was when your man called me on the telephone. I did not understand a damn thing and he called at the wrong time, and I did realize the call was from you, but I understood nothing that the man rattled off. He said something about waiting and then "bye-bye" I was not in the best of shape myself but I was not drunk because I never drink too much, but I could not understand a thing.<sup>52</sup>

Penkovsky was hungover from a drinking session the night before, and COMPASS did not have very good Russian language skills.<sup>53</sup> The operation was not off to an auspicious start.

Time went on, and Penkovsky had many chances to make contact. All of the others Penkovsky approached were too afraid to take his information though. Through his cover position with the Soviet Union's State Committee for Science and Technology, GNTK, he came into contact with a British businessman by the name of Greville Wynne, who would become his

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<sup>51</sup> Schechter, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, 19-22.

<sup>52</sup> "Meeting 38 October, 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012418, 18-19.

<sup>53</sup> "Meeting 38 1961", 18-19.; Schechter, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, 20.

courier. Penkovsky pressed the information on Wynne as boarded a plane to leave.<sup>54</sup> Wynne dutifully delivered the letter to MI6. However, MI6 were suspicious of Penkovsky due to the directness of his approach, and wrote him off as a standard provocation attempt. Ultimately, the CIA had enough of COMPASS, and, with the refusal of the American Embassy in Moscow to allow a qualified CIA officer in, decided to bring the British in on the operation.<sup>55</sup> This was the only way possible to run Penkovsky.

The two organizations put together a team of two CIA officers and two MI6 officers. The CIA portion of the team consisted of George Kisevalter, from the Popov operation, and Joe Bulik. The MI6 team consisted of Harry Shergold and Michael Stokes. Together this team debriefed Penkovsky over everything he knew during his trips outside the Soviet Union in 1961, ranging from the organization and procedures of the Soviet intelligence agencies to the Soviet missile program.

These meetings occurred when Penkovsky left the Soviet Union, due to his good relationship with Wynne through his cover position in the GNTK. This occurred on three occasions in 1961, twice to London and once to Paris for trade fairs and exhibitions. Penkovsky believes that the KGB would not have allowed him out if it had not been for Wynne. This goes back to the KGB deeming his father politically unreliable.<sup>56</sup> In these meetings, Penkovsky discussed a wide variety of topics. One of these was the intelligence and security organizations of the Soviet Union. The other, and vastly more important, two topics were the Soviet stances on Berlin, and the Soviet missile program.

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<sup>54</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 36.

<sup>55</sup> Schechter, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, 33-35.

<sup>56</sup> "Meeting 6 Leeds April 1961", 16-17

## **The Neighbors and the Nearest Neighbors: The Intelligence Agencies of the Soviet Union.**

Being a Colonel in the GRU Penkovsky was able to provide a detailed description of the structure of the GRU, their intelligence operations, and some information on the KGB. While much of this information was already known thanks to the Popov Operation, it was still helpful. This updated information allowed the Western Intelligence services to more accurately seek out potential weaknesses in these organizations or disrupt operations. Such information was not available via other means.

The GRU's members mostly had military backgrounds, being the military intelligence department, which gives the West an idea on how many of its members think.<sup>57</sup> There was no one person to which the GRU was answerable to. Rather, there were people in charge on all levels. This allowed the *rezidenturas* to act independently.<sup>58</sup> This also allowed for a culture of graft and corruption to develop. These relations decided how high one could rise in the Soviet ranks. Penkovsky was skilled at developing these relationships being friends with many generals, and even having a patron in Varentsov, who became the Chief Marshal of Artillery.<sup>59</sup> It becomes apparent that the system itself made Penkovsky's defection possible.

According to Penkovsky, the primary purpose and basic task of both the KGB and the GRU was early warning of an impending nuclear attack. He brought this task with him when he began working for the West.<sup>60</sup> While the basic task of the KGB and the GRU was the same, the two organizations had different focuses. The GRU focused on the military and scientific, especially nuclear, advancements of the West, and the KGB focused on the political aspects.

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<sup>57</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 13.

<sup>58</sup> "Meeting 38 October 1961", 13.

<sup>59</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 6.

<sup>60</sup> "Meeting 7 Birmingham April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012397, 12.

By 1961, Serov was the head of this organization. Serov was a former KGB man, and, when Stalin died, he backed Beria in the ensuing power struggle. However, he was a distant relation of Khrushchev's, and was spared from being shot. Instead he was made of head of the GRU. He was a hard and brutal man. According to Penkovsky, he knew how to interrogate and shoot people, and left the executive functions to his deputies.<sup>61</sup> He also had troubles with another GRU official, who had many failures in Turkey.<sup>62</sup> This characterization given by Penkovsky allowed the Western security services to know what to expect from the GRU. They could then predict what actions the GRU was most likely to make, and then take the appropriate countermeasures.

The GRU had five directorates. The First Directorate dealt with Illegals. Illegals are long term penetration operatives. They are sent to live in a country using illegal papers making them appear as if they are citizens of the country. The term "illegal" stems from the fact that they are living in the country illegally, as opposed to "legals", who were under diplomatic cover. All spying is, of course, illegal. Serov believed in the heavy usage of Illegals. However, he did not like the head of the directorate.<sup>63</sup> The Second Directorate dealt with Europe, and specialized in radio intelligence.<sup>64</sup> The Third Directorate dealt with America. This was a neglected area. Penkovsky reported that the only GRU agents in this directorate were old and not very good. The Fourth Directorate was known as the "Eastern Directorate" because it dealt with all the Asian parts of the world, from Egypt and Turkey, to Japan.<sup>65</sup> The Fifth Directorate planned sabotage and morale operations. They had plans ready for all countries. All they needed was the command to go. Coding was handled by a separate section called the "Coding Section", and rear service

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<sup>61</sup> "Meeting 5 Leeds April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012395, 25.

<sup>62</sup> "Meeting 12 London May 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012400, 35.

<sup>63</sup> "Meeting 6 Leeds April 1961", 23.

<sup>64</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 13.; "Meeting 7 April 1961", 10.

<sup>65</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 13-14.

units provided logistical support, such as: clothing, diamonds, and gold for agent operations.<sup>66</sup>

Knowing these sorts of organizational details allowed the West to look for potential weaknesses in the fundamental structure of the GRU.

The communications between the Directorates was very strict. Penkovsky reports:

S: One needs a special pass to go to the First Directorate (Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defense). Even when I have to go to the Tenth Directorate (Countries of Peoples' Democracies), either I am met by the officer I am to see, after a phone call, or am told to go to a specific room or they may issue me a temporary one-day pass. Everything is done in a recorded manner. They are so strict about lost documents. There was one case where an officer was court-martialed for losing his work folio. Actually, two officers were enemies and one burned the working folio of the other and the one whose folio could not be produced was tried.<sup>67</sup>

Clearly, there was a high level of security in the GRU. Gathering information or infiltration was highly dangerous and no easy task. Despite the strength of these security measures, there was still a resolution passed by the Presidium pointing out other flaws of the intelligence services.<sup>68</sup> Flaws clearly existed, intra-office rivalry for example, the West simply had to find them to exploit them.

Penkovsky also detailed the radio services of the GRU. Some of the sites were permanent and others were mobile, but GRU officers on the fifth floor of the GRU's headquarters in Moscow handled all the Illegals. He also described the internal radio network of the GRU:

G: Do you have any other extensive radio station network throughout the USSR since distances are considerable? S: Yes. Every RP has its radio station, but of course their equipment is nowhere near the capacity of the GRU OSNAZ stations near Moscow. Often they act as relay stations and when they get an incoming message say from the direction of Iran, the entire coded message is transmitted to Moscow. They do not decode it at the RP. Of course if the message is directed

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<sup>66</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 14.

<sup>67</sup> "Meeting 4 April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012394, 8.

<sup>68</sup> "Meeting 6 April 1961", 18-19.

locally, say to the chief of a military district, it would remain there. This commander of intelligence operations in a military district is responsible for conducting intelligence against the country to which the district is adjacent.<sup>69</sup>

What this lets the West know is how the GRU communicated within the USSR, and the necessity of infiltrating the communications network to advance signals intelligence goals.

The KGB and GRU had separate radio technology shops, but the two readily shared information. There were two similarities between the KGB and the GRU radio communications as well. A sub-organization handled all normal communications, and the Eighth Section handled transmitting mechanics.<sup>70</sup> There are many other unnamed similarities stemming from the fact that the KGB had no formal academy of its own, so it stole recruits from the GRU's Military Diplomatic Academy.<sup>71</sup> What this means is that most of the KGB had a military background like the GRU. Even more importantly, it also means that the two organizations had similar operations procedures. This made counterintelligence much easier because once the procedures for one organization were compromised; the other one's were as well.

The KGB was a large organization with high salaries.<sup>72</sup> Penkovsky estimated that it was twice the size of the GRU. The KGB was unscrupulous over who they recruited adding to the size of the organization.<sup>73</sup> However, only young people were recruited as full agents.<sup>74</sup> Anyone deemed too old was treated as a trusted informant.<sup>75</sup> The Soviets also used local Communist parties as tools. All Russians reported to the KGB, and informers reported on everything while

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<sup>69</sup> "Meeting 14 Unknown Location (London?) May 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012402, 12.

<sup>70</sup> "Meeting 14 May 1961", 11-13.

<sup>71</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 15.

<sup>72</sup> "Meeting 2 London April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012393, 12.

<sup>73</sup> "Meeting 40 Paris October 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012419, 20.

<sup>74</sup> "Meeting 10 London April 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012398, 3.

<sup>75</sup> "Meeting 16 London May 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012404, 1-4.

abroad.<sup>76</sup> The KGB was an unscrupulous organization, and would do anything to gather more information.

The KGB had control over who went in and went out of the Soviet Union. They did not like sending unmarried people out, because they had no reason to return if they decided to defect. Having a family or close relatives gave the KGB hostages. When one was allowed out, one was given a set of instructions.<sup>77</sup> Penkovsky recounted a tale about one delegation member who made a mistake and misplaced an agent notebook:

S: Here is a good case. It can be written up in the press. I give you my permission. Let them think how you got it. Two months ago we sent a GNTK Delegation to the German Federal Republic. An engineer from Leningrad was sent along. He was slightly sick mentally. He made notes in an agent notebook like mine. He was not an Intelligence man, he was an engineer. Possible he was coopted; I never found out. We did not coopt him, possibly the KGB did. He put the notebook in the pocket of his overcoat and forgot it in the car when he got out. He got the overcoat back but the notebook was missing. He became so upset that when his comrades went shopping he hanged himself. He used the cord of an electric iron which he attached to the electric fixture on the ceiling. They had taken a portable iron to save money on pressing. He used the cord from this iron. The body was flown to Leningrad. G: He became scared? S: Yes. He hanged himself. He had a good wife and two children. They said that he was mentally unbalanced; he took it too hard. He was a fool, of course. But he did hang himself. The others returned and found him dead. It was two months ago. We were all called together; it was a big affair.<sup>78</sup>

While this example is extreme, it is clear that the intelligence organizations expected their proper execution of their instructions, and mistakes were not tolerated. Penkovsky's arrogance comes out with his giving permission to the West to use the information he provided.

This rough sketch of the Soviet intelligence organizations shows how someone on the inside can gather information that an eye in the sky cannot gather. It also shows the necessity of chicken feed in determining a potential agent's credentials. Without the chicken feed there is no

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<sup>76</sup> "Meeting 14 May 1961", 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> "Meeting 12 May 1961", 44-46.

<sup>78</sup> "Meeting 12 May 1961", 45-46.

way for the sides to build trust. Penkovsky also provided updated information on the GRU after any re-organization due to Popov.

### **The Two Pills: The Berlin Crisis of 1958-1961.**

After World War II the victorious powers, Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union divided Germany. This applied to Berlin, the capital of Germany, as well. As Berlin lay in the heart of the Soviet Zone, it quickly became a contentious issue, as the Cold War quickly began. Between 1958 and 1961 the issue of Berlin came to a head with Khrushchev threatening to turn control over to the East German government. While Penkovsky's information on the Soviet intelligence agencies, especially the GRU, was essential to establish his credentials, it was only with his help that the West knew what was occurring in the Soviet camp as the Berlin Crisis reached its peak in 1961, and led to effective decision making.

Stalin, the successor to Lenin, died in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev became the head of the Soviet Union after a power struggle between himself and Lavrenti Beria. While the West had built up its own impressions of Khrushchev since 1953, Penkovsky felt the need to pass along his own. Khrushchev rose up through the ranks and became Minister of Agriculture. While not a powerful position, he was able to build a basis of support for his bid to the leadership. Here he showed his energy and resourcefulness, as Penkovsky points out. He gathered those he had appointed to positions, who were also members of the Central Committee. This gave him a quorum, and allowed him to be seated in his position at the head of the Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup>

Khrushchev was clearly a clever and skillful leader.

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<sup>79</sup> "Meeting 2 April 1961", 38-39.

No matter how skillful he was, he did not have the total the support Stalin had.

Penkovsky related one anecdote told to him by his patron Sergei Varentsov about how the missile program needed greater funding which demonstrates Khrushchev's lack of popularity:

S: ...VARENTSOV told me how the meeting went. He said "Oleg, not a word about this". I'll tell you one interesting detail. At the last meeting which took place after the convocation of the plomas of the PROKOMITET they talked about everyone's troubles with agriculture. After this, KHRUSHCHEV traveled all over the country dealing with his opponents at the conference in accordance with the decisions of the Plenum. He arrived in Tbilisi, you remember, and then went to the East, to the virgin lands – talking about the great new territories and towns. All that time the military council were working on their plan – SUBLOV and MIKOYAN participated. The Ministers made reports. BIRYUZOV made his reporting on the questions of how they need more money and how rockets must be tested. There were numerous cases where the missions were not fulfilled, much new testing was necessary, and the problems must be looked into. VARENTSOV said, "Do you know that there was no one there who would support this! STALIN would just have banged on the table and that would have been that."<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, that Khrushchev did not have the strength of leadership that Stalin enjoyed.

To make up for his lack of popularity, Khrushchev moved to secure his position. He gave pensions to the families of those who were tortured and executed, and many of those arrested were rehabilitated.<sup>81</sup> He also reduced KGB controls.<sup>82</sup> While he was doing this, he was attempting to create a cult of personality. Ironically, as Penkovsky pointed out, Khrushchev centered his around denouncing Stalin and his cult of personality.<sup>83</sup> Khrushchev needed to increase his popularity before he could carry out his will with the impunity of Stalin, and he tried to accomplish this by pursuing multiple major programs at once.

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<sup>80</sup> "Meeting 6 April 1961", 4-5.

<sup>81</sup> "Meeting 7 April 1961", 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 18.

<sup>83</sup> "Meeting 31 Paris September 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012412, 26.

There were goals that Khrushchev changed his position on. Originally, when he first came to power, he emphasized long-range aviation, but he later switched to missiles.<sup>84</sup> He also outright contradicted himself on his policy towards Germany. However, according to Penkovsky, this was simply Khrushchev testing the waters. At the time Khrushchev first proposed a peace treaty, the Warsaw Pact armies were not strong enough to back up his proposed bite.<sup>85</sup> Penkovsky clearly alerted the West that Khrushchev was feeling confident enough in his armies by 1961.

One of the ideas Penkovsky pushed about Khrushchev is how many lies Khrushchev told. Penkovsky believed that the West could use this information to knock down any prestige Khrushchev tried gaining from summit meetings.<sup>86</sup> Two examples come up repeatedly. The first is the death of Mitrofan Nedelin, Chief Marshal of Artillery, and the U2 Incident.

In 1960, the Soviets shot down an American U2 spyplane piloted by Gary Francis Powers while on a reconnaissance mission over the Soviet Union. When Khrushchev confronted President Eisenhower about this, he was met with a flat denial. The Soviets produced Powers, and the Eisenhower Administration was thoroughly embarrassed. However, according to Penkovsky, there was no direct hit as Khrushchev claimed. It also took more V-75's to take down the plane than Khrushchev let on, not to mention the Soviet fighter jet which was also shot down in the process.<sup>87</sup> Penkovsky reported that Khrushchev feared that another incident such as this would lead to war.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, by the time the West trusted Penkovsky, the lifetime of

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<sup>84</sup> "Meeting 4 April 1961", 13-14.

<sup>85</sup> "Meeting 32 Paris September 1961" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012413, 32-33.

<sup>86</sup> "Meeting 6 April 1961", 18.

<sup>87</sup> Schechter, *Spy who saved the World*, 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> "Meeting 7 April 1961", 37-38.

this information had expired. The V-75 was to play a role in the Cuban Missile Crisis as well in the death of the U2 pilot, Rudolf Anderson.

Also in 1960, the Soviets were trying to find ways to launch their missiles farther and faster, even including nuclear power. At one of these tests, many of the top artillery commanders there, including Nedelin. The launch was set into motion, but nothing happened. The waiting period came to a close, and people began leaving the protective observation bunker. It was at this point that the second stage of the missile ignited and exploded killing all those outside the bunker, including Nedelin. To cover this, the Soviets announced that Nedelin died in a plane crash.<sup>89</sup> Penkovsky argued that if the West exposed this lie, it would embarrass Khrushchev.<sup>90</sup> While Penkovsky was meeting with his handlers, the Berlin Crisis was reaching its peak.

In 1948, in an attempt to force the Western Powers out of Berlin, Stalin cut-off the supplies to the city via rail and road. To get around this, without violating any of the treaty rights, the Western Powers began flying in all the supplies for the city with one plane landing after another. The Soviets gave up the blockade after eighteen months.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the West won the first showdown over Berlin.

Berlin remained a point of contention between the two sides. Khrushchev even went so far as to refer to the city as the “Testicles of the West” because, when he squeezed, they screamed. While relations over the city were tense, neither side did anything about it until 1958.<sup>92</sup> It was then that things started to get hot.

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<sup>89</sup> “Meeting 1 April 1961”, 28-29.

<sup>90</sup> “Meeting 14 May 1961”, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Judge, *A Hard and Bitter Peace*, 70-73.

<sup>92</sup> Judge, *A Hard and Bitter Peace*, 141-43 & 166-71

In November of 1958 Khrushchev asked the West to leave Berlin, and to encourage them he began threatening to sign a peace treaty with the East German government. This meant that the treaty rights were moot, and the West would be forced to deal with the East German government.<sup>93</sup> East Germany greatly desired this because it meant they could stem the hemorrhage of Eastern Germans fleeing to West Germany via Berlin by having control over access to the city from both land and air. What would happen is East Germans fled to West Berlin, there; they would claim their West German citizenship. Since the East German government still claimed these people as citizens, they were considered criminals. The refugees, therefore, could not take land routes to the larger West Germany. However, they could take flights.<sup>94</sup> So they did.

The West German government did not want the peace treaty Khrushchev was threatening because it would force the West to recognize the East German government as legitimate. This was particularly bad because the West Germans were invoking the Hallstein Doctrine, and would ruin any hopes of re-unification for some time. West German Foreign Minister Walter Hallstein developed this doctrine to isolate East Germany. In its most basic form the Doctrine was a staunch and rabid refusal of recognition towards the East German government. The West German government claimed authority over all of Germany, and demanded to be recognized as the only legitimate government of Germany. If another country held talks with the East German government, West Germany strongly protested, and would even go so far as to threaten to break off diplomatic ties with said country.<sup>95</sup> This was West Germany's way of fighting the Cold War.

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<sup>93</sup> William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 87.

<sup>94</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps Towards Détente: American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1961*, (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2012) 10.

<sup>95</sup> Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 44-55.

In 1961 Khrushchev threatened the peace treaty again after the failure of the Vienna Summit. This time he was much more serious than previous attempts as Khrushchev intended to announce it before the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Conference in Moscow in October 1961. The West scrambled to find a response, and received a six-month reprieve from the execution of the treaty for their efforts.<sup>96</sup> Khrushchev still had plans to announce the treaty at the Party Conference though.

The Party Conference was to be quite the affair. A delegation from China led by Zhou Enlai was to attend. This delegation would walk out after a speech by Zhou due to the Sino-Soviet split. (While the West suspected the Sino-Soviet split, Penkovsky confirmed this.<sup>97</sup>) Heads of state from other People's Democracies planned to attend as well. The party chairs for Communist parties in the West also attended.<sup>98</sup> During this, the Soviets had something much more sinister planned.

While the Party sat in conference the Soviet military, in conjunction with its Warsaw Pact allies, were performing military maneuvers on a massive scale. The entirety of the various Warsaw Pact militaries were prepared, including the rear services of all the Soviet military districts and even the GRU.<sup>99</sup> This was the largest mobilization of militaries to that point.

According to the rumors Penkovsky heard, the purposes of the manoeuvres were twofold. The first purpose was to determine the capabilities of units: seeing which ones were good at offense, which were better at defense, and just a general check on training and combat readiness.

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<sup>96</sup> Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 95-99.; Williamson, *First Steps Towards Détente*, 29.

<sup>97</sup> "Meeting 32 September 1961", 30-31.

<sup>98</sup> Robert M. Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet –American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin, June-November 1961*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 339-345.

<sup>99</sup> "Meeting 31 September 1961", 15-16.

The second purpose was to have troops ready in case the West reacted violently to the signing of the peace treaty.<sup>100</sup> Penkovsky explained it thus:

S.: Let me review. Immediately after the Party Conference KHRUSHCHEV wants to sign the Peace Treaty; at the time of the signing he wants to have all possible military units in a state of combat readiness. If necessary he will strike. If it is only a local attack by us then it will be parried, but of course if a larger conflict develops that is why combat readiness is needed. KHRUSHCHEV, our General Staff and the GRU know perfectly well that secret preparations in modern times are not possible due to intelligence techniques. But under the guise of manoeuvres, concerning which he will insist that they are only manoeuvres, their extent and duration can easily be extended. If the allies swallow the second pill and say “very well since you have signed a treaty with East Germany we will deal with East Germany”, then the strain will be relieved and the manoeuvres will terminate and the result of these will serve as a valuable training exercise for joint operations. If not the powder is still dry and military action can still be employed. This is the dual purpose for which these manoeuvres are planned for the early days of October.<sup>101</sup>

Tensions were rising over the divided Germany.

Penkovsky also heard rumors about the Berlin Wall in Moscow. However, due to the speed with which the Wall was erected, it was not possible for the West to receive any information, as there was no operational procedure for Penkovsky to deal with this.<sup>102</sup> The rapidity of the erection of the Berlin Wall led to a revision of the operational plan, which the team discussed with Penkovsky in his second trip out of the Soviet Union in 1961. In the original plan Penkovsky was to do a sort of modified brush pass with Janet Chisholm, the wife of the MI6 Moscow Station Chief. The two would meet “coincidentally” in a park, and Penkovsky would put a box of candies loaded with exposed Minox roles in the stroller of the youngest.<sup>103</sup> Chisholm would then switch that box with a real box, previously hidden in the stroller, to give to

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<sup>100</sup> “Meeting 31 September 1961”, 8-9.

<sup>101</sup> “Meeting 31 September 1961”, 10.

<sup>102</sup> “Meeting 31 September 1961”, 9.

<sup>103</sup> A Minox is a small camera used to photograph documents, and is set to be focused at 17 centimeters.

the children. However they could only do this on certain days.<sup>104</sup> To remedy this several suggestions were given. The temporary solution was to use a dead drop, and give a specific person a call. An American representative would then empty the dead drop within the next half-hour.<sup>105</sup> Although the West did not receive the information, they knew that the Soviets were up to something, and considering the climate of the times, Berlin was the most logical place to look. With the changes in place, the operation was in full swing, and things were going well.

Ultimately, the information passed by Penkovsky on the manoeuvres was unnecessary because Khrushchev allowed the ultimatum for the signing of the peace treaty to lapse. However, with the Cold War warming, knowing that the Soviets and their allies were planning military manoeuvres allowed the West to begin their own preparations to pre-empt any actions by the Soviets. U2 spy planes or Corona Satellites, the two technological masterpieces of the early CIA, could not gather the information presented by Penkovsky but rather human ears had to listen for it.

### **“If we give them rockets there will be a war.”: The Cuban Missile Crisis**

With the conclusion of Berlin as a point of contention, the next crisis could come anywhere, and come it did. The next crisis came in the form of the Cuban Missile Crisis as the Soviets were attempting to install Intermediate Range, IRBM, and Medium Range, MRBM, ballistic missiles in Cuba. As Penkovsky had studied the Soviet missile program, the West knew the precise ranges and payloads, among other technical details of the Soviet missile program.

There were many reasons for Cubo-Soviet decision to install missiles on the island of Cuba. The first and foremost was the new Communist government of Cuba felt threatened by the

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<sup>104</sup> “Meeting 35 Paris September 1961” FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012415, 8.

<sup>105</sup> “Meeting 37 Paris October 1961” FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012417, 6-8.

United States, which was actively hostile towards the Castro Regime. The most blatant of these was the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs in mid-April 1961. In which a group of American trained Cuban émigrés landed at the Bay of Pigs.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately the invasion failed for a variety of reasons.

There were many other blatant American attempts to subvert the regime. In January of 1962, the US gathered votes to suspend Cuba from the Organization of American States. Many of these states also followed the American example and ended diplomatic relations with Cuba. The US also enacted economic aggression against Cuba going back to trade restrictions in 1960. By early 1962 these restrictions had expanded to reach a full embargo.<sup>107</sup> These actions were viewed as diplomatic and economic preparations for invasion.

In 1962, there were two extensive US military exercises in the Caribbean, both of which appeared to be practice for invading Cuba. Leftovers from the botched Bay of Pigs Invasion were rolled into a covert action plan called “Operation Mongoose”. The purpose of Operation Mongoose was to infiltrate Cuba for intelligence, but also for raids, and if possible, assassinating Castro.<sup>108</sup> These were clearly thinly veiled preparations for an invasion of Cuba.

Another contributing factor in the decision to place missiles in Cuba comes from the Soviet side: the American installation of Jupiter missiles in Turkey in 1961. These missiles were capable of carrying nuclear warheads, and delivering nuclear payloads into the important cities of the Soviet Union, such as Moscow.<sup>109</sup> The installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba was not an

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<sup>106</sup> Judge, *A Hard and Bitter Peace*, 160-164.

<sup>107</sup> Raymond Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Revised Ed. (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1989) 8-9.

<sup>108</sup> Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 6-7.

<sup>109</sup> Schechter, *The Spy Who Saved the World*, 105.

act of aggression, but rather a restoration of nuclear parity. Deterring an American invasion was simply an additional advantage.

Another Soviet motivation was that Khrushchev thought he could get away with installing offensive missiles without the West noticing.<sup>110</sup> Looking back, if it had not been for the U2 spyplane flights John McCone ordered over the island, Khrushchev probably would have gotten away with it.<sup>111</sup> Both sides had their motivations. A line was being drawn in the sand, and crossing this line meant nuclear war.

The Kennedy Administration did not believe McCone when he warned the administration of the potential for Soviet missiles. It took the observation of semi-trucks carrying missile-like tubes to get the White House to allow the resumption of U2 overflights of Cuba.<sup>112</sup> This clearly shows the importance of technological intelligence. However in order to understand the interplay between the TechInt and the HumInt in this situation it is necessary to go to a different time and place.

In World War II, the RAF flew over the German V-weapon research site at Peenemünde. Buildings were identified, largely incorrectly, but there were other objects which analysts could not identify. It was only with the inpouring of information from foreign labor, forced to work at the sites, and anti-German Poles and Swedes that the British were able to piece together precisely what the site was doing.<sup>113</sup> While this process was much more convoluted, the crateology involved in the crisis provides a striking similarity.

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<sup>110</sup> Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 9-11.

<sup>111</sup> Christopher M. Heist, "John McCone and the Cuban Missile Crisis August 1-November 3, 1962" (master's thesis, Liberty University, 2010), 35- 37.

<sup>112</sup> Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 191-196.

<sup>113</sup> John Keegan, *Intelligence in War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 258-294.

The information Penkovsky supplied can be clearly seen to provide helpful insights into the missiles supplied to Cuba by the Soviet Union. During the crisis, the U2 spyplanes took many photos of the Soviet ships carrying the missiles to Cuba. Analysts were set to work to determine the contents of the photographed crates. This became known as “crateology”. Using scaling techniques the size of the contents of the crates could be calculated. Then, using the sizes given by Penkovsky, the exact type of missile contained in the crate could be determined. Thanks to Penkovsky the US knew how large the missiles it was facing were.

According to Penkovsky, the V-75 was the premier Soviet air defense rocket. These rockets were mass produced, and considered good and reliable.<sup>114</sup> Considered thus, this rocket was given to Soviet satellites in order to protect themselves.<sup>115</sup> It was only an anti-aircraft rocket. Thus, there was no atomic warhead, because those are too expensive to put on anti-aircraft rockets. There was some post-launch guidance. The detonation, however, relied upon a proximity fuse, which was set to the calculated distance the rocket would destroy the targeted aircraft.<sup>116</sup> To make the detonation more effective a process of grooving was employed. What this grooving did was, similar to a hand grenade, adjust the size and direction of the shrapnel.<sup>117</sup> The rocket had a range of 40 km.<sup>118</sup> This information alerted the West to the dangers of the V-75, especially in regards to U2 spyplanes, which was previously thought to fly beyond the range of the V-75.

The offensive Soviet missiles installed in Cuba were the R-12 and R-14, both of which Penkovsky learned about in his classes at the Dzerzhinsky Academy. The R-12 was capable of

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<sup>114</sup> “Meeting 7 April 1961”, 19.

<sup>115</sup> “Meeting 21 Location Unknown July 1961” FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012408, 10.

<sup>116</sup> “Meeting 7 April 1961”, 19.

<sup>117</sup> “Meeting 21 July 1961”, 9-10.

<sup>118</sup> “Meeting 21 1961”, 9.

delivering a 16 kt atomic war head at a range of 2500 km. However, this caused a variability of 160 km. With a conventional warhead, the range doubled. This rocket was in mass production in 1962.<sup>119</sup> This model was included in the rockets given to the various People's Democracies.<sup>120</sup> The R-14 had a 4500 km range when armed with a nuclear warhead, and 9000 km when armed with a conventional warhead. However even more importantly it was being prepared for mass production, which means that it would soon be available to for the People's Democracies.<sup>121</sup> The most probable reason this model was sent to Cuba is that it gave the Soviet Union near total coverage of the US. With this information in hand, the President Kennedy's advisors knew just how serious the situation was.

Unfortunately for the West, the KGB arrested Penkovsky during or shortly after the Cuba Crisis, between October 22 and November 2. Several days later, someone triggered one of the signals given to Penkovsky. There was a mark put on the proper street post, and the correct individuals were called, with the proper signals given. What the signal meant was an imminent pre-emptive strike.<sup>122</sup> Scholars believe that Penkovsky was attempting to do as the Biblical Samson did. When the Philistines captured Samson, they cut his hair; the way God recognized him to give him his strength. They brought him out to perform for him while they ate a feast. Samson prayed to God to give him the strength necessary to bring the temple down upon the heads of his captors, and he was. Samson brought the pillars down killing himself and bringing the roof collapsing down on the heads of the Philistines.<sup>123</sup> Thankfully, the recipients of the signal decided to play it cool, and did not begin a pre-emptive nuclear exchange. The upper

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<sup>119</sup> "Meeting 31 September 1961", 11-12, 17-18.

<sup>120</sup> "Meeting 1 April 1961", 14.

<sup>121</sup> "Meeting 31 September 1961", 11-12.

<sup>122</sup> Schechter, *Spy Who Saved the World*, 337-347.

<sup>123</sup> Judges 16:23-31 (New International Version).

echelons of the CIA did not even hear of this provocation.<sup>124</sup> This clearly shows two major problems with HumInt: the agent getting caught, and the agent making rash decisions.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was, without a doubt, one of the hottest points of the Cold War, and nuclear war was within a hairsbreadth. Thanks to the information that Penkovsky provided, the US knew precisely what it was dealing with in Cuba with the R-12 and R-14. He also gave information about personalities vital to the Soviet Missile program, as well as its inner workings.

### **Conclusion:**

Penkovsky's arrest at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis was a major blow to the West. The Intelligence Services went from equal terms with the KGB to being a half step behind. However, even in failure the West was better off than before. The big question for the Intelligence Services was now: How did the KGB catch Penkovsky?

Only the KGB knows what precisely led them to suspect Penkovsky is. However, this has not stopped authors from theorizing on this question, and three theories seem to have come about in the historiography. The leading theory is the KGB caught him on simple chance through the use of normal surveillance. After Popov operated in Moscow right under the KGB's nose, the KGB began randomly tailing diplomats. The organization also realized that wives could be used, and would randomly tail them as well. What some authors believe is that it was on one of these random surveillances of Janet Chisholm that the KGB spotted Penkovsky, and they worked from there to identify Penkovsky. Once identified, the KGB could begin laying traps and closing the

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<sup>124</sup> Schechter, *Spy Who Saved the World*, 346-348.

nets.<sup>125</sup> This was the first theory developed, and, with the evidence available, holds the most weight.

The second theory developed was that Penkovsky was revealed by a double agent in the American NSA by the name of Jack Dunlap. Approximately six months after the KGB arrested Penkovsky, Dunlap had his clearance revoked due to suspicions of his being a Soviet agent. Some authors take his suicide two months later as an admission of guilt. Dunlap did have access to documents emanating from Penkovsky, as investigators found some in a search of his apartment.<sup>126</sup> He was not the only leak however. The leak could have come from anyone with access.

The third theory comes from the most recent work on Penkovsky, *Dead Drop* by Jeremy Duns. According to Duns it was a British correspondent, John Wolfenden, in Moscow blackmailed into working for the KGB after being caught in a revealing situation with another man. According to Duns, Wolfenden alerted the KGB to Janet Chisholm being involved in an operation.<sup>127</sup> This seemingly small piece of information would be enough when combined with the KGB's constant surveillance of foreign diplomats.

Two of those involved with the operation presented on their experiences with the operation. One of the purposes of this discussion was to analyze weaknesses inherent in the operation as part of the CIA's fiftieth anniversary. The first weakness of the operation was the US Ambassador in Moscow. Lewellyn Thompson was adamant that the CIA could not run operations through diplomatic positions in the US embassy. He was also never convinced of

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<sup>125</sup> Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, 172-173.

<sup>126</sup> Duns, *Dead Drop*, 203-204.

<sup>127</sup> Duns, *Dead Drop*, 236-252.

Penkovsky's genuineness.<sup>128</sup> The operation was being run in an all-around hostile environment, having to fight the US State Department and the KGB.

A second weakness was the use of Janet Chisholm. Chisholm had been a secretary in MI6 before marrying Rauri Chisholm, an MI6 officer. This was a problem because Rauri had worked in Berlin with George Blake, a member of the notorious Cambridge Five. Rauri Chisholm was, therefore, a known MI6 officer, and would be under constant suspicion.<sup>129</sup> This suspicion extending to his wife is only natural, giving credence to the first theory of the discovery of Penkovsky.

The next two weaknesses stem from Penkovsky himself. Penkovsky was ambitious by nature, and desired to provide high quality information. He craved acknowledgement from the handlers on the quality of his contributions, two qualities that clearly drove Penkovsky to defect.<sup>130</sup> One of those involved with the operation phrased it thus: "The frequency of meetings [with Janet Chisholm], however, seems to have been largely at Penkovsky's instigation. A driven man, he wanted to produce as much as possible as fast as possible."<sup>131</sup> The only event that slowed Penkovsky was some rather obvious surveillance.<sup>132</sup> It is believed that Penkovsky was attempting to gather too much information too quickly.

The second weakness stemming from Penkovsky himself was that he called many of the shots in the operation. His handlers allowed this because he was demonstrably an effective and productive operator. He also had so much trouble getting the West to take a chance on him. This

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<sup>128</sup> Names Redacted (Rodney Carlson and Harry Shergold?), "Reflections on Handling Penkovsky", Declassified Articles from Studies in Intelligence: The IC's Journal for the Intelligence Professional Collection, Doc. No. FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0006122519, 54.

<sup>129</sup> "Reflections on Handling Penkovsky", 56-57.

<sup>130</sup> "Meeting 7 April 1961", 2-3.

<sup>131</sup> "Reflections on Handling Penkovsky", 57.

<sup>132</sup> "Translation of the Letter which Redacted (Penkovsky) Passed Redacted (Janet Chisholm) on 28 March 1962" FOIA/EDSN (CREST) 0000012274, 1-3.

is abnormal and considered dangerous as it increases the chance of compromise.<sup>133</sup> Following the main theory on Penkovsky's capture these two reasons become more important.

Even though he was captured in 1962, and tried and executed in 1963, Penkovsky managed to force changes in the Soviet leadership. Varentsov, after rising to the heights of Chief Marshal of the Artillery, was demoted to the rank of major general, and discharged. He was also expelled from the Central Committee and his seat in the Supreme Soviet was removed. Ivan Serov was also demoted to major general and fired. Many other less important military personnel were also disciplined for their laxity in security.<sup>134</sup> Depending on how much the KGB forced Penkovsky to talk, the KGB and the GRU would need to change their operational procedures. The military would also need to change many of its procedures, as they were now well known to the West.

Clearly, Human Intelligence contributed to the Western success in two early Cold War Crises that could have easily gone nuclear. The information passed in regards to the Berlin Crisis alerted the West to Khrushchev's readiness to go to war on the issue. Penkovsky also alerted the West to the military power the Soviet Union was capable of bringing out in a conflict over Germany. In regards to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the West knew the exact limits of the Soviet missile program as well as the personalities and natures of those involved in the program, allowing a confident calling of Khrushchev's bluff over the missiles installed on the island. It is also clear that Penkovsky was defecting due to deep professional frustrations, which gave the West a sign to look for in later defectors.

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<sup>133</sup> "Reflections on Handling Penkovsky", 61.

<sup>134</sup> Schechter, *Spy Who Saved the World*, 377.

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