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Ex-CIA officer sheds light on 1977 spy arrests in Moscow

APRIL 16, 2012 BY [JOSEPH FITSANAKIS](#) [5 COMMENTS](#)



By [JOSEPH FITSANAKIS](#) | [intelNews.org](#)

A recently retired CIA officer has spoken publicly for the first time about the 1977 arrest and eventual suicide of a Soviet double agent considered one of the Central Intelligence Agency's most important assets during the Cold War. Aleksandr Dmitryevich Ogorodnik was an official in the Soviet diplomatic service who, while stationed at the Soviet embassy in Bogotá, Colombia, was compromised and later blackmailed by Colombian intelligence into spying on Moscow. Ogorodnik was initially handled by the Colombians, with little success. Later, however, when he was moved to a sensitive post in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, the Colombians turned him over to the CIA. He was handled by CIA officer [Aldrich Ames](#)—himself a double spy for the Soviet KGB—who gave Ogorodnik the codename TRIGON. After establishing contact with him in Moscow, the CIA provided Ogorodnik with a miniature camera and other essentials, which he used regularly to take photographs of classified Soviet documents. As a go-between, the Agency selected Martha D. Peterson, the first female CIA case officer ever to be posted in Moscow. Peterson was a fresh CIA recruit, who had completed her Career Training program in 1974, less than a year before being sent to the Soviet capital. Having retired in 2003, after 31 years with the CIA, Peterson has now [published](#) a memoir entitled *The Widow Spy*. In it, she reveals that she coordinated regular dead-drops with Ogorodnik for nearly two years, picking up his used film while supplying him with fresh film and other espionage accessories. On July 15, 1977, however, her mission was abruptly terminated after she was arrested by a large team of KGB officers underneath a railway bridge in Moscow, a few minutes after conducting a dead-drop for

Ogorodnik. She was taken to the KGB's Lubyanka prison, where she says she was interrogated for three days before being released by way of her diplomatic immunity, and ordered to leave the USSR. Ogorodnik was not so fortunate. A few months prior to his arrest, he had requested that the CIA provide him with a poison pill, which he could take in case he was arrested by the KGB. The CIA obliged, providing the Soviet Foreign Ministry official with a pill hidden inside a modified fountain pen. Following his arrest, Ogorodnik was able to extract the poison pill from the pen and swallow it, dying almost instantly. In her memoir, Peterson rejects the Soviet claim that she and Ogorodnik were arrested as a result of meticulous Soviet counterintelligence work. Instead, she adds her voice to the dominant theory that TRIGON and herself were betrayed by Karl Koecher, a Czechoslovakian-born CIA translator, who had 'defected' to the West with his wife but had continued to work for Eastern Bloc intelligence services. The Soviets broke the story of Peterson's and Ogorodnik's arrest on June 13, 1978, almost a year after the event. Peterson claims that she is still technically considered *persona non grata* in Russia.

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5 Responses to *Ex-CIA officer sheds light on 1977 spy arrests in Moscow*

1.  **Rick Brandt** says:

April 17, 2012 at 17:59

Hello Martti this Rick Brandt a US marine security guard when you were there and just wanted to say hello.

2.  **Rick Brandt** says:

April 20, 2012 at 13:19

Hello Marty this is Rick Brandt a Marine Security Guard at the Embassy when you was there. I hope you did not forget me? I wish I could get together with all the good people that

was there. My email is richbrandt15@comcast.net or call me 6097848907 Take care Rick...

3. **Eli Chavez** says:

June 8, 2015 at 21:25

Great Story. Eli Chavez

4.  **Riobha** says:

June 20, 2016 at 17:35

“She was taken to the KGB’s Lubyanka prison, where she says she was interrogated for three days before being released by way of her diplomatic immunity,” She says in her book that she was held from 11:30PM ’til 2:00AM...that is less than three HOURS, not three days. Also, she says the poison was a liquid and that accounts later revealed he only had to bite on the barrel of the pen to release the poison.

5. **Kirk Kohnen** says:

June 29, 2016 at 15:49

Just finished reading your book. WONDERFUL! I’ve read about TRIGON in other books (e. g., Spycraft by Wallace & Melton) – his tale from your point of view rounds out the story.