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All about Andrei's father, Valentin Berezkhov, the 'diplomat'

As a consequence of the escape of his teen-age son, the first secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, Valentin Berezkhov, was precipitately recalled to the U.S.S.R. With his son, Andrei, and his wife, Valeria, he left by air on Aug. 18. His diplomatic career, it was said, was ruined.

I should like your indulgence to say a few words about Valentin Mikhaylovich Berezkhov, my former colleague.

The press described V.M. Berezkhov as a professional diplomat. He is a professional, all right. As I can testify from personal knowledge, Berezkhov is a veteran spymaster, one who has spent over 40 years in the ranks of the Soviet secret police, the KGB.

"Diplomat" is hardly the word for this 67-year-old tiger of the KGB, protégé of Stalin, Molotov, Beria and Dekanozov. His tasks in Washington were sophisticated tasks for the KGB, not for the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has plenty of young first secretaries available.

When Soviet Embassy strongmen paraded their captive 16-year-old Andrei in front of American television cameras, they offered a hint of the staged trials of past decades and a chilling reminder that fear and lies still govern the land the Soviets rule.

I never knew Berezkhov personally, although we met without being introduced, in the KGB in which we both served. (Its earlier designations, in our time, were NKVD, MGB and MVD). He worked mostly outside the precincts of the headquarters on Dzerzhinsky Square.

But while managing KGB secret work in Germany, I not only studied files on his activities — and worked under his old colleague there, KGB Gen. Aleksandr M. Korotkov — but I have also read Soviet books, never translated in the West, which describe highlights of Berezkhov's career. This old secret agent "wears a long tail," as they say.

For example, he helped Stalin help Hitler. As a "technical engineer" in the Soviet trade mission in Berlin, he helped negotiate the trade treaty signed on Feb. 11, 1940, which made it possible for Hitler to circumvent the British blockade.

Stalin thus assured Hitler the essential supplies for Nazi conquest of France, Belgium, Holland, Yugoslavia and Greece. He sent vast quantities of oil from Baku, iron and chrome ores, phosphate, grain from the Ukraine — and safe passage over the Trans-

Siberian Railway of rubber from the Far East.

At the same time, Berezkhov was spying — using his good command of German in secret meetings with spies in Poland, Belgium and Holland during travels in 1940 "on trade matters" (as his autobiography puts it). And in Germany he was in contact with members of the network later to become famous as "The Red Orchestra."

In the fall of 1940, Berezkhov was called back from Berlin to change his cover from foreign trade to diplomacy and to join Foreign Minister Molotov and some of Stalin's top spies — Deputy State Security Chief Vsevolod Merkulov and former head of the foreign operations directorate, Vladimir Dekanozov — in a mission to Berlin to exploit Stalin's relations with Hitler and pave the way for bloody deportations from Poland, Bessarabia and the Baltic

Dekanozov stayed on in Berlin as Stalin's ambassador to Hitler, with Berezkhov as his "first secretary."

Berezkhov was still spying, of course. He claims in his memoirs that he even used his social contacts with Americans to meet useful German military men. When Hitler invaded the U.S.S.R. on June 22, 1941, the Soviet mission was interned.

But Berezkhov (using the alias "Kurt Huesker") bribed an SS oberleutnant to permit them a last excursion to town. There they eluded him, took a subway to meet and give final instructions and a radio set to an agent of the "Red Orchestra," Greta Kuckhoff.

After the interned Soviet and Nazi diplomatic missions were exchanged, Berezkhov worked in Moscow and accompanied the Soviet delegation to

the 1943 Tehran Conference as an interpreter.

There he wrote in his memoirs, he incurred Stalin's displeasure when, caught with his mouth full of juicy steak, he couldn't translate a question Churchill asked Stalin. "I sat there like a fool, my face red as a lobster. Everybody stared, then laughed. Stalin leaned over, his eyes gleaming and said through gritted teeth, '... this is disgraceful!'"

But his presence at Tehran permitted him, many years later, to perpetuate a famous Soviet lie: their alleged discovery of a German plot to assassinate Roosevelt at Tehran. Although by the time Berezkhov wrote his memoirs, this canard had long since been discredited, Berezkhov insisted that the NKVD had uncovered the plot. The fact is that Stalin and the NKVD invented it to induce Roosevelt to move over to the Soviet embassy — to Soviet microphones and away from Churchill.

Berezkhov came to the United States in 1944 as "interpreter" for the Dumbarton Oaks Conference drafting the United Nations Charter.

After the war Berezkhov again changed his cover — and entered a field which has probably been his specialty to this day. He became a "journalist" and used his "diplomatic" experience and contacts for KGB tasks of secret political influence.

He was assigned as special correspondent and deputy editor of *New Times* (*Novoye Vremya*), a magazine

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