

***The Spy and the Traitor: The Greatest Espionage Story of the Cold War***

Ben MacIntyre (Crown, 2018), 358 pp., map, codenames and aliases, references, bibliography, index.

**Reviewed by David A. Foy**

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The sudden change of the music confirmed that he was now safely out of the clutches of the KGB—instead of the “horrible, horrible music” (294), as Oleg Gordievsky described the *Greatest Hits of Dr. Hook*—the defecting KGB colonel and devotee of classical music now heard from his hiding spot in the car trunk the enchanting notes of Jean Sibelius’ *Finlandia* coming from the cassette deck. With that, Gordievsky knew, finally, that he had made his escape from the Soviet Union—with the considerable help of his MI6 handlers and support from the Danish service. It was July 1985, and Gordievsky, recruited by the British foreign intelligence service in 1973, had been delivering high-grade intelligence to his handlers for more than 11 years.

As veteran intelligence author Ben MacIntyre notes, Gordievsky’s father was a career KGB officer, which meant a life of privilege and relative ease, at least by Soviet standards. Young Oleg never seriously considered doing anything else but joining the “family business,” describing the KGB as “an exclusive club to join—and an impossible one to leave.” (8) He joined the KGB in 1962, which also employed his older brother, Vasili, who was training to be an “illegal” in Directorate S. Young Oleg was assigned to the Soviet Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the job of supporting “illegals” in the country. Despite being an outwardly loyal KGB officer, Gordievsky was soon disillusioned by the secret knowledge of the West he had accumulated, partly through his love of classical music (forbidden in the Soviet Union), and partly his shock at the nature and extent of Soviet repression in Hungary and later in Czechoslovakia. In sharp contrast, Gordievsky found Denmark very much to his liking, commenting “. . . I could only look back on the vast, sterile concentration camp of the Soviet Union as a form of hell.” (27)

Meanwhile, the small but efficient Danish security service became increasingly convinced that Gordievsky was a KGB officer, rather than a bonafide diplomat. As they already knew, only six of the 20 Soviet personnel

assigned to the Copenhagen embassy were actual diplomats, the other 14 being either KGB or GRU officers. When his university running buddy and intellectual confidant, Standa Kaplan—studying to be a Russian military translator—defected, the latter mentioned his friend’s disillusionment, and Gordievsky was immediately flagged as a “person of interest” to MI6, which codenamed him “SUNBEAM.” Gordievsky rotated back to the Soviet Union in January 1970, struck by “how shabby everything seemed.” (35)

Within the next two years, Vasili had drunk himself to death and died a KGB hero, and Gordievsky married, returning to Copenhagen in 1972 with his new wife and his new rank of major. The next step in this developing dance occurred when Gordievsky was visited by legendary MI6 figure Richard Bromhead and then by Kaplan, whom Oleg suspected was dispatched to recruit him. Shortly before Bromhead was reassigned, Gordievsky told him that he had not reported their meeting to the KGB—the prelude to SUNBEAM’s becoming a formal MI6 recruit. The British service would run their promising asset, notably without informing the CIA of its new-found treasure. Predictably, the British started with the presumption that such a high-ranking figure as Gordievsky had to be a dangle, only to conclude after various tests that he was a legitimate asset. The issue then became the one that would preoccupy the attention of MI6 for the next decade—how to use the high-grade intelligence SUNBEAM was providing without burning its prized source.

The subject was never far from Gordievsky’s mind, either. As he began supplying the British service with KGB documents to copy and microfilm, he requested an exfiltration plan from MI6. In an exemplar that would prove to be of critical importance later, MI6 decided that evacuation by car to the Finnish border would be the best option, and thus was born PIMLICO, the code-name for Gordievsky’s extraction plan should it ever prove necessary. The British service offered Gordievsky the oppor-

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tunity to defect at any time, but Oleg never seriously considered accepting the offer. Meanwhile, several MI6 officers involved in PIMLICO regularly practiced executing the escape plan, down to the smallest detail, to ensure that it would be ready to implement on a moment's notice.

To the delight of MI6, a vacancy appeared at the Russian embassy in London for an English-speaking diplomatic officer, and Gordievsky was selected, though he was not finally cleared to travel to the United Kingdom until June 1982. Once he made contact again with MI6, SUNBEAM—now NOCTON—was introduced to his new case officer, “Jack” (James Spooner). For the next three months, Gordievsky provided the British with the largest “take” of intelligence information in MI6's history. Gordievsky provided several startling revelations, including that the KGB was “flawed, clumsy, inefficient” (138) and that the Kremlin leadership was absolutely convinced that the West was about to launch a surprise nuclear attack on the Soviet Union in 1982–83, the premise behind Operation RYAN.

Notably, MI6 began dribbling out such information to CIA though never divulging the source. Ironically, as Oleg's stock with MI6 rose sharply, his Moscow Center superiors were increasingly dissatisfied with him—in short, Gordievsky was floundering at his job. His MI6 minders launched a two-pronged effort to salvage his career—and his value to them as a source. First, they removed obstacles to his career progression, such as Line PR chief Igor Titov, who was PNG'ed in March 1983 and replaced by Gordievsky—now promoted to lieutenant colonel. Before long, two other superiors were similarly removed, and the position of rezident of the London embassy was dangled in front of Oleg's eyes. Second, MI6 realized that Gordievsky needed to provide valuable information to please his Moscow mentors and so began feeding him “genuine, though valueless” (156) information.

Meanwhile, Burton Gerber, the head of Soviet operations at CIA, was increasingly annoyed that he did not know the identity of MI6's highly-placed spy and launched an investigation to answer that vexing question. Regretably, that task was given to Aldrich Ames, described by MacIntyre as “part of the furniture at the CIA, tatty but familiar.” (201) By March 1985, he had identified Gordievsky as the KGB spy the Agency now referred to as TICKLE. Gordievsky was due to take over as the

official London rezident at the end of April 1985; 12 days before, Ames had volunteered to work for the KGB.

While it seems likely Ames told the KGB about Gordievsky in their initial meeting, it is not clear if he knew his name at the time. In response, the KGB launched the largest manhunt in its history to locate the British mole. Col. Viktor Budanov, head of Directorate K (Counter-intelligence), reputedly “the most dangerous man in the KGB,” knew a mole existed, likely in the London rezidentura, but Gordievsky was not the only suspect. Three months after taking charge in London, Gordievsky was recalled to Moscow, prompting MI6 to ponder the reason—belated congratulations, or a trap? Despite the potential danger, Gordievsky opted to return on 19 May 1985, with MI6 reassuring him that if it went bad, Operation PIMLICO was in place, ready for activation.

What began as a fairly civil meeting quickly devolved into a brutal interrogation, aided by spiked brandy. Gordievsky's second wife, Leila—daughter of a KGB general—and their two daughters were sent back to Moscow, causing panic in MI6. On 13 June, Ames named 25 spies working against the Soviet Union, including Gordievsky. However, rather than facing relentless interrogation followed by a bullet to the back of the head, Gordievsky was somewhat surprised to instead be sent to a state-run sanatorium for senior officials for a period of rest and relaxation, though he was still under heavy surveillance.

Following his “enforced vacation” and return to his family, Gordievsky decided that, in order to survive, he had to escape. But should he take Leila and his daughters, now ages five and three, with him? As he agonized over what to do, Gordievsky realized that while he loved Leila, he did not entirely trust her and, as MacIntyre puts it, “in one part of his heart, he feared her” (247); “Leila was still KGB. And he was not.” (193) When he tested her on her willingness to flee, she responded coldly, “Don't be idiotic,” (249) giving Gordievsky the answer he expected but dreaded hearing. After a nervous missed brush pass, he was finally able to leave this message for MI6—“AM UNDER STRONG SUSPICION AND IN BAD TROUBLE, NEED EXFILTRATION SOONEST. BEWARE OF RADIOACTIVE DUST AND CAR ACCIDENTS.” (250) In response, the British service implemented Operation PIMLICO, which required the personal approval of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher—who

never learned that the operation she approved was already underway.

Committed to escaping, Gordievsky was savvy enough to convince all his friends and colleagues in Moscow in every way possible that he was not going anywhere, accepting social commitments he never intended to keep. Meanwhile, his MI6 team made preparations for his escape, which would involve a road trip from Moscow to Leningrad, Finland, Norway, and then to the United Kingdom. Somewhat astoundingly, the KGB did not immediately realize Gordievsky had fled—as MacIntyre notes, even when they did start looking for him, they did so “with no particular urgency.” After a nerve-wracking trip starting Friday, 19 July, Gordievsky—unceremoniously stuffed in a car trunk in his underwear, with a heat-shielding blanket to avoid detection by border guard search dogs—crossed the Finnish border on Sunday morning, 21 July. Once he arrived in Britain, he was spirited to the MI6 training base at Ft. Monckton, where he spent the next four months being debriefed. A week after NOCTON—now known as OVATION—reached the safety of the United Kingdom, 25-year-veteran KGB general Vitaliy Yurchenko defected in Rome, only to redefect within four months, though having confirmed Gordievsky’s bona fides along the way.

MI6 now confirmed Gordievsky’s identity to CIA, letting its intelligence cousin know that the inside information on Project RYAN had come from him. Among Gordievsky’s numerous visitors at Ft. Monckton was DCI William Casey, who asked Oleg for advice on what President Reagan should say in his first meeting with Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Notably, Gordievsky told the DCI that continued US emphasis on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) would ruin the Soviet leadership and bankrupt the country, a cogent piece of analysis.

With Gordievsky now safe, the focus turned to reuniting him with his wife and daughters, an undertaking known to MI6 as Operation HETMAN, which would take a grueling six years to complete. Still in Moscow, Leila had lost her job and apartment, was under virtual house arrest, and had changed the children’s last names. Subtle British queries about getting them out of Russia were dismissed out of hand by the Soviets, and ultimately

the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union each expelled 31 suspected intelligence officers as part of the fallout. In November 1985, Gordievsky was tried in absentia by a military tribunal, found guilty of treason, and condemned to death. As part of his resettlement, Gordievsky was living in a house bought for him by MI6, using an assumed name, while writing books with historian Christopher Andrew and having audiences with Prime Minister Thatcher as well as President Reagan at the White House. Possibly in response to diplomatic pressure, the KGB told Leila that if she would divorce Oleg, her property would be returned—which she did, reverting to her maiden name in the process. The ultimately successful reunion, however, likely owed more to the failed Soviet putsch of 1991, which prompted a change in KGB leadership. In September, the new (and last) KGB director, Vadim Bakatin, agreed to free Leila and the girls, who then flew to London to rejoin Oleg. Three months later, the Soviet Union dissolved and, two years later, so did the marriage of Oleg and Leila, who parted in 1993 and never saw each other again.

Readers of *The Spy and the Traitor* will find it difficult to put it down, as MacIntyre tells a compelling story in masterful fashion, though the subtitle “The Greatest Espionage Story of the Cold War” is likely to stimulate spirited discussion. Those who are either in or familiar with the intelligence profession will also be struck by some of the author’s observations about the craft, such as “secrecy is seductive” (16) and the discomfiting observation that “Espionage attracts more than its share of the damaged, the lonely, and the plain weird.” (61) MacIntyre is also adept at portraying human foibles and fears, especially in his discussion of the implementation of PIMLICO and the tense relationship between Oleg and Leila, and in withering descriptions, such as his rather shallow characterization of James Angleton as the Agency’s “cadaverous, orchid-collecting CI chief.” (125) *The Spy and the Traitor* is profusely illustrated and enhanced by a map showing the route of PIMLICO, a list of code names and aliases, a select bibliography, and a detailed index. Although MacIntyre’s volume is the only biography of Gordievsky, Oleg’s autobiography—*Next Stop Execution: The Autobiography of Oleg Gordievsky* appeared in 2015 and would make a good complement to the fascinating story of this “spy and traitor.”

