

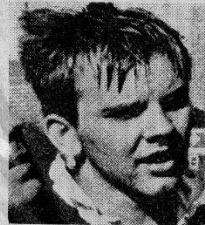


June or July 1978

Incredible double-life of the U.S. beauty accused of killing for CIA



Martha sits silently as Russians accuse her.



Lost husband John



A young Martha.

THE family and friends of U.S. diplomat Martha Peterson are shocked and hurt at Soviet charges that she is a CIA spy responsible for the poison death of a Russian citizen.

They cannot believe that the slim, athletic young woman with a warm personality and excellent academic background could have done anything so monstrous.

"It has got to be a pack of lies," one of her closest friends said this week. "It is just inconceivable she could have done anything so wicked. The Russians are using her to smear this country."

But a STAR investigation shows that the life of Martha Denny Peterson and her late husband, John, read like a John Le Carre thriller. So much so, they are being called the sweetheart spies.

Mrs. Peterson was thrust dramatically onto the front pages of newspapers throughout the world early in June, when the Soviets issued a photograph of her in Moscow sitting next to U.S. Consul Clifford Gross.

Spread out in front of them, was a jumble of items the Russians alleged were Mrs. Peterson's espionage equipment.

The Russian Government newspaper Izvestia claimed that she had been involved in the murder of "an innocent Soviet citizen who stood in the way" of a spy ring run by the CIA.

They claimed she was caught red-handed as she was about to transfer espionage gear, including two poison capsules, to an unidentified contact. Diplomatic sources in Washington said



Martha's townhouse: Living in seclusion.

the attack on Mrs. Peterson was a retaliation for the arrest in May of two Russian UN officials for alleged spying in the U.S.

Mrs. Peterson, a 5-ft. 7-ins., 33-year-old blonde, returned home late last year, but it wasn't until last month that anyone had a clue about her amazing double life ... a life that almost certainly began when she met her future husband at Drew University, N.J.

John Peterson graduated in 1967, joined the Green Berets and was sent on active duty to Southeast Asia. Martha continued her education at the University of North Carolina, and wrote to John almost every day. On his return to the U.S. they married on December 26, 1969 at the First Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

John eventually joined an organization known as Air America, a CIA front in the Far East. Martha who had become fluent in Spanish and Russian, joined her husband in the East in 1971, working for the State Department.

But their love story had a tragic ending — John Peterson was killed in a helicopter crash over Laos on October 19, 1972.

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When she returned to Washington, the State Department classified her as "over-complement", meaning there were no duties for her. She was given a State Department telephone number, but since the disclosure in Izvestia, she has reportedly been "on leave" or "unavailable".

She lives in a \$90,000 townhouse in Falls Church, Va., which she bought in 1974.

Martha's mother told THE STAR from her home in Laguna Drive, Fla.: "As far as her being a spy, I think that is sheer propaganda. She is an intelligent, attractive person, and I can assure you she does not go around trying to poison people."

Her father added: "I spoke to Martha on the phone the other day and she appeared to be quite happy to be back at work.

"It seems funny that after all this time, the Russians are saying she is a spy, particularly after two Russians have been arrested for spying. I think the whole thing is nothing but propaganda."