

# ИЗВЕСТИЯ



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## The Two Faces of Mrs. Peterson

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One of the photos published in *Izvestiya* No. 138 made the rounds of literally the entire United States press. It would be difficult to find a newspaper or magazine that had not reproduced the photo of American spy Martha Peterson, who was a CIA officer working undercover in the US embassy as a Vice Consul and was caught red-handed. Readers of this newspaper will obviously remember this remarkable photograph: the shaken Mata Hari from Langley (CIA headquarters), and Mr. Gross, chief of the American Embassy's Consular Section, confused and keeping his head down. Spread out before them on the table is a "gentleman's kit" which included ampoules of poison for work which is far from gentlemanly, and even less so ladylike.



The exposure of Martha Peterson has caused remarkably diverse reactions here [in Washington]: vexation among some, bewilderment in others, curiosity in a third group, and undisguised surprise among a fourth, etc. Such a wide range of feelings is not surprising: it depends on who they are and what kind of connection

they had with Martha, or “Marti” as her close friends and acquaintances called her.

Let us say this right now: Martha Peterson’s affiliation with the “cloak and dagger” army is not at all in doubt. The newspaper *Washington Post*, followed by *Time Magazine* write that official sources confirmed Peterson’s employment at the CIA.

*Time Magazine* writes that as soon as *Izvestiya* published the article about Peterson’s adventures, the State Department ordered the CIA to place the failed spy on vacation, and she disappeared from sight. Regarding the Peterson case, an official CIA spokesman responded to a question directed by the magazine by trying to deny that she was mixed up in an attempted murder (such activity by American intelligence officers is formally forbidden by a presidential decree issued by Ford in 1976). The newspaper *Washington Post* points out that related to this, the accusations put forth in *Izvestiya* contradict recent statements in Congress by CIA Director Admiral [Stansfeld] Turner, who affirmed that American intelligence now foregoes political murders and acts within the “framework of the law.”

The competitor of *Time Magazine*, the other leading weekly magazine *Newsweek*, also decided to follow the trail of Peterson, who has “gone underground,” as the journal characterizes her current situation. Like the *Washington Post* and *Time*, *Newsweek* cites the acknowledgement of official circles that Peterson “worked for the CIA, although she was assigned to the embassy’s Consular Section as a cover.”

*Newsweek’s* “investigative activity” turned out to be more fruitful than that of *Time*. In spite of the fully understandable unwillingness of Turner’s agency to satisfy the hunger of the magazine’s reportage, *Newsweek* managed to establish the following: before her departure to Moscow, Peterson underwent intensive Russian language training (let us note that there’s nothing criminal in this. But to study the handling of poisons is another matter). In Moscow she worked on the first floor of the embassy, where the consulate was located. Her main responsibility was to interview Soviet citizens who might turn out to be “potential immigrants to the United States.”

As the reader remembers, the article *Who Benefits?*<sup>i</sup>, [Yulian Semyonov's article published in *Izvestiya* 13 June 1978] also mentions several other people. Among them was embassy first secretary Robert Fulton. In a note to the USSR MFA, it is said that he was involved in the spy activities of Peterson. Here is what *Newsweek* writes about this. First, the magazine confirms that his activities as First Secretary for Political Affairs was just cover for Fulton. In reality, he was a CIA officer and Peterson's direct boss. Fulton, the magazine continues, would go down from the seventh floor of the embassy, where the CIA office and the political section are located, to the first floor to talk with Peterson. The magazine claims that embassy employees did not suspect that Peterson was a CIA agent. They also did not know about the real reasons for her hasty departure to the US. Officially, it was announced that Peterson left "because of family circumstances."

On returning to Washington, the failed spy, it seems, continued the comedy act to divert attention and showed up at the personnel section of the US State Department where she was listed as "excess staff," [Translator: *shtat lichnogo sostava* (sic), probably means *shtat lishnego sostava*] which in bureaucratic jargon in human language means "nothing-work," no responsibilities, no functions. True, having given Peterson no work (not this institution), they did give her a phone, or more accurately, a number for the business of doing nothing. This was the State Department switchboard plus extension 28364. But when *Newsweek* tried to call Peterson's number, some female voice mumbled that she was on three weeks leave, with no further context. To the question who authorized Peterson's leave, the female voice answered that it was the "personnel section management." This pompous name implies the personnel section where Marti was observed, as a diversion.

*Newsweek* did not stop here with its investigations. It succeeded in finding out that Peterson visited Pompano Beach, Florida where her mother lived, and among other things paid cash for a sporty Pontiac Firebird automobile with red, white, and blue patterns. This fact also confirms other data, emphatically underlining that the price of the automobile in no way is affordable for ordinary employees of the diplomatic corps. Apparently, her bosses decided to give a donation to gild the wings of the singed *firebird*<sup>ii</sup> from the CIA.

After her visit to sunny Florida, Peterson returned home to her townhouse, bought just before her tour in the Soviet Union for 90,000 dollars, which is also out of reach for an ordinary employee of the diplomatic service (apparently, the townhouse was a generous advance and the automobile – the final contribution for a burnt-through (bird). The townhouse is located in the town of Falls Church, Virginia, not far from Washington and literally a few steps from Langley, where the main CIA headquarters is located.

*Newsweek* decided to pay a visit to Falls Church. And although Mrs. Peterson was home that day watching some program on television, she refused to open the door for reporters or even speak with them on the phone. Mr. Fulton, her boss in Moscow, also turned out to be close-mouthed. Like Mrs. Peterson, he also returned to the States after her failure and now lives in a Washington suburb in a home resembling a seaside villa. “I understand what you’re looking for,” he told people at *Newsweek* over the phone, “but I am not the person who might talk to you about this.” You bet; you see, silence in such situations is golden!

When the photo from *Izvestiya* and statements from the article *Who Benefits?* made their way to residents of Falls Church, they raised a big commotion in that Virginia backwater. People, including her neighbors, discovered that they knew nothing about her. And even the facial expression on the famous photo had little effect on the impressions of their local “nice neighbor.” Where she studied, where she grew up, who her parents were, her maiden name and many other things that that co-workers and neighbors usually knew about each other was preserved in secret here. Residents of Falls Church are afflicted with the child of an alien soul.

In the words of the *Washington Post*, the workers at the American Embassy in the USSR also experienced a similar sensation. “One of the main entertainments during their stay in Moscow was to guess which of our diplomats is a CIA officer. I cannot recall anyone who suspected Marti,” recalls one of her Moscow colleagues. Very characteristic entertainment, isn’t it?

Only one detail was well known by neighbors of Mrs. Peterson. Marti’s husband was a US Navy pilot who died in Laos in 1973. The source of this information was Peterson herself. A certain former CIA officer recalls that he saw them both in Laos. However, this is curious: when the newspaper *Washington Post* approached

the US Department of Defense for information about the “tragic loss” of Peterson’s spouse, the reporters were told that according to the Pentagon’s computer data there was no pilot named Peterson who died in combat or by accident in Southeast Asia among their people. Furthermore, they could find no person with that surname among the casualties among other branches of the US armed forces. According to preliminary data, which is supposedly “just now being verified by the Pentagon,” the spy’s wife might be John Peterson, who served in US Army Special Forces units from 1967-1969.

... Silence surrounds the little house in Falls Church with a bright red roof and faced with cream-colored brick. The window blinds and glazed doors are lowered carefully. In the evening, electric light barely penetrates them. A man who introduces himself as a “friend of a friend of Mrs. Peterson” answers the doorbell. The neighbors do not know who he is and have never seen him in the area before.

Peterson is a person without a biography, like a vampire without a shadow. In her official personnel file, which is still stored in the personnel section at the US Department of State, there are a total of two lines: she was born 27 May 1945; Started work in 1975. And that is all. It is not thick. The *Washington Post* ends its story about Peterson’s odyssey just as melancholily as *Newsweek*: “So, Peterson secretly enters her home and secretly leaves it, hides from newspaper reporters and in general from everyone. She is a shadow in the world of ‘Cold War’ espionage.”

Biography? It’s the biography of an institution of dirty deeds which even now in its policies and activities has not abandoned its Cold War goals and methods, or its politics of using any means, including the most extreme—remember the poison ampules? – to poison and undermine the spirit of disarmament, and especially the particularities of Soviet-American relations, and damage the development of fruitful cooperation between the Soviet and American peoples.

The American press, now unravelling the Peterson story, maintains that there is nothing to be done, what can you do. That same newspaper, *The Washington Post*, in its lead article, “Espionage conducted inside Russia continues to be appealing and is obviously a useful addition to intelligence operations which are undertaken from outside.” Thus, unappealing, and more accurately—criminal

subversive activities are surrounded as before not only by secrecy but also a halo in the eyes of Washington ruling circles.

The magazine *Newsweek* writes that the methods of the late CIA chief [Allen] Dulles, who loved to drop spies in parachutes on Soviet territory, were declared “obsolete” by the current chief of American intelligence Turner, who, well, is a “strict advocate” of spy satellites, electronic intercepts, monitoring of microwave devices and other wonders of the technotronic age.”

Well, the trouble is, laments the magazine further, even in the era of super-technological espionage there is a fundamental need as before for what in intelligence jargon is called “HUMINT” (that is, human intelligence) – the human factor in intelligence. “You understand, just like before we have a need for spies,” an employees of the CIA told the magazine with disarming simplicity. Of course, continues the magazine, “technology is a integral part of spy activities in Moscow. The roof of the American embassy bristles with super-sensitive antennas, but... But without Humint it is just not possible. HUMINT is desperately needed and we need Peterson and others with fake cloaks and totally real ampules of poison.

In vain *Newsweek* tries to shift the blame on “imperfect” technology. The issue is not with this, but with those who try to use it and the notorious HUMINT in the service of forces of reaction and the Cold War, with the goal of undermining the cause of peace.

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<sup>i</sup> *Izvestiya June 13, 1978, Julian Semenov*

<sup>ii</sup> Translator: *Firebird* in Russian is жар-птица (*Zhar-ptitsa*)