

PBS interview with Igor Prelin, retired KGB Colonel, now an author who has appeared in Russian media as well as on PBS and American Heroes Channel TV documentary on TRIGON and Martha Peterson *Shadow Ops, Codename TRIGON*

Interviewer: *Does the KGB believe the American version about [Venona](#)? That they broke the Russian codes?*

Igor Prelin: *Having studied all the published materials on the Venona project, myself and many of my colleagues in KGB came to the conclusion that it is not actually the result of the deciphering of all the codes by the American scientists or specialists. We are under the impression that this regional, or some code book for at this period of time, was passed to the Americans by their agent working at this time at the Soviet embassy, or in the Soviet as a Soviet Intelligence Offices in the United States. But Americans didn't want, well, they keep on telling us that it was their specialist who managed to actually decipher the Russian codes, because, up to now, they do not want to name their agent.*

Interviewer: *Well the Cold War's over, they say, why so much of this still so secret?*

Igor Prelin: *Who told you that the Cold War is over? It is not over, it just has taken a new shapes and new forms, and we are still far away, we're still on a long road till we're open to each other--our hearts and all our doors. It's a little bit early to disclose all our secrets, neither Americans nor especially Brits are not anxious to do so.*

"The following is a complete, unedited, unverified interview, portions of which were utilized in the Red Files PBS broadcast. Statements therein are the sole opinion of the interviewee, and do not reflect the views of PBS, DDE or Series and Web Site producer Abamedia, which are not Responsible for the interview content."

Interview with [Igor Prelin](#)

KGB Colonel

Interviewer: What would you say is the greatest espionage achievement by the KGB?

Igor Prelin: Soviet intelligence officers believe that the atomic, in espionage, is the greatest achievement of the Soviet External Intelligence. It's not only we at KGB believe so, but also the former deputy director of the CIA has said, quote: "That the atomic espionage and the success of the Soviet Intelligence in obtaining the atomic secrets of the United States is the greatest achievements of all the intelligence services of all the times."



Interviewer: How important is Lona Cohen as a spy?

Igor Prelin: Lona Cohen was in the United States, was a liaison officer, a liaison agent.

Interviewer: Liaison?

Igor Prelin: Liaison. Liaison Agent, for the Soviet Intelligence, and her role cannot be over estimated, because she was bringing the information obtained by the Soviet Agents in Los Alamos to the Soviet resident in the M, Embassy in the Capital. And, without her work, this important information would never reach the resident, would never reach Moscow.

Interviewer: A number of the top revolutionaries had worked under cover abroad hadn't they? How did that influence the tone of the revolution?

Igor Prelin: Top Soviet leaders are the first ears of the Soviet power, such as [Lenin](#), [Trotsky](#), [Dzerzhinsky](#), and many others had a very wide experience living as illegals and as political immigrants in the foreign countries--in a number of the foreign countries. And over there, they've established various kind of contacts with different people and their experience, when the Soviet External Intelligence were established, it, their experience influenced greatly the forms and methods of work of the Soviet Intelligence. Thus illegals became of a certain house dish of the Soviet intelligence in the future years.

Igor Prelin: Ah, in the twenties and in the thirties, when the Soviet intelligence officers were playing, planning to go abroad. The superiors of the Soviet Intelligence. They were sending them to the old Bolsheviks, who were still living here, and they were providing them with the names and the addresses of their former colleagues, or the former contacts in these or that country. So when a person was coming there he would just passing around these people, renewing the contacts, and was practically getting complete agent network at hand.

Interviewer: That's lovely. Next question is, why was the Cheka formed? For what purpose was the Cheka formed?

Igor Prelin: The Cheka, which is an abbreviation for the old Russian Extraordinary Commission for Fight against Counter Revolution and Sabotage, was formed under Lenin's decree on December 20th, 1917. And this was the first Russian Secret Service. Then the name was changed at a later stage. New functions appeared, such as in 1918, the special depart—so-called departments in the army were formed in December of 1920. The Soviet External Intelligence was organized.

Interviewer: Is it true that one of the early roles of Soviet Intelligence was to eliminate, liquidate, or assassinate enemies abroad?

Igor Prelin: In 1922, when the Civil War was over, the fight against the counter-revolution hasn't ended. Hasn't finished. The majority of the White Guard, Monarchists, and all other enemies of the Soviet power, they went abroad. And so they keep on fighting against the Soviet power from there. So we can put it this way, that the first ten years of the Soviet State, the main task of the Soviet External Intelligence was struggle against the

counter-revolutionary forces in the countries of their residence at this time. That means abroad. And, for us the civil war hasn't ended then. It was just moved on somebody else's territory.

Interviewer: So the question will be did that involve assassinating enemies?

Igor Prelin: So, the fighting against their counter-revolutionaries, include first of all search and destroy for their terrorist and the sabotage groups which was sent to the territory of the Soviet Union from abroad. Secondly, the actual termination or liquidation of the heads of these organizations in the country of their domicile, and also different attempts to undermine the--these organisations, or the relations and the unity of these organisations by providing various explicit information, etc.

Interviewer: What exactly is an illegal?

Igor Prelin: So, in our definition an illegal is a--a Soviet citizen, Intelligence Officer, who was specially trained and who can pose himself as a foreigner and who does to some foreign country, presenting himself as a citizen of some third country. That means that if he were trying to be a French man he would be going to Germany or to England. If he was trying to be a--a German maybe he would go to England, but the United States. He would to be an American citizen; he would go most probably to Latin America. We have our joke, when he was asked what is his profession; the answer was he's a foreigner.

Interviewer: Why did Soviet Intelligence need to use illegals so much?

Igor Prelin: There are three main reasons for which the Soviet External Intelligence and Military Intelligence use illegals so widely. First of all it took many years till the Soviet State was recognized by other countries. And at this time there was no possibility, as there were no representative officers, or no embassies, to send an Intelligence Officer abroad. Secondly, even when the context had been established, there were not so many of Soviet citizens there, and they were able to work abroad, officially, only at the embassy, trade represented, or may be as--um--a journalist of some Party newspaper. And this person had to carry their Soviet passport. They were living in the house with a red flag on top of it, and every counter intelligence of the police knew they--they'd better have close look at them. And the third thing which I have mentioned, we have mentioned earlier is that the--all the top leaders of the Soviet State has a very wide illegal experience of their pre-revolutionary past. And these Bolshevik traditions have influenced greatly, different spheres of the Soviet Society in the first decades including the Intelligence.

Interviewer: What was Colonel Abel's cover, and what was his mission?

Igor Prelin: Colonel Abel's cover can be described in the following way: He was a representative of the free profession. He wasn't working anywhere. He was posing as a curve, cameraman. Musician, even. And he was living in the -- we think he was living as a free artist and mixing with a different artistic circles, easy to go anywhere on his own.

Interviewer: What was it like to meet Colonel Abel? What--I mean--what kind of a person was he?

Igor Prelin: Colonel Abel was one of my professors when I was starting at the Intelligence School. Last time I saw him was in May 1969. And he was an extraordinary person. But speaking him about, as a human being, I should say that he was quite a shy person. He didn't attract much attention. He was let's to pull; we can put it such a way--that he was a man from the crowd. And it was possible for him to dissolve in any society, in any crowd. And thus without being noticeable to perform his very important duties.

Interviewer: What was Colonel Molody's cover? What was his mission? What was his target?

Igor Prelin: Colonel Molody was a businessman. And he organized his own company, and he was dealing in the manufacturing of the jukeboxes, which was a big business in late 50's. It should be noted that he participated in the international exhibition in Brussels in 1958. And he won a gold medal for United Kingdom, although officially he was a Canadian citizen at this time. As a result, when he got back to Britain, he became a member of the Royal Society. He was having dinner sometimes with the Queen.

Interviewer: O.K. What was Colonel Molody's mission in Britain?

Igor Prelin: Ah, Colonel Molody had two important targets while working and living in the UK. Ah, first one was the Navy Research Centre in Portsmouth where he was having several agents including Houghton, and the second target was ah, the--ah--the Centre of Biological Warfare in Portland, the most important, and he was the head of the KGB resident office in the United Kingdom. When this activity was stopped by Scotland Yard, and they started to look for the connections they only managed to find the two above-mentioned agents in Portsmouth. But the situation at the Portland remained unknown until now.

Interviewer: When you say Portland, you mean Portland Down, the biological centre?

Igor Prelin: Yes.

Interviewer: All right, um, so I'll ask the question if we're rolling sound. Uh, I mean what was he like to meet, Molody, Lonsdale? I mean I think you met him, didn't you? Weren't you one of his pupils?

Igor Prelin: Yes, he was also one of my professors, and the last time I saw him was also same as with other, in the Spring of 1969, and if we compare him with other they were just two opposites. Because Molody was a very good-natured person who loved life, good humoured--with a very nice sense of humour, and he always wanted to be in the light, he always wanted to be--wanted to be seen and heard, and something. And according to the books, that's not the way the illegal should behave, but, in his case, he confirmed that this approach can also be positive and moral. When a legal failed in the country, the counter-

intelligence always tried to find as much as possible negative documents and materials on him to show to the public of this country, look what kind of bastard was working here and who tried to undermine our security, and so on. Scotland Yard did manage to check every aspect of his life, but couldn't find anything negative about him. Moreover, at the court, the judge was sympathetic towards him, the jury was sympathetic, and even the prosecutor can't hide his sympathy for him, and the final reaction of the court was that if all the Soviet spies are like him, it would be very difficult for us to fight against them.

Interviewer: Let me ask you one more question, because we haven't given you all this lovely stuff about how good he was as a business man remember? How the--the jukebox was paying for all the agents?

Igor Prelin: Now, if you can imagine, maybe it's also a funny story, when she was over in the back in Russia, Igor asked for him a visit to Moscow Motor Works, and--the she was in drastic state, run down, and all that, and, after meeting the workers there he told them, listen guys, if, I become your manager, in a year you will start working differently, and the place will run differently.

Interviewer: How good a businessman was, Lonsdale?

Igor Prelin: Lonsdale was a very good businessman. Actually it should be said that he started from scratch. First it was the jukeboxes, then slot machines, then at a later stage, different kind of machines selling drinks, cigarettes, sandwiches and all that, and he was quite wealthy. He had several houses in Britain. He got the two rooms in the hotels permanently. He had several cars and this allowed him not only to properly operate all his activities, but he even never asked for money from the centre. He even managed to pay the agents out of his business.

Interviewer: So, after he was sent back to Russia what happened to his, book collection?

Igor Prelin: Ah, after long they was arrested, naturally Scotland Yard put an arrest on all his property in UK, the houses, the cars and everything including the library. Had a very rich library, which contains not only modern books, but also some Asian books including Chinese manuscripts.

Because he was speaking Chinese as well, and, actually, after few years in jail when he was exchanged for Greville Wynne, when he gave back to the Soviet Union, and he tried some how to get this rest of his property, but in vain. And then he recollected that he was a member of the Royal Society, and he decided to do nothing more or less than to write letter to Her Majesty the Queen requesting a return at least of his library. And the Queen made a decision, and the library was packed and sent back to him to the Soviet Union.

Interviewer: Ha, that's great. All right. What was the Krogers' cover and what was their mission?

Igor Prelin: When Lona and Morris Cohen were in the United States, in all there was liaison officers or liaison agents for the Soviet Intelligence. When they had to leave the United States and they got back, came to the Soviet Union, well, there was a question what can we do next? And so, they were trained and sent to the United Kingdom as illegal agents. That means they received the New Zealand passports and their new identities as Peter and Helen Kroger. And their mission, in the United Kingdom, was to provide technical assistance to Lonsdale, which includes processing of the information received: radio operation, ah, coding and decoding all the information, etc. So it was technical support.

Interviewer: What happened to the agent's contacts that Lonsdale developed against the British biological warfare effort?

Igor Prelin: So, the Lonsdale scheme was like this. In 1961, a Polish Intelligence officer defected to the United States, and he provided the American counter-intelligence with the information about Houghton in the Portsmouth Naval Base, because he was recruited when in Warsaw. And through Houghton, they got to Lonsdale and to the Krogers. But here all the connections are within the spy ring--they've ended. Of course during the court, they tried to get additional information about both Lonsdale and the Krogers, but they kept silent about their connections at the Portland Biological Warfare Centre. So this part of the activity by Lonsdale remained unknown to Scotland Yard. As a professional, I presume that as these agents survived several years later, maybe somebody else has approached them and work with them continued.

Interviewer: O.K. The Blake's spy ring and the Krogers' spy rings crashed at almost the same time and for the same reason. How come?

Igor Prelin: So, when the Polish intelligence, officer defected to the American side, he provided the American's with all the available information on the activity of the Polish Intelligence and also all the other intelligence services -- all the Warsaw Pact countries. At this time, there was a system of exchange of information between so-called brotherly intelligence services of the Warsaw Pact, and thus Polish Intelligence was provided with the Russian Intelligence on the certain information related to Poland, the source of which was originated in UK. So when this information had been passed over from the American Secret Service to the British officials, they start searching for the source and this circle was getting smaller and smaller, and, finally, they managed to locate Blake. Although his name was not mentioned at this time, because it was only the information, but not the person that was available.

Interviewer: Both Krogers' and Blake's spying careers ended at about the same time, how come?

Igor Prelin: The defection of the Polish Colonel to the Americans led on, not only to the disclosure of Houghton, and thus the Krogers and Lonsdale, but also he provided information received by Polish Intelligence from the Soviet External Intelligence, which

in return received it from Blake. And thus it makes possible for the British officials to localize this person. And this actually leads to the failure of Blake as well.

Interviewer: So fairly briefly, are there still undetected atom spies or nuclear spies who have never been caught?

Igor Prelin: Speaking about the H-bomb project, I believe that all the major figures are already well-known to the public. But if we're going to speak about the H-bomb, then I believe that here there are still a few which hasn't been disclosed. I can only mention a that in 1949, 1950, and later, Colonel had two agents with the code names ANTA and ADEN working for him at the Huntford Nuclear Research Centre. Their real names are known.

Interviewer: Ah, is there a connection between the Cohens and these two undetectable agents?

Igor Prelin: In 1949 he got them as his agents, and then soon after, Klaus Fuchs was arrested who used to work with Lona Cohen, and there was a danger that his failure would lead to Lona and Morris Cohen and further to Aden and Anta. Thus a decision was taken to take the Cohens out of the United States and to the Soviet Union, and have them continue the work with him on his own.

Interviewer: Does the KGB believe the American version about [Venona](#)? That they broke the Russian codes?

Igor Prelin: Having studied all the published materials on the Venona project, myself and many of my colleagues in KGB came to the conclusion that it is not actually the result of the deciphering of all the codes by the American scientists or specialists. We are under the impression that this regional, or some code book for at this period of time, was passed to the Americans by their agent working at this time at the Soviet embassy, or in the Soviet as a Soviet Intelligence Offices in the United States. But Americans didn't want, well, they keep on telling us that it was their specialist who managed to actually decipher the Russian codes, because, up to now, they do not want to name their agent.

Interviewer: Well the Cold War's over, they say, why so much of this still so secret?

Igor Prelin: Who told you that the Cold War is over? It is not over, it just has taken a new shapes and new forms, and we are still far away, we're still on a long road till we're open to each other--our hearts and all our doors. It's a little bit early to disclose all our secrets, neither Americans nor especially Brits are not anxious to do so.

[Return to KGB Interviews](#)

