

Tolkachev, A Worthy Successor to Penkovsky

Barry G. Royden

Editor's Note: This unclassified article draws extensively on Directorate of Operations files, which, of necessity, remain classified. Because Tolkachev's story serves as an important case study of Cold War intelligence operations, it is being made available to scholars and to the public in as much detail as possible, despite minimal source citations.

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On 20 September 1985, international wire service reports carried a statement distributed by the official Soviet news agency TASS that one A. G. Tolkachev, whom it described as a staff member at one of Moscow's research institutes, had been arrested the previous June trying to pass secret materials of a defensive nature to the United States. Subsequent news stories said Tolkachev was an electronics expert at a military aviation institute in Moscow who was compromised by former CIA officer Edward Lee Howard.

In October 1985, *The Washington Post* ran a story that described Tolkachev as "one of CIA's most valuable human assets in the Soviet Union." According to FBI affidavits related to the Howard espionage case that were made public, Tolkachev had provided information on Soviet avionics, cruise missiles, and other technologies. The Soviets subsequently publicly confirmed that they had executed Tolkachev in 1986 for "high treason."

Despite the fact that more than 15 years have passed, little additional information has surfaced about Adolf Tolkachev and his work for the CIA. The following is the story of a brave and dedicated man who for over seven years provided the CIA with a huge volume of extremely sensitive and valuable intelligence on Soviet military research and development (R&D) activities. It is also the story of a well-conceived and executed CIA intelligence operation run in Moscow under the nose of the KGB.

The Beginning

In January 1977, on a typically depressing winter evening in Moscow, the local CIA chief left his office and drove to a nearby gas station used by diplomats. While waiting for gas, he was surprised when a middle-aged Russian approached him and

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asked him in English if he was an American. When the CIA chief answered affirmatively, the Russian placed a folded piece of paper on the car seat and departed. The CIA chief later noted that his was the only American-plated car at the gas station, and it appeared obvious that the man was waiting for an American to appear. The man was calm and clearly had thought out his approach.

The note, written in Russian, was short and to the point. The writer said that he wanted to “discuss matters” on a “strictly confidential” basis with an “appropriate American official.” He then suggested a discreet meeting at a given time and place in the car of an American official or at a Metro station entrance. The writer also suggested a signal—a parked car at a certain place and time, facing either one direction or the other—to indicate which meeting arrangement was preferred. The note contained sketches of the exact locations of the two optional sites and where the car should be parked to trigger a meeting.

It would be a long and tortuous process before secure contact would be established between the CIA and this “intelligence volunteer.” The KGB had established a pattern in the Soviet Union of running “dangles” (ostensible intelligence volunteers actually controlled by the KGB), which made it risky to respond to any potential volunteer. Dangles were aimed at flushing out

Agency personnel so that they could be expelled from the country and to obtain important information on the CIA’s methods of operation.

On the other hand, many of the CIA’s best agents through the years have been intelligence volunteers. One of the Agency’s most famous Soviet agents, Col. Oleg Penkovsky of the Soviet military intelligence service (GRU), volunteered to the CIA in Moscow in 1960. He also experienced great difficulty in establishing contact with Western intelligence. Penkovsky passed letters to two American students, a British businessman, and a Canadian businessman over a period of several months before he succeeded in using British businessman Greville Wynne to open a channel to US and British intelligence.¹

The CIA ran Penkovsky jointly with the British for a little over a year, and he provided immensely

¹ The basic facts of the Penkovsky case are set forth in Jerrold L. Schecter and Peter S. Deriabin’s *The Spy Who Saved the World* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992). The authors were given access to the CIA files on the case and conducted interviews with many of the people involved.

valuable information on Soviet political and military plans and intentions. He also passed data on Soviet missile deployment methods and operations that proved critical to the United States during the Cuban missile crisis. All substantive meetings with Penkovsky, however, were held in the West, taking advantage of his travel abroad with Soviet delegations.

The point in time when Tolkachev chose to try to establish contact with the CIA in Moscow was a particularly sensitive one. CIA personnel in Moscow had several operational activities scheduled to take place over the next several months that they and CIA headquarters were loath to complicate by the possibility of getting caught in a KGB dangle operation. In addition, Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State-designate in the administration of newly elected President Jimmy Carter, was scheduled to visit the USSR soon to lay the basis for bilateral relations, and it was clear that the new US administration did not want anything untoward to roil the waters between the two countries. As a result, given the absence of any identifying data on this prospective volunteer, the lack of any indication of his access to sensitive information, and the difficult counterintelligence (CI) environment, CIA headquarters decided against replying to the note.

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More Approaches

On 3 February 1977, the volunteer again approached the local CIA chief, this time as he got into his car. (Although the chief's car was parked near the US Embassy, it was blocked from the view of the Soviet militiamen guarding the Embassy by high snow banks, a fact that Tolkachev later said he had taken into account.) He again spoke briefly, dropped a short note into the car, and departed. The note reiterated the writer's desire to establish contact with an American official. Based on the previous CIA headquarters decision, no action was taken to respond to the note.

Two weeks later, the CIA chief was approached after work by the same individual, who dropped another note into the car. This note said that the writer understood the concern about a possible provocation. He claimed that he was an engineer who worked in a "closed enterprise" and was not knowledgeable about "secret matters," so he might not be going about this the right way. He said that he had not included specific information about himself because he worried about how his letters would be handled. He repeated his request that he be contacted, and he provided new instructions for establishing contact.

By now, the CIA chief was impressed with the man's tenacity and asked headquarters for permission to respond positively by parking his car in a spot that

had been indicated in the note, so that the writer could pass him a letter with more details about who he was and what information he wanted to share. Headquarters, however, continued to demur, citing overriding CI concerns, and forbade any positive response.

In May, the volunteer approached the CIA chief for the fourth time, banging on his car to get his attention. The chief ignored him.

More than six months passed before the volunteer appeared again. In December 1977, he spotted an individual who had gotten out of an American-plated car and was shopping in a local market. The volunteer gave a letter to this individual and pleaded that the letter be hand delivered to a responsible US official. The letter was passed unopened to the US Embassy's assistant security officer, who in turn gave it to the local CIA chief.

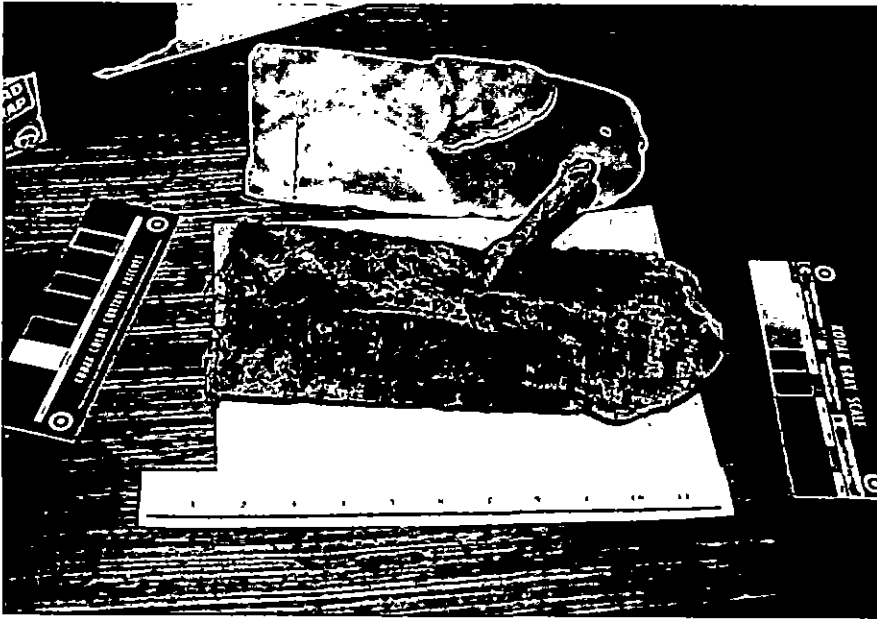
In the letter, the volunteer again provided instructions and accompanying drawings for an initial contact with an American official. He went further this time, however, and included two typewritten pages of intelligence regarding the electronic systems for a Soviet aircraft, which convinced the newly arrived local CIA chief, Gardner "Gus" Hathaway, that a serious effort should be made to respond. He said that

he wanted to do "what Belenko did."² Again, he provided some contact scenarios. Hathaway sent a message to Washington, urging that he be allowed to follow up and contact the volunteer. This time CIA headquarters tentatively concurred, pending an evaluation of the intelligence sample.

In early January 1978, however, headquarters again disapproved contact. It cited the fact that an American official had been declared *persona non grata* by the Soviet government just one week previously, as well as the fact that the CIA had had to send home two case officers the previous year, when cases they had been handling were compromised. Headquarters concluded that they could not afford to lose another officer in Moscow, should the latest contact prove to be a Soviet provocation attempt. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the information provided by the volunteer showed it to be highly interesting but not likely to do "grave damage" to the USSR—a criterion that apparently had to be met in headquarters' view before it would approve taking the risk to meet the volunteer.

By fortuitous chance, in February 1978, the Pentagon sent a memo to the CIA citing the US military's high interest in any intelligence that could be provided on Soviet aircraft electronics and weapons control

² Viktor Belenko was a Soviet pilot who flew his MiG-25 to Japan in 1976.



Construction worker's glove used as a deaddrop container.

systems. As it turned out, this was precisely the type of information, albeit in limited quantity, that the volunteer had passed in December 1977.

Persistence Pays Off

On 16 February 1978, the volunteer approached Hathaway and his wife at their car on the street after work and passed another note containing additional intelligence information. He wrote that he seemed to be caught in a vicious circle: "I'm afraid for security reasons to put down on paper much about myself, and, without this information, for security reasons you are afraid to contact me, fearing a provocation." He then suggested a secure way to pass key identifying data on himself. In his note, he provided all but two of the digits in his phone number. He

instructed the recipient of the note that at a certain time at a certain bus stop he would be standing in line holding two pieces of plywood, each with a single number on it. These would be the last two digits in his phone number. At the indicated time, Hathaway's wife drove past the bus stop in question, recognized the volunteer holding the two pieces of plywood, and recorded the numbers.

Hathaway immediately sent a cable to CIA headquarters pushing for a positive response to the volunteer. This time, headquarters concurred. On 26 February, after careful planning, John Guilsher, a case officer fluent in Russian, conducted a lengthy surveillance-detection run to determine that he was free of any Soviet surveillance and then called the volunteer's home phone from a public phone booth.

The volunteer's wife answered the call, however, forcing Guilsher to break off the conversation. Guilsher repeated this exercise on 28 February, with the same lack of success.

On 1 March 1978, Tolkachev again approached Hathaway and his wife on the street after work. This time, he passed 11 pages of handwritten materials, the bulk of which was detailed intelligence on Soviet R&D efforts in the military aircraft field. In this note, Tolkachev finally identified himself fully, providing his name, address, exact employment, and a great deal of personal background information. He noted that he had spent "hours and hours roaming the streets in search of [US] diplomatic cars," and, having found one, had returned "tens of times" without passing anything, because of unfavorable conditions. He said that he was now almost desperate for a positive response to his efforts, and, if he did not get one this time, he would give up.

Tolkachev had clearly gone above and beyond what could be expected of anyone trying to volunteer to help the United States. The CIA, on the other hand, for a variety of good reasons had had to be cautious about accepting contact with him. Fortunately, after much soul searching, it had been decided to meet him. Once that decision was made, a spectacular intelligence success story began.

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Making Contact

At about 10 p.m. on 5 March 1978, Guilsher, after determining that he was free of surveillance, called Tolkachev at home from a public phone at the Bolshoi Theater and spoke to him for the first time. Guilsher identified himself as “Nikolay,” as Tolkachev had suggested in his 1 March note, and confirmed that the proper people had received all the materials Tolkachev had provided. The purpose of the call was to assure Tolkachev that his security was intact and that US intelligence was interested in learning more about him and his work. He was told that he would be called again with further instructions regarding future contacts.

It was not until August, however, that the details finally were worked out on how the case was to be pursued. Despite Hathaway's desire that personal contact be established with Tolkachev in the USSR, CIA headquarters opted—as “safest”—to have the necessary materials and directions passed to Tolkachev via a deaddrop (an impersonal exchange of information) so that he could prepare a series of letters with additional information about his access and his work. These letters were to be prepared in “secret writing” (SW), instructions for which were contained in the deaddrop, and were to be sent to various accommodation addresses (apparently innocuous addresses actually controlled by the CIA). At Hathaway's insistence, to enhance

Tolkachev's protection, he also would be passed a “one-time pad” (OTP). The one-time pad (a series of numbers randomly keyed to letters that can be put into clear text only by someone having an identical OTP) would be used to encipher his secret writing messages.

On 24 August, Guilsher contacted Tolkachev by phone and directed him to a deaddrop site located next to a phone booth near Tolkachev's apartment. The materials for Tolkachev, hidden in a dirty construction worker's mitten, consisted of an operational message, a series of intelligence requirements, an SW carbon paper with instructions for its use, three pre-written “cover” letters (apparently innocent letters, on the reverse side of which the SW was to be concealed), and an OTP with accompanying instructions. The CIA later determined that Tolkachev had retrieved the materials.

In September, all three cover letters from Tolkachev were received, and their SW contents successfully broken out. All three letters showed signs of having been opened, presumably by the Soviet authorities, but the SW had gone undetected.

The SW messages contained useful intelligence on such subjects as a new Soviet airborne radar reconnaissance and guidance system, the results of performance tests of new Soviet aircraft radar systems, and the status of work on the weapons-aiming systems for various Soviet aircraft under development. Tolkachev also indicated that he had 91 pages of handwritten notes that he wanted to pass. The intelligence contained in these letters finally tipped the balance, convincing senior CIA managers that Tolkachev should be considered a valid volunteer. As a result, Hathaway was given the go-ahead to arrange a personal meeting with him in order to construct an in-country communications system between him and the CIA.

On New Year's Day 1979, the CIA took advantage of Soviet holiday laxness to arrange its first personal meeting with Tolkachev. After insuring that he was free from surveillance, Guilsher used a public phone to call Tolkachev at his apartment, triggering contact at a predetermined meeting site. He reminded Tolkachev to bring the 91 pages of notes with him. A 40-minute meeting was held while walking the streets of Moscow in bitterly cold weather.

Tolkachev was well prepared. He delivered the voluminous notes, which contained a detailed description of the highly sensitive work in which he was involved, as well as exact formulas, diagrams, drawings of oscilloscope presentations, precise weapon and

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electronic systems specifications, charts, and quotes from official documents. He had carefully drawn various diagrams and charts on oversize graph paper. Guilsher passed Tolkachev additional intelligence requirements and operational questions, as well as a payment of “good faith” money. He was impressed with Tolkachev’s calm manner. He also noted that Tolkachev was probably one of the few sober Russians in Moscow on this major national holiday.

Impressive Production

The information that Tolkachev provided in his first meeting was quickly disseminated to a limited number of senior civilian and military customers. It had an immediate impact, as reflected in a March 1979 memorandum sent to the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) by a high-ranking military recipient of the Tolkachev information. This memo stated that all the information provided by the “special source” had correlated fully with existing holdings from photo and communications intelligence collection. Regarding the new data reported, the memo concluded that the Soviets would judge it quite damaging to their interests for Washington to be in possession of this information.

The memo continued by stipulating that the primary value of the source’s reporting was that it provided detailed data on new Soviet weapon systems that would not be available from technical collec-

tion sources for many years, if ever. The complete documentation on these systems, which the agent provided even before the systems were fully operational, was described as “of incalculable value.”

In May 1979, the CIA hosted a three-day seminar for a small group of senior customers of Tolkachev’s product. Representatives included senior analysts from both civilian and military intelligence agencies. This group’s consensus was that Tolkachev’s information was impressive. Military representatives attending the seminar stated that the data he provided had saved them “up to five years of R&D time.”

Tolkachev was on his way to becoming one of the most valuable and productive agents in the history of the CIA.

Assessment and Background

Before the first personal meeting with Tolkachev, one of his handwritten notes had been passed to the CIA’s Office of Technical Service (OTS) handwriting experts for analysis. The analysis, done in May 1978, was positive, accurate, and even prophetic. The report made the following observations:

The writer is intelligent, purposeful, and generally self-confident. He is self-disciplined but not overly rigid. He has well above average intelligence and has good organizing ability. He is observant and conscientious and pays meticulous attention to details. He is quite self-assured and may plow ahead at times in a way which is not discreet or subtle. All in all, he is a reasonably well-adjusted individual and appears intellectually and psychologically equipped to become a useful, versatile asset.

After his early reluctance to identify himself to the US officials he was trying to contact, Tolkachev over time provided a great deal of information about himself. He wrote that he was born in 1927 in Aktyubinsk (in what is now Kazakhstan), but moved to Moscow two years later and had lived there ever since. He did not provide any information about his parents. The only sibling mentioned was a brother, Yuri, who was born in 1938 and described as a train mechanic.

Tolkachev identified his wife as Natalia Ivanova née Kuzmina. She was born in 1935 and worked as an electronics engineer at the same institute where he worked—he described her as an “antenna specialist.” He wrote that his wife’s mother “had been executed in 1938,” but he said nothing about the reasons for her execution. He noted that his wife’s father had spent many

years in a labor camp, typically the fate of “enemies of the Soviet state.” Freed in 1955, he had returned to Moscow, but died shortly thereafter. Tolkachev commented a number of times to at least one of his case officers that the brutal treatment that his wife’s parents had suffered was a key factor in his motivation to work against the Soviet regime. He never shed any light on why the authorities had taken these actions against his wife’s parents, but once suggested that his wife and her parents were Jewish. Given the Stalinists’ anti-Semitism, this factor may have played a role in their persecution.

Tolkachev apparently was devoted to his family and took their interests into account in everything that he did. He wrote that he helped his wife with the housework and liked to go shopping with her. He said that she would not question where he got “reasonable sums” of money. He explained: “I got married at 30 and have lived with my wife already 22 years. I am 52 and my wife is 44. Apparently, I belong to those who love only once. I consider that I have the normal attachment to the family that exists in mankind.” The couple had one child, a son named Oleg, born in 1966. In 1979, Oleg was described as going to “art school;” by 1982, he was studying at an architectural institute. Tolkachev made it clear from the beginning that he had not told, and would not tell, his wife or son about his work for US intelligence.

In detailing his technical credentials, Tolkachev wrote that he had completed “optical-mechanical radar training” in 1948 and graduated from the Kharkov Polytechnical Institute in 1954. Since then, he had worked at NIIR (Scientific Research Institute of Radio Building). He described himself as a “leading systems designer” at this institute and said that he worked in a large open office with 24 other people. (In writing this, he seemed to recognize that there would be interest in knowing how much privacy he had in his office, in terms of his ability to steal secrets.)

Tolkachev led a relatively comfortable life. He said that he earned 250 rubles per month, plus a 40 percent “secrecy bonus,” which would give him a normal salary of some 350 rubles (about \$110 at the official exchange rate at that time). His wife’s salary would have doubled this amount. He later added that he occasionally received monetary awards for inventions in his field. An average Soviet salary at that time was estimated at 120 rubles per month.

Tolkachev and his family lived on the 9th floor of an apartment building only some 400 meters from the US Embassy. He noted that this location had allowed him to walk unobtrusively near the Embassy when he was seeking to establish contact. The apartment consisted of two rooms, plus a kitchen, bath, and toilet. Although modest by US standards, it was quite luxurious

by Moscow standards. These cramped quarters, however, were to limit his ability to carry out his clandestine role for the CIA.

Various health problems bothered Tolkachev during his collaboration with the CIA. At one time or another, he indicated that he had high blood pressure, peritonitis, and gastritis. He also had trouble breathing at night due to a broken nose that he had suffered as a youth playing hockey. Nonetheless, he described an active life. His hobbies were jogging, skiing, reading, listening to Voice of America and West German news broadcasts, and watching TV. He also said that he and his family enjoyed camping out in the summer.

Motivation

Tolkachev was not a member of the Communist Party. He said that he had lost his early interest in politics because it had become “enmeshed in such an impassable hypocritical demagoguery.” His theater going had declined, he wrote, because all the plays had become too ideological.

When asked during his first personal meeting about his motivation for approaching US intelligence, Tolkachev said that he was “a dissident at heart,” who could best “contribute to the cause” by taking advantage of his access to unique information of value to the West. In April 1979, he explained his motivation in a

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written note, of which the following is an excerpt:

... I can only say that a significant role in this was played by Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, even though I do not know them and have only read Solzhenitsyn's works which were published in Noviy Mir. Some inner worm started to torment me; something has to be done. I started to write short leaflets that I planned to mail out. But, later, having thought it out properly, I understood that this was a useless undertaking. To establish contact with dissident circles which have contact with foreign journalists seemed senseless to me due to the nature of my work. (I have a top secret clearance.) Based on the slightest suspicion, I would be totally isolated or liquidated. Thus was born my plan of action to which I have resorted.

... I have chosen a course which does not permit one to move backward, and I have no intention of veering from this course. My actions in the future depend on [my] health, and changes in the nature of [my] work. Concerning remuneration, I would not begin to establish contact for any sum of money with, for example, the Chinese Embassy. But how about America? Maybe it has bewitched me, and I am madly in love with it? I have not seen your country with my own eyes, and to love it

unseen I do not have enough fantasy or romanticism. However, based on some facts, I got the impression that I would prefer to live in America. It is for this very reason that I decided to offer you my collaboration. But I am not an altruist alone. Remuneration for me is not just money. It is, even to a greater extent, the evaluation of the significance and the importance of my work.

Tolkachev further explained that he had decided “five or six years ago” to cooperate, but that he waited until “my son grew up.” He wrote, “I understand that in case of a flap my family would face a severe ordeal.” At first he thought about trying to establish contact at a US exhibit, but decided this would not be secure. He then started taking long walks around the Embassy area. Having spotted cars with diplomatic license plates, he looked for an opportunity to approach an American getting in or out of his car. He observed that some of these cars had Russian drivers and realized that he would have to be careful which car he chose. (Tolkachev clearly had no idea that he had stumbled on the local CIA chief as the target for his initial approaches.) He noted that he had decided that the driver of

the car he chose to approach had to be an American and not a Russian chauffeur due to “his bright and beggarly clothing—trousers which had never seen an iron—no Russian chauffeur of a diplomatic vehicle would ever dress like that.”

The Operation Takes Off

The first meeting with Tolkachev in January 1979 was a watershed event. The information that he passed convinced all but the most diehard skeptics that the CIA was in contact with a volunteer with immense potential. The Agency now moved into high gear to put the operation on a sound footing.

The CIA was breaking new ground in several ways. Tolkachev provided access to information of a sort never before seen in its Soviet operations, in terms of both its huge value to US military planners and its highly technical nature. In addition, Tolkachev was to be handled extensively via face-to-face meetings in Moscow rather than by deaddrops, which were normally used for Russian assets handled in country.

The January meeting started a pattern of successful encounters with Tolkachev held every two or three months over the next 18 months of the operation. The first meetings were dedicated not only to receiving Tolkachev's immensely valuable intelligence, but also to working out the critically important operational

details that would ensure that he could be handled securely and productively over the long term. This meant constructing a viable agent communication system, coming to agreement with the agent over a compensation package and a way to deliver it, and working out the means by which he could best take advantage of his access to obtain Soviet secrets for delivery to the CIA in a secure manner. Tolkachev continued to deliver large quantities of highly valuable intelligence while the details of the arrangement were being worked out.

Agent Communications

Considerable planning was needed to establish a contact routine for the Tolkachev operation. In this case, the CIA did not have the luxury of being able to provide the agent with any external training in the use of deaddrops before the initiation of his agent role. Since painstaking efforts had already led to a personal meeting with Tolkachev, the door was opened to the possibility of using face-to-face encounters on an ongoing basis.

In February 1979, after several exchanges of messages with CIA headquarters regarding the type of communications to be used in this case, a deaddrop was put down for Tolkachev containing a small spy camera, a light meter, camera instructions, and an operational note, all concealed in another "dirty mitten." The spy camera was matchbox-sized and had been fabricated by OTS so that



Subminiature camera, not much larger than its film cassette, use in for document copying or cite casing photography.

Tolkachev could photograph documents clandestinely at his office.

The note passed to Tolkachev in the same deaddrop contained a communications plan that provided for a variety of methods of contact. For example, Tolkachev could be called at home once a month, on the date that corresponded to the number of the month, that is, 1 January, 2 February, 3 March, and so forth. Tolkachev would cover the phone between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. on those dates to await a "wrong-number" call. Depending upon the name asked for by the caller, Tolkachev would be directed to one of three prearranged deaddrop sites: "Olga," "Anna," or "Nina." The caller also had the option of asking for "Valeriy,"

which would trigger a personal meeting at a prearranged site one hour from the time of the call.

Once a month, on the date that corresponded to the number of the month plus 15 days—18 March, 19 April, 20 May, etc.—Tolkachev was directed to appear at one of several prearranged sites, at a specified time according to the month, and to wait for five minutes—a password and recognition signal were incorporated into the plan in case someone other than the regular case officer should make the meeting.

Once every three months, on the last weekend of the month, Tolkachev would have the opportunity to pass materials via

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In more than 20 encounters, Tolkachev handed over hundreds of rolls of exposed film and hundreds of pages of written notes.

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deaddrop. Tolkachev would look to see whether a “ready to receive” signal had been made; if so, he was to put down a package in a prearranged site. A recovery signal would be put up the next day so that he could check to ensure that his package had been received. He was also given instructions on how to package and conceal any drop of materials for passage to the CIA. He also could trigger a deaddrop delivery by making a marked signal on any Monday; a case officer in turn would signal readiness to receive his package, using a parked-car signal the following Wednesday, and that night Tolkachev could put down his deaddrop package. A recovery signal would then be put up the following day to signal the successful recovery of his drop.

Tolkachev, however, resisted using deaddrops. In an April 1979 written message, he said that he did not understand why the CIA wanted to use deaddrops to communicate. He said that personal meetings would be no more risky than using deaddrop passes, because in both cases a CIA officer had to be free of surveillance to carry out the communications plan. Given this fact, Tolkachev said that it seemed to him that personal meetings were to be preferred, because they would be much more productive. He also noted that “psychologically” he preferred to exchange materials via personal meeting, because he worried that a drop could accidentally fall into the wrong hands and that in such a case the

documents he provided could be traced back to him.

Hathaway agreed with Tolkachev’s reasoning, as ultimately did CIA headquarters. As a result, beginning in April 1979, personal meetings with Tolkachev were used almost exclusively. Several were held with him in the second half of 1979, and more than 20 took place over the next five years. These personal encounters allowed Tolkachev to hand over to his CIA case officer hundreds of rolls of exposed film and hundreds of pages of written notes containing an enormous amount of valuable intelligence.

Surveillance Detection Runs

To ensure that the case officer was free from KGB surveillance before carrying out any element of the communications plan, the officer would conduct a surveillance detection run. This involved case officers moving about the city in an apparently innocent fashion, while unobtrusively checking to determine whether they were under surveillance. Although the 17th Department of the KGB, responsible for counterintelligence inside the USSR, had a large

manpower pool, it could not maintain surveillance on all foreigners all the time, so it was important to try to convince surveillance teams, when they were covering a given case officer, that the officer was not involved in any operational activities when they were moving about the city.

As part of this process, every case officer went to great lengths to establish a routine that took him to various parts of the city on a regular basis, to do shopping, run errands, take part in recreational activities, go sightseeing, take the children out, walk the dog, and so forth. These routines were carefully constructed to try to bore the KGB surveillance teams, to the point where they would be moved to other, presumably more productive, targets. If and when the officers did find themselves free of surveillance while on these personal travels around the city, they would take advantage of this situation to look for prospective new deaddrop sites, to service such sites, or to carry out other operational activities.

This method of action meant that a series of alternative contacts had to be built into every agent communication system, because a case officer could never know ahead of time whether he would be free of surveillance on any given day. Because of the heavy surveillance normally used against CIA case officers, another part of any agent communications system required that several case officers be read in on the case, so that any one of them

who was able to determine that he was surveillance-free on a given day would be capable of communicating with the agent.

Another technique that was used to defeat KGB surveillance was to disguise the identity of the case officer being sent out to meet with Tolkachev. This technique was first used in this operation in June 1980. John Guilsher drove to the US Embassy building at about 7:20 p.m., ostensibly having been invited to dinner at the apartment of an Embassy officer who lived there. Once inside, he disguised himself so that when he later left the compound in another vehicle, he would not be recognized by KGB surveillants waiting outside. Checking to ensure that he was free of surveillance, Guilsher, while still in the vehicle, changed out of his western clothes and made himself look as much as possible like a typical, working-class Russian by putting on a Russian hat and working-class clothes, taking a heavy dose of garlic, and splashing some vodka on himself. Guilsher then left his vehicle and proceeded on foot and by local public transportation to a public phone booth, where he called the agent out for a meeting at a pre-arranged site.

After the meeting, Guilsher returned to his vehicle, put on normal Western clothes, and drove back to the Embassy. There he resumed his own identity and then left the compound and returned to his apartment.

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[The case officer] put on a Russian hat and working-class clothes, took a heavy dose of garlic, and splashed some vodka on himself.

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Tolkachev's case officers successfully used this technique, with some variations, for a number of meetings with the agent over the course of this operation.

Agent Compensation

As is the case with most agents, remuneration was a subject of great importance to Tolkachev and an operationally difficult matter to resolve. As the details were worked out over time, it became evident that he was primarily interested in obtaining a salary as a demonstration that the CIA highly valued his work, rather than as a means to enrich himself.

The dialogue regarding compensation began with the second personal meeting in April 1979. During a 15-minute walking contact, Tolkachev turned over five rolls of film that he had taken with his miniature camera and more than 50 pages of handwritten notes containing intelligence of both a substantive and operational nature. In the notes, he proposed to pass information over a 12-year period, divided into seven stages; he wanted to be paid a set amount at the end of each stage. He said that he considered

that stage one had been completed with the passage of the extensive materials that he had delivered in January, added to what he had been able to pass before that time via his SW messages and written notes. He went on to say that he did not feel that he had been adequately compensated for his first year and a half “of lonely efforts to break down the wall of distrust” and for the significant information that he had provided to date. He provided a range of figures in the tens of thousands of rubles, which he said he believed would be fair compensation for the information that he had provided so far.

Tolkachev stated that he could either just pass information as he had outlined in his seven-stage plan, and ask for a sum of money “in six figures” equal to “what Belenko got,” or he could go



Case officer in disguise as a Russian worker for meeting with Tolkachev.

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He was told that he was to be paid an annual salary ‘equivalent to the salary of the US President.’

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beyond this and keep passing new information as it developed and he got access to it.³

Tolkachev wrote that, if he were cooperating just for the money, he probably would follow the first course, but, because he had tasked himself with passing the maximum amount of information to the United States, he did not intend to stop halfway, and “only the second course of action is viable.”

In October 1979, Tolkachev returned to the subject of his reimbursement. Subsequent to the April letter outlining his salary demands, he had been told that the DCI had approved the passage to him of an amount of rubles equivalent to almost \$100,000 for the information that he had provided to date. In response to this, Tolkachev now wrote that, when he said he wanted compensation in the “six figures,” he meant “six zeroes!” He went on to say that he had heard on the Voice of America that “American specialists” estimated that the Soviets would have to spend \$3 billion to reequip the MiG-25 as a result of the Belenko defection. If that were the case, he reasoned, “several million dollars is not too fantastic a price” for the information that he had provided to the CIA on the new technology with which the Soviets would reequip this aircraft.

³ In his note, Tolkachev claimed that he had learned how much Belenko was paid from security personnel who periodically briefed the scientists at his institute.

In Tolkachev’s first meeting with Guilsher in January 1979, the latter had told him that his superiors were worried that, if the agent were given a substantial amount of money, he would start throwing it around. Returning to this topic, Tolkachev wrote in his April note that “the subject of reckless handling of sums of money can never arise.” He stated that he already had the means to buy a car and an expensive dacha. Although he said that he never wanted a car, he planned to buy one when his son turned 15 or 16—depending on “how his relations develop with his growing son.” He also said that neither he nor his wife had any inclination to be saddled with a dacha, although they were considering eventually buying a small house and some land.

Perhaps realizing that his salary demands might seem exorbitant, Tolkachev went on in his April note to emphasize that his “basic goal in working with [the CIA] consists of passing the maximum amount of information in the shortest time.” He wrote that he knew that “the end may come at any moment, but it does not frighten me and I will work to the end.”

In the next meeting in December 1979, Tolkachev said that he

realized that his salary demands were unrealistic. He said he had made them because he wanted to ensure that he got appropriate recognition for his work. On accepting the over 100,000 rubles that he was passed at this meeting, Tolkachev commented that this was much better than the few thousand rubles that he had previously been paid. He went on to say that he did not really need the money and that he would just store it; he added that he did not want any money at the next meeting. He said he just wanted the money as proof that the CIA really valued his work.

By May 1980, Tolkachev’s salary had finally been agreed on. He was told that he was to be paid an annual salary “equivalent to the salary of the US President” for his work in 1979 and an even higher salary for each year thereafter that he was in place and productive. The bulk of these funds would be held in escrow, to be available to him at some future date when he determined that he wanted to be exfiltrated to the United States with his family. Meanwhile, these funds would earn 8.75 percent interest, and he would be able to draw on them at his discretion.

Tolkachev suggested in one of his notes that he wanted to consider donating some of his salary to the Russian dissident movement. He said that previously he had not raised this possibility because he had not yet worked out the matter of his CIA compensation and that, “I would not like to divide up the hide of an unkilld bear.”

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**The only secure
 manner was to
 photograph documents
 in the men’s toilet.**
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Now that agreement had been reached to pay him certain funds, however, he said that he wanted to consider how some of these funds might be made available to the families of dissidents who had been repressed by the Soviet authorities. The hard part would be to find a way to do this securely, and he asked for the CIA’s ideas. As it turned out, no such arrangement was ever made, presumably because no way could be found to do this without possibly compromising Tolkachev.

Dealing With a Camera Problem

Another vitally important issue that took some time to work out concerned how Tolkachev could best collect the large quantities of highly technical data to which he had access. The miniature camera passed to him in February 1979 had a number of limitations. Although it allowed for 70 to 80 exposures per roll, it required more light than was normally available for the photography done by Tolkachev at his office. More important, its small size made it almost impossible to hold steady, frequently resulting in blurred photos. Tolkachev also complained that it clicked *too loudly*, and that he had to stack several books in order to get the camera at the right 13-inch height to take photos.

Tolkachev suggested that he be given a regular 35-mm camera. He said that the best method for

photographing sensitive institute documents would be for him to take them home over the lunch hour, while his wife would still be at the office and his son would be at school. As a result of this suggestion, in June 1979 he was passed a Pentax ME 35-mm camera and clamp to hold the camera steady by attaching it to the back of a chair.

The results immediately justified the change in cameras. In the April and June 1979 meetings, Tolkachev had passed over a dozen rolls of film taken with the miniature camera, but almost all were unreadable. In meetings held in October and December 1979, after the receipt of the Pentax, he provided more than 150 rolls of film shot at home, all of excellent quality. Accompanying notes included new intelligence and explanations of the documents he had photographed.

CIA headquarters continued, meanwhile, to work on giving Tolkachev the capability to photograph documents at his office, should that prove necessary. In October 1979, the agent was passed two updated spy cameras fabricated by OTS; in December, he received four more. The cameras, disguised in a suitable concealment device, had a capacity of some 100 shots per roll of film. Given the intricacy of

changing the film, Tolkachev was to return the entire camera each time that he completed a roll.

New Security Practices at Work

The forethought in issuing Tolkachev the new spy cameras proved worthwhile. Tolkachev’s institute initiated new security procedures in December 1979. In the past, institute staffers could check out an unlimited number of sensitive documents from the institute library, as long as they were returned *before the close of business* that same day. Now, such documents could only be checked out by leaving one’s building pass at the library. Tolkachev was no longer able to take the documents to his apartment to photograph, because he could not leave the building without showing his pass.

For several months, Tolkachev was reduced to photographing documents at his institute using the new spy cameras. He informed the CIA that the only secure manner of doing so was to photograph documents in the men’s toilet. Despite the danger and the difficulty, he exposed all the frames of four of his six miniature cameras during this period, which he passed to his CIA case officer in a personal meeting in February 1980.

Nonetheless, Tolkachev preferred to do his photography at home with his 35-mm Pentax. He continued to be dissatisfied with the CIA’s miniature

cameras, saying that the low light conditions were difficult to overcome and that he had a hard time trying to hold the camera still while shooting. In addition, the cameras periodically malfunctioned.

To deal with the new security restrictions, Tolkachev suggested that the CIA fabricate a copy of his building pass. He could then leave the fake building pass at the library when checking out documents, while using his real pass to exit and reenter the building over the lunch hour. He suggested that he could “lose” his pass so that he could turn it over to his case officer to be copied. Instead, for his protection, he was asked to take color photos and provide a physical description of the pass, which OTS could use to try to make a duplicate.

Meanwhile, by good fortune the new security restrictions were canceled in February 1980. The change in procedures had worked a hardship on the women who worked at the institute, who constituted a majority of the staff. The women complained that they needed to leave the institute during the lunch hour to do their shopping, but they could not return any sensitive documents that they might have checked out from the library and retrieve their building passes, because the library was closed for lunch. This enabled Tolkachev to resume photographing documents at home. The benefits to the operation were immediately visible: In June 1980, Tolkachev passed almost 200 rolls of film, the largest

amount he was ever able to turn over in one meeting.

Rave Reviews

Meanwhile, customer satisfaction with Tolkachev’s reporting remained extremely high. A December 1979 Defense Department memorandum to the DCI said that, as a result of Tolkachev’s information, the Air Force had completely reversed its direction on a multi-million dollar electronics package for one of its latest fighter aircraft. Furthermore, in March 1980, a preliminary internal CIA evaluation highly praised Tolkachev’s information on the latest generation of Soviet surface-to-air missile systems, stating: “We never before obtained such detail and understanding of such systems until years after they were actually deployed.” The evaluation also noted that the information jibed with data produced by “national technical means,” but that it added important details that other collection systems could not provide.

Also in March 1980, consideration was given to having cleared Defense Department personnel work on the translation of backlogged materials provided by Tolkachev, due to the inability of CIA translators to keep up with this task. It was estimated that it would take eight clerks and three Russian-language translators, working full time for seven to eight weeks, to process these materials! (In the end, however,

no action was taken on such an initiative.)

An April 1980 internal CIA memorandum called Tolkachev’s information on jam-proofing tests for Soviet fighter aircraft radar systems “unique”—such data, sought for many years, was not obtainable by national technical means. In June 1980, Tolkachev was credited with providing unique information on a new Soviet aircraft design, extensive information on modifications to another Soviet fighter aircraft, and documents on several new models of airborne missile systems. The next month, another internal memorandum stated that, even if Tolkachev’s spying were discovered, the value of the information that he had provided would not diminish for at least eight to 10 years—it would take the Soviets that long to design, test, and deploy new technology to replace that which the agent had compromised to the CIA.

The kudos continued. In September 1980, a memorandum from the Defense Department stated: “The impact of [Tolkachev’s] reporting is limitless in terms of enhancing US military systems’ effectiveness, and in the potential to save lives and equipment.” It also called the information instrumental in shaping the course of billions of dollars of US R&D activities, and described the value of Tolkachev’s information to these programs as immense.

From January 1979 until June 1980, Tolkachev had provided an

extremely high volume of incredibly valuable intelligence to the US military. This information could have meant the difference between victory and defeat, should a military confrontation with the USSR have occurred.

Plans for Contingencies

In the early stages of the operation, the CIA had to consider how and when ultimately to end it. This included potential exfiltration arrangements, given the tremendous value of Tolkachev's information and the high risks that he was running. Headquarters had quickly concurred in offering exfiltration to Tolkachev and his family, but it wanted to delay any actual departure from the USSR for several years, if possible, to take maximum advantage of his access.

Tolkachev had also been thinking about the eventual end of his relationship with the CIA, but in somewhat different terms. In the note that he passed in April 1979, he had requested that he be issued a poison pill, writing, "I would not like to carry on a conversation with organs of the KGB." He reiterated this request in his October 1979 note and made it a steady theme in his messages to the CIA from that point onward. The CIA officers handling this case at first resisted these requests, but gradually concluded that Tolkachev would not be put off. The matter was then referred to the DCI, who refused to authorize the issuance of a poison pill.

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**Tolkachev reiterated
 his request . . . but the
 DCI refused to
 authorize the issuance
 of a poison pill.**

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After being told of this decision, Tolkachev wrote a letter to the DCI pleading his case; he gave the letter to his case officer during his June 1980 meeting. In it, he detailed the risks he was running and insisted that he be given the means to commit suicide, if necessary, because of his "precarious security situation." Because of the large number of intelligence requirements he had been given, he said that he could not answer many of them without obtaining documents to which he did not normally have access. To satisfy these requirements, he had to check out quantities of sensitive documents from the institute library. Each time he did so, he had to sign out the documents which had originated with his institute but which were outside of the purview of his own work. Worse, he had to obtain prior written permission from any other Soviet research institutes or agencies whose documents he wanted to obtain.

Tolkachev emphasized that, if the KGB ever for any reason suspected that information was being leaked on the research activities on which he was working, a review of the document sign-out permission cards would quickly finger him as the leading suspect. He said that the next

thing the KGB would do would be to search his apartment, and "things that I can hide from my family I can never hide from the KGB." Given this situation, he said that it should be easier to understand his efforts to obtain the "means of defense" as soon as possible. By having a means to commit suicide, Tolkachev said that he would be able to keep secret "the volume of his activity and the methods by which he was able to carry out this activity." Incredibly, Tolkachev was not only thinking about his personal situation, but he was pointing out the importance of preventing the Soviets from finding out exactly what he had passed to the Americans, which would greatly complicate their efforts to carry out a damage assessment, when and if he were compromised.

In this June 1980 note, Tolkachev also responded to the CIA's suggestion that a dialogue begin on the subject of his eventual exfiltration to the United States with his wife and son. He specifically requested that these exfiltration preparations be made as soon as possible, and he asked to be notified of what he had to do to support this planning.

Turnover

The handing over of an agent from his first case officer to a successor is always a signal event in any agent operation. Although John Guilsher had not actually "recruited" Tolkachev, he had been the agent's first handler and

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**Headquarters
proposed the use of the
latest and best Short-
Range Agent
Communication
System.**

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he had moved the operation from its initial, halting steps into a smooth relationship. He had made Tolkachev feel confident that he could be depended on to protect his security, and the two had become comfortable with each other in the dangerous endeavor in which they were involved. It was time, however, for Guilsher to leave Moscow, and the CIA had some concern that Tolkachev might react negatively to the introduction of a new case officer. Nonetheless, on 14 October 1980, Tolkachev met for the first time with his new case officer and showed no hesitation in accepting him. An important milestone had been passed.

Tolkachev told his new case officer at their first meeting that he had purchased a new car, a Russian Zhiguli; and he insisted that the meeting be held in the car, which was parked nearby. He suggested that, in the future, other meetings could be held in the car.

The CIA ultimately agreed that personal meetings in Tolkachev's parked car were a sensible complement to walking meetings. Although the car's license plates were traceable to the agent, there was no reason for the KGB to pay particular attention to these plates, should they see the car parked with two people sitting in it. The CIA case officers meeting with Tolkachev always dressed like working class Russians. In cold weather, it would appear more natural for two people to be seated in a warm car than to be

out walking. Gradually, meetings in Tolkachev's parked car were incorporated into the meeting plan and used throughout the duration of the operation.

Alternate Communications

In September 1980, CIA headquarters suggested that planning begin for the possible use of Short-Range Agent Communications (SRAC) with Tolkachev, as an emergency backup communications system. It could be used if Tolkachev wanted an emergency meeting or there were a need for a brief exchange of data without the risk of a personal meeting.

Headquarters proposed the use of the latest and best SRAC system available at the time. It consisted of two identical units, one for the case officer's use and one for the agent's use. These units were about the size of two cigarette packs laid end to end. Each unit came with detachable antennas, Russian or English keyboard plates, battery packs and batteries, chargers, and instructions.

Before any planned transmission, both the agent and the case officer entered their messages by keying them into their respec-

tive unit one letter at a time. The messages were automatically enciphered as they were keyed into the units. The units had a capacity of several thousand characters. With no major physical obstructions between them, the units had a range in the hundreds of meters. They were programmed to exchange messages in a burst transmission that lasted only seconds. The messages could then be read by scrolling the deciphered text across the unit's small screen.

The use of this communications method was highly structured. In this operation, it would be up to the agent to initiate any SRAC exchange. To start the process, Tolkachev would be directed to mark a predetermined signal site (a chalk mark on a utility pole) in accordance with a periodic (normally monthly) timetable. A case officer would monitor this site, which would be on a street regularly used by the officer.

If the agent marked the signal, this would initiate a sequence of events leading up to a SRAC exchange. Both the agent and a case officer would go to prearranged electronic letter drop (ELD) sites at a predetermined time. These sites would be close enough to allow a SRAC exchange while being far enough apart so that there could be no apparent visual connection between the case officer and the agent. Primary alternate sites and times for ELD exchanges were built into the communications system. There were also prearranged signals for the agent

to convey that he did or did not receive the message transmitted to him. In the Tolkachev operation, these signals were to be parked car signals (PCS)—that is, the agent would park his car a certain way at a certain place at a given time to indicate that he did or did not successfully receive the SRAC transmission. In return, the CIA would use a PCS to convey the same information to the agent.

The idea of using SRAC was broached with Tolkachev in a note passed to him in the October 1980 meeting. He responded positively in December 1980, and, in March 1981, a SRAC unit and the accompanying paraphernalia and communications plan were passed to him.

Some technical bugs had to be worked out before this system could be used successfully. As it developed, it was decided not to meet Tolkachev for an extended period after his March 1981 meeting to decrease the frequency of contact with him and thus reduce the chance that the KGB might stumble onto his activities. Consequently, the agent was not met again until November 1981, at which time he returned his SRAC unit, saying that he could not get it to work. The unit was repaired and returned to him later.

In March 1982, the agent signaled for a SRAC exchange, and a successful exchange of SRAC messages was carried out on 13 March. Tolkachev had asked for the exchange because he wanted

an unscheduled personal meeting just three days after a regular meeting. The purpose of this unscheduled meeting was to allow him to provide a critique of the first cut of the fake building pass that OTS had made. Anxious to obtain this pass so that he could safely check out sensitive documents, Tolkachev resorted to using the SRAC system.

SRAC was not the only alternate communications method introduced into this operation. In November 1981, Tolkachev was passed a commercially purchased short wave radio and two one-time pads, with accompanying instructions, as part of an "Interim-One-Way Link" (IOWL) base-to-agent alternate communication system. He was also passed a demodulator unit, which was to be connected to the short wave radio when a message was to be received.

Tolkachev was directed to tune into a certain short wave frequency at specific times and days with his demodulator unit connected to his radio to capture the message being sent. Each broadcast lasted 10 minutes, which included the transmission of any live message as well as dummy messages. The agent could later break out the message by scrolling it out on the screen of the demodulator unit. The first three digits of the message would indicate whether a live message was included for him, in which case he would scroll out the message, contained in five-digit groups, and decode the message using his one-time pad. Using

this system, Tolkachev could receive over 400 five-digit groups in any one message.

Tolkachev tried to use this IOWL system, but he later informed his case officer that he was unable to securely monitor these broadcasts at the times indicated (evening hours) because he had no privacy in his apartment. He also said that he could not adhere to a different evening broadcast schedule by waiting until his wife and son went to bed, because he always went to bed before they did.

As a result, the broadcasts were changed to the morning hours of certain workdays, during which Tolkachev would come home from work using a suitable pretext. This system also ran afoul of bad luck and Soviet security. Tolkachev's institute initiated new security procedures that made it virtually impossible for him to leave the office during work hours without written permission. In December 1982, Tolkachev returned his IOWL equipment, broadcast schedule, instructions, and one-time pad to his case officer. The CIA was never able to use this system to set up an unscheduled meeting with him.

Excellent tradecraft and good luck conspired to allow the CIA to continue its pattern of undetected personal encounters with Tolkachev. Over 10 such meetings were held between October 1980 and November 1983. There were some instances where heavy KGB surveillance on CIA officers

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Defeating the [phone] habits of a typical teenager was more than either the CIA or the agent could manage!

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forced a given meeting to be aborted, but for the most part they were held as scheduled.

The periodically heavy KGB surveillance on various case officers, often without any apparent logic, did, however, force the CIA to become more creative in its personal-meeting tradecraft. A new countersurveillance technique that was used for this operation involved what was called a “Jack-in-the-Box” (JIB). A JIB (a popup device made to look like the upper half of a person) allowed a case officer to make a meeting with an agent even while under vehicular surveillance.

Typically, a JIB would be smuggled into a car disguised as a large package or the like. Subsequently Tolkachev’s case officer and other station personnel would set out in the car many hours before a planned meeting with the agent. Following a pre-planned route, the driver at some point would make a series of turns designed to provide a brief period when the trailing surveillance car would lose sight of the car containing the case officer and other CIA personnel. After one of these turns, Tolkachev’s case officer would jump from the slowly moving vehicle, at which time the driver would activate the JIB. The JIB would give the appearance to any trailing surveillance team of being the missing case officer. The car would then continue its route, eventually arriving at a given destination, usually the home of one of the other CIA personnel in

the car. The JIB, again concealed in a large package, would then be removed from the car. At that point, the case officer would almost certainly be missed by the KGB surveillants, because he would not get out of the car, but they would have no hope of locating him until he returned to a known site.

Meanwhile, the case officer, having exited the car wearing a Russian-style coat and hat, would proceed by foot and public transportation to the meeting site, after assuring himself that he indeed was free of surveillance. After conducting the meeting, he would use public transportation to return to the Embassy or to his home. This method of avoiding surveillance was used successfully several times for meetings with Tolkachev.

It was preferable not to overuse this technique because the KGB would be well aware that the case officer had eluded surveillance and that almost certainly some operational act had been carried out. Typically in such situations, some KGB retaliation could be expected—such as air let out of the case officers’ tires, cars blocked on the street, or other harassment—and surveillance of

suspected CIA personnel in general would be increased temporarily. Nonetheless, at times the use of this technique was the only way that a case officer could get free to meet with Tolkachev.

The communications plan with Tolkachev had to be adjusted in other ways as well. In November 1983, Tolkachev asked that he not be called at home to set up unscheduled meetings, because the phone was now located in his son’s room and it was his son who always answered the phone. Although the CIA could defeat KGB surveillance, defeating the habits of a typical teenager was more than either it or the agent could manage!

Favors for Oleg

Tolkachev’s desire to satisfy some of the needs of his son was high on the agent’s list of reasons for maintaining his relationship with US intelligence. Oleg liked Western rock-and-roll music. In the note that Tolkachev passed to the case officer at his October 1980 meeting, he asked to be provided with some popular records for passage to his son. He also requested Western stereo equipment. Finally, he asked for advice on how he could dependably receive Western radio broadcasts, which were frequently jammed by Soviet authorities.

In response, the CIA provided seven cassettes of taped rock-and-roll music during a March

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Consideration was given to the possibility of compensating him in part with expensive jewelry or gold coins.

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1981 meeting, despite concerns that having such cassettes could pose a security threat. Tolkachev said that the CIA should not worry, because such music was available in the Russian black market, but he himself did not want to be bothered trying to track it down there. He then requested stereo headphones for his son, some albums, and the words of the songs in these albums in English. He also asked that he be given the words to the songs on the seven cassettes that had been previously taped for his son.

This effort to do favors for Oleg continued. In March 1982, Tolkachev “reluctantly” asked more personal favors. He requested a Walkman for his son, as well as a set of pencils of various degrees of hardness for Oleg to use for mechanical drawing. He also asked for some non-Soviet razor blades, writing that “shaving with Soviet razor blades is an unpleasant operation.” He apologized for asking for such trivial things, noting that, “unfortunately our personal life consists also of all types of small things which sometimes exert an influence on the general mood of life.” CIA personnel in Eastern Europe were ultimately tasked with purchasing a local razor and a year’s supply of razor blades for passage to Tolkachev.

In February 1983, Tolkachev asked for various drafting materials for his son, including specialized drafting pens, inks, erasers, and pen tips. In April 1983, he asked for some Western

books on architecture for Oleg, as well as other Western books, which apparently were for both him and his son. The books included Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, a copy of the Bible (in Russian), the DIA publication *Soviet Military Power*, the memoirs of Golda Meir, and a Solzhenitsyn book. He also asked for biographies of famous world figures and a selection of popular Western fiction. Although all indications are that his son was never made witting of Tolkachev’s CIA role, he clearly was a beneficiary.

More Money Matters

Tolkachev’s remuneration continued to be a subject of negotiation. In December 1980, he asked that the 8.75 percent interest that his escrow salary was accumulating be paid to him in rubles at the end of each calendar year. Despite the obvious security concerns, this request was granted. In November 1981, Tolkachev was passed an amount of rubles equivalent to over \$40,000, which was the amount of interest to which he would be entitled as of 31 December of that year. Even this, however, did not satisfy him.

In February 1982, Tolkachev wrote the CIA that the conversion of his interest from dollars to rubles should be done at the

black-market rate (which in his mind was the real rate of exchange) rather than the official rate. By his calculations, he should have received more than four times the amount of rubles that he had been given.

CIA officials managing this case agreed that Tolkachev’s information was well worth the sums he was seeking, and it was decided to meet his request starting the following year. There was, however, great concern about the large amounts of funds that he would be receiving. Any unusual spending by Tolkachev or his family could easily be noticed by the Soviet authorities and lead to a security investigation. Because of the fears that such large amounts of rubles could cause security problems, consideration was given to the possibility of compensating him in part with expensive jewelry or gold coins.

In later written exchanges, Tolkachev agreed that he might be partially compensated with “very fine gold Russian-made jewelry” from the late 19th or early 20th century. He noted that such jewelry could be reasonably explained as having been left to him by his mother. CIA headquarters subsequently conducted a search of antique shops and other possible sources in London, Rome, Paris, Helsinki, Munich, New York, and Washington, to locate and purchase such pieces. This proved to be quite difficult, but eventually some items were found and passed to Tolkachev.

In December 1982, Tolkachev again raised the subject of his remuneration, but with a different twist. He said that he would like to create a “relatively large reserve of money in case of unforeseen events.” He noted that, if a “full breakdown” occurred in his activity, no amount of money would help. If, however, a “partial breakdown” occurred—such as a co-worker catching him hiding materials or taking classified materials home—he might be able to bribe his way out. CIA headquarters never liked this idea, and ultimately it was discarded.

Exfiltration Planning

The CIA was also focused on the need to construct a viable plan for removing Tolkachev and his family from the USSR in the event of a perceived threat of arrest. This subject had first been raised with Tolkachev in December 1979. He responded in February 1980 that he had never considered leaving the USSR, but that, if the CIA could get him and his family out of the country, he would like to pursue planning for such an eventuality. At this point, however, he informed the CIA that his wife and son were totally unwitting of his intelligence work, and thus the whole question of their possible exfiltration would take some deliberation.

After the June 1980 meeting, planning for the possible exfiltration of Tolkachev and his family proceeded sporadically. CIA per-

sonnel in the Soviet Union were tasked to devise workable exfiltration scenarios, including the casing of signal sites and agent pickup sites, while CIA headquarters took on the task of manufacturing containers in which the agent and his family could be smuggled out of the USSR.

Tolkachev appeared highly interested in this subject, once it had been broached. One of Tolkachev’s former case officers recalls that Tolkachev would periodically brainstorm on the subject, suggesting wildly improbable scenarios, such as having the CIA fly a specially made light aircraft into a rural area of the Soviet Union, where Tolkachev and his family could be picked up. When discussing that particular possibility, he noted that the only problem might be that such an aircraft designed to evade Soviet aircraft detection systems might have trouble accommodating his wife, due to her weight!

The subject of exfiltration came up again in January 1983, following the initiation of new security regulations at Tolkachev’s institute, which suggested at least the possibility that the Soviets might have become aware of the leakage of sensitive information from that institute. It was agreed that a Leningrad option would be preferable if Tolkachev and his family were able to get out of Moscow. This would involve a vehicular pick up in Leningrad and subsequent smuggling across the border into Finland in a spe-

cially constructed hiding cavity in the vehicle. The secondary option would be a vehicle pickup on the outskirts of Moscow, the smuggling of Tolkachev and family into a secure holding area, and their subsequent removal from the country by controlled aircraft or overland by specially modified vehicle.

There was some discussion of actually issuing an exfiltration plan with suitable alternatives to Tolkachev at his next meeting, in March 1983, but it was decided to discuss the subject with him in depth at that time to ensure that the CIA’s tentative plans made sense to him and to seek more information from him to aid in the planning for this eventuality. This was done in a written note, which was passed to Tolkachev at the March meeting. In this note, it was proposed to meet again with Tolkachev in April to get feedback from him and to allow for in-depth discussions of an exfiltration plan.

Tolkachev was met in April 1983 as planned. He refused, however, to accept an envelope that had been prepared for him outlining an exfiltration plan with various alternatives. He said that because of his “current family situation,” he did not want to consider exfiltration at that time.

In a written note, Tolkachev explained further his unwillingness to accept an exfiltration plan. He wrote that he and his wife had some acquaintances who had left the Soviet Union for Israel, and eventually ended up

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**‘I cannot think about
 exfiltration since I
 would never leave my
 family.’**
 ”

in the United States. The woman in this family had subsequently written to Tolkachev’s wife about how much she missed her homeland. Tolkachev said that his wife had commented that she could never leave Moscow, let alone the Soviet Union, because she would suffer “too much nostalgia.” Similarly, Tolkachev wrote that his son had commented (presumably in response to an elicitation effort by his father) that, “It would not be too bad to travel to the West for two or three years,” but he could never leave the Soviet Union for good because all his friends were there.

Tolkachev said that, given this situation, “I cannot think about exfiltration since I would never leave my family.” Nonetheless, he provided written answers to the questions that had been posed, so that exfiltration planning could continue, against the day that his family situation somehow changed.

Protecting Production

By mid-1980, the operation had settled into a regular routine, with Tolkachev taking documents home during his luncheon break for photographing. The main limiting factor at this time was the weather. In winter, Tolkachev was able to smuggle large quantities of documents out of the institute under his heavy clothing. In summer, lighter clothing restricted how much he could sneak out.

Meanwhile, CIA headquarters continued to work on a fake building pass for Tolkachev that he could use to check out documents, should tighter security restrictions be re-imposed. In October 1980, headquarters reported that OTS hoped to have a final version of the fake pass in November.

That same month, Tolkachev passed to the CIA a document sign-out permission card from his institute’s document library. He asked that the Agency’s technical experts also try to duplicate this card. He wanted to use it to replace the real one surreptitiously, because the card contained a full listing of the large volume of sensitive documents that Tolkachev had signed out, most of which he had obtained to photograph for the CIA. The agent had long worried that, if and when any leak occurred in the United States that indicated that sensitive information from his institute had been compromised, the KGB’s first recourse would be to check the document sign-out cards, and, in so doing, they would quickly finger Tolkachev as a likely culprit. If, however, he could substitute a “clean” sign-out card, there would be nothing on the record to point to him as a possible suspect.

OTS was given the task of reproducing this sign-out card as well as his building pass. Both were completed by early 1981 and passed to Tolkachev. He substituted the fake sign-out card for his real card in March 1981, greatly relieving the pressure he felt, at least for the immediate future. He had returned his fake building pass, however, because the color of the outside cover was not quite right. Fortunately at the time, the institute was still under somewhat relaxed security procedures, and Tolkachev was able to sign out documents without leaving his building pass.

In November 1981, however, he reported that his institute had reinitiated the procedure by which the building pass had to be left at the document library when signing out documents. By then, OTS had completed the fake building pass and it was included in the materials passed to the agent during a meeting held that month. The following month, however, Tolkachev called for an unscheduled meeting to return the fake pass again—the color was still not right. He noted that he would not need his original pass while on extended vacation in January and February and could lend it for use in fabricating the fake pass. He stressed his concern that his production would fall off if this problem were not solved. The case officer resisted the temptation to take his pass at the meeting, reasoning that there was no guarantee that a case officer could make a subsequent meeting with the agent within a given time frame

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Tolkachev gave the case officer a piece torn off his pass so that OTS could work with the exact colors [to make a duplicate].

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to return the pass, which made giving up his pass too risky. Tolkachev was told that a fall off in production would be preferable to his doing something that could dramatically increase the chance of his being compromised.

Despite the increased security restrictions at his institute and the difficulties in fabricating an exact replica of his building pass, Tolkachev continued to produce documentary intelligence, albeit at a reduced rate. In December 1981, he passed several rolls of 35-mm film; in February 1982, he provided more than a dozen rolls. Asked how he had managed to continue to do this photography, given the security restrictions in place, Tolkachev said he was able to resort to various ruses, too complicated to explain in their entirety.

Subsequently, Tolkachev provided another story that he had concocted to bypass these security regulations. He noted that sometimes, after leaving his building pass and checking out a document, he would return to get his pass so that he could go home for lunch, explaining that he could not return the documents he had checked out because “his boss was currently reviewing them.” He would then take the documents home and photograph them. When the case officer commented that this was “dangerous,” Tolkachev laughed and said, “Everything is dangerous.”

Tolkachev called for an unscheduled meeting in March 1982 to

provide additional feedback on the fake building pass that OTS had produced. This time, he gave the case officer a piece that he had torn off his pass so that OTS could work with the exact colors.

A number of meetings had been held between November 1981 and May 1982, primarily instigated by Tolkachev in an effort to solve his building pass problem. It was decided in May that, for security reasons, these personal contacts should be halted for several months. Later, heavy, but apparently routine, KGB surveillance of CIA case officers in the latter half of 1982 forced several planned meetings to be aborted. It was only through the CIA's first use of its JIB technique that they were able to reestablish personal contact with Tolkachev in December 1982.

At this December meeting, the agent said that for the first time he had successfully used the OTS-fabricated building pass to smuggle sensitive documents out to photograph at his home. Nonetheless, Tolkachev was depressed because his production was down, as a result of a new, two-tiered building pass system set up at the institute. Now, he and all but a few of the most senior officers had to turn in

their building pass anytime they left the building. To reenter, they needed to go to the main desk and give their pass number to the guard to reclaim their pass. Even worse, because the new passes were different from their predecessors, the fake OTS pass was now useless.

In addition, Tolkachev and all other staffers at the institute now needed to get signed permission slips from their bosses to leave the institute during working hours, except for going home for lunch. This meant that it was virtually impossible for Tolkachev to go to his apartment on the indicated mornings to listen to his short wave radio for possible IOWL messages. He requested a camera that he could use to photograph documents at his office, despite his past difficulties in doing so.

CIA headquarters speculated that the Soviets might have learned that sensitive information on the projects being worked on in this institute had leaked to the United States. It recommended that Tolkachev be directed to stand down for six months (later modified to “several months”). Headquarters also opposed issuing Tolkachev a special camera for use in his office as being too risky, but said that the agent should be informed that he would be kept on full salary during any stand-down in his operational activities.

At meetings held in February and March 1983, the CIA case

officer continued his discussions with Tolkachev regarding how to keep the operation productive in the face of the heightened security restrictions. At the March meeting, Tolkachev provided a strip from his new building pass and a photograph of it so that OTS could try to duplicate it. He said that he had smuggled his 35-mm camera into his office on three consecutive days until he could photograph it clandestinely at his desk!

Tolkachev continued to do some document photography in spite of the security restrictions. He turned over more than a dozen rolls of 35-mm film at the March meeting with his case officer and another dozen-plus rolls at an April meeting.

To deal with these restrictions while at the same time heeding the agent's desire to remain productive, CIA headquarters decided in May to issue him at the next opportunity the latest miniature camera in its inventory, which was the third generation of such cameras. Meanwhile, for security reasons Tolkachev would be directed to stand down completely from taking any documents home to photograph.

The Beginning of the End

The summer and early autumn months of 1983 were harbingers that the best days of the Tolkachev operation were over. From then on, various problems

reduced the agent's productivity until his arrest at some still-undetermined date in the first half of 1985.

Between September and November 1983, five attempts to hold a meeting with Tolkachev failed. On three occasions, the agent signaled a readiness to meet but did not appear at the meeting site at the appointed time. On two other occasions, the agent signaled a readiness to meet, but no appropriate CIA case officer was able to shake surveillance and show up at the meeting site. Tolkachev later said that he had been unable to make the three meetings he missed due to minor but unavoidable problems, but he had gone to the meeting site for the two meetings that the case officer had had to abort.

Finally, in mid-November, Tolkachev and his case officer met. The agent appeared relaxed and happy to be back in touch. He provided 16 pages of handwritten notes but no film, noting that for security reasons he had been unable to photograph any documents. The case officer gave Tolkachev a note discussing security matters, some new requirements, two new concealed mini cameras with accompanying instructions, a light meter, some additional questions regarding the efforts to duplicate his document sign-out card, a proposed meeting schedule for the future, some pieces of gold jewelry of the type he had specified, and some books of fiction and architecture that he had

requested. All the physical signs from this meeting were positive, except for the agent's inability to photograph any documents.

Security Threat

When Tolkachev's written notes from this meeting were processed, however, the CIA officers involved in the case were stunned to read that a serious security threat to the agent had occurred the previous spring—one that had frightened him to the point where he had been convinced that he would be arrested at any moment.

In his note, Tolkachev said that a major security investigation had been conducted in his office in April 1983, apparently regarding possible leaks of classified information about a particular Soviet fighter aircraft target-recognition system. Tolkachev said that security personnel in his institute had requested on a priority basis a list of all personnel having access to information on this subject. Because Tolkachev had passed information on this system to the CIA the previous month, he was convinced that any leak would almost certainly be traced back to him.

Tolkachev wrote that, after having been informed of this investigation, he had asked for the next day off. He had driven to a dacha, taking all of his espionage paraphernalia—including his SRAC unit, Pentax camera, and deaddrop and signal site

instructions—as well as the books and money that had been passed to him.⁴ At the dacha, he had burned everything that would burn. He had thrown the remaining charred metal parts out of the car on the drive back into Moscow.

At that point, Tolkachev said that he had started carrying everywhere with him a poison pill that he had obtained. He reasoned that the most likely scenario for his arrest would be a call to his boss's office, at which point he would be seized. As a result, for the next several days, any time he was called to this office, he first placed the poison pill under his tongue, so that if seized he could immediately bite it. Given these circumstances, wrote Tolkachev, he would have to stand down on any document photography for the time being. He said, however, that he would continue to provide written infor-

⁴ This was the first information on record to indicate that Tolkachev had purchased a dacha—presumably at least partly with the funds that he had earned from the CIA. Such a purchase tended to belie his earlier assertions that he would not spend money rashly and had no real desire to have a dacha of his own. The new car that he showed off when he met with his case officer in October 1980 presumably also was purchased at least partly with CIA funds. Despite his protestations that his spending habits would not compromise his CIA role, Tolkachev apparently did want, at least to some degree, to enjoy the fruits of his CIA labors. There is no indication, however, that these purchases played any part in his eventual compromise.

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**He drove to a dacha,
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paraphernalia ... [and]
burned everything.**
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mation about sensitive documents.

Tolkachev had prepared his written account of these April events in the expectation of a meeting with the CIA in September. With each missed meeting, he added a few pages, each time showing increased confidence that he had weathered the storm and would be able to continue his work for the CIA. Meanwhile, as noted above, Tolkachev had acted quite calmly at his 16 November meeting, giving no sign at that time that he had suffered this tremendous scare. A subsequent CIA message from Moscow to headquarters commented that Tolkachev's continued sang froid, despite the events of April, demonstrated that “this is indeed a driven man who is determined to continue to produce, by whatever means he deems necessary, right up to the end, even if that end is his death.”

CIA headquarters in turn noted in a message sent to Moscow that the information provided by Tolkachev in March on the Soviet fighter aircraft target recognition system had not been disseminated outside of the CIA until June, and thus no leak of this information could have occurred. This ignored, of course, the possibility that a leak from

the Agency itself could have taken place—something that was unthinkable in CIA eyes, until the treason of CIA officer Aldrich Ames.⁵

Over the next several months, intense discussions took place inside the CIA regarding how best to protect Tolkachev, while still trying to keep the operation going. It was agreed that meetings in the future should be held to a minimum, probably only twice yearly, with a possible re-issuance of a SRAC capability. In addition, a revised communications system was planned. There was also a great deal of discussion about the problem of trying to get the funds to Tolkachev that were owed him (the yearly interest on his escrow account), in light of the physical difficulties of passing large sums of money to him and the possible security threat posed by his having such sums in his possession. Finally, it was agreed that a complete exfiltration plan should be prepared and passed to the agent at the next meeting.

Headquarters directed that Tolkachev be advised to exercise extreme caution in his intelligence-gathering activities. He was not to take any more documents home to photograph. The CIA decided that he should be told to limit his activities for the

⁵ Ames was arrested in March 1994. He ultimately pleaded guilty to committing espionage for the Soviet Union over a long period and was sentenced to life in prison.

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Headquarters reaffirmed that it was too dangerous for him to be given another 35-mm camera.

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most part to writing down at home notes on sensitive documents that he had read in the office that day. It was decided to continue the practice of passing miniature CIA cameras to the agent, but to tell him to use them only if he felt completely secure in doing so.

In April 1984, Tolkachev again signaled his readiness to meet. At the meeting, the agent gave the case officer the miniature cameras he had been given, having shot full rolls of film with both, and some 39 pages of handwritten notes, 26 of which contained detailed intelligence. He also handed over some schematics on Soviet radar systems. All but a handful of the 96 frames that he had taken with his spy cameras were of excellent quality.

Tolkachev, in turn, was passed two new spy cameras, a revised communications plan, a note, some medicines and books that he had requested, and over 100,000 rubles. He again refused to accept the exfiltration plan, insisting that he would not be able to use it.

At this meeting, Tolkachev's morale seemed to be high. He said that everything appeared calm at his office, with no further developments relating to the sudden security investigation of the previous year. In his note to the CIA, he wrote that he was sorry to have overreacted and destroyed his spy gear. He also said that he thought that he could be met safely more than

twice a year, and he asked for several new mini-cameras and for the re-issuance of his Pentax 35-mm camera. The only negative note appeared to be his health—he wrote that he had been diagnosed as having “chronic gastritis” and that his peritonitis had worsened. He asked for medicines for both problems. Tolkachev's case officer wrote that, as far as Tolkachev was concerned, it appeared that the operation was “back to normal.”

Weighing Risks and Gains

Between April and October 1984, the internal CIA debate continued regarding the appropriate balance between productivity and security for this case. The agent's security was deemed to be the primary consideration. As a result, Tolkachev was not to be reissued a Pentax camera, because it would be too dangerous for him to try to carry documents home to be photographed in the future. The agent could be met more than twice a year, but only if he insisted that it was safe.

Another meeting with Tolkachev took place in October 1984. He returned the two miniature cam-

eras—all 90 frames came out clearly—and turned over another 22 pages of written notes. The agent in turn was passed three new miniature cameras, a note, various medicines, architects' drawing ink for his son, and some intelligence requirements. Tolkachev said that everything was normal at work and that his health had improved. He again insisted that he be given a Pentax; when told that it was too dangerous, he replied that he had requirements to meet and that he was anxious to get on with his work.

Despite Tolkachev's insistence, CIA headquarters reaffirmed that it was too dangerous for him to be given another 35-mm camera. CIA personnel in Moscow agreed, but they worried that he just might go out and buy a camera himself. It was agreed that he should be passed more than two miniature cameras at future meetings to try to keep him happy and to discourage any effort to obtain another 35-mm camera.

There was also a continued discussion of what should be done to pay Tolkachev the funds he would be owed as of 31 December. Based on his escrow account holding of over a million dollars, which represented salary that had been accumulated as of December 1983, Tolkachev would be owed several hundred thousand rubles, just in interest alone. His ruble interest payment was based on the amount of his accumulated salary at the end of the previous year.

Business as Usual

In January 1985, another seemingly routine meeting was held with Tolkachev. He returned his three used miniature cameras and passed 16 pages of handwritten notes containing both intelligence and operational information. The case officer gave him five new miniature cameras, intelligence requirements, new communications signal sites, some 100,000 rubles, and three Russian-language books that he had asked for. Per Tolkachev's request, the case officer also returned some technical notes that the agent had passed to the CIA earlier.

Tolkachev again said that all was calm at his office, and he immediately asked whether his Pentax had been included in his package. When he was told why this had not been done, he said that he disagreed but would abide by the decision. Although he said that his overall health was better, his teeth were still bothering him. He suggested that the next meeting be held in June, and that plans be made for an average of three meetings per year.

At this meeting, Tolkachev had a long list of personal requests; including medicines, transcripts of official statements made by Soviet leaders as reported in the Western press; books, albums, and soft-tipped pens for his son; and English-language materials (written and cassette) for his son and one of his son's female friends. Tolkachev recognized that it would take a lot of work to

satisfy all these requests, and he proposed that someone be hired full-time, to be paid out of his escrow funds, just to take care of these requests.

Tolkachev also explained how he was currently doing his document photography. He said that he usually took the documents to the toilet of an office building in the institute complex that was adjacent to his office building. He did this because the light was better there (a bigger window) and it was used less often. He said that he usually arranged to make a cover stop at someone's office in the other building to explain his presence there. Normally, the whole process took no more than 20 to 25 minutes.

When the film that Tolkachev had returned in January was developed, it was unreadable, almost certainly due to the lack of light—he had written in his note that he had done the photography on a cloudy day, and he worried that he had not had sufficient light. This was particularly unfortunate because he had noted that the photographed papers had included “very important documents concerning frontline fighters for the 1990s.” Tolkachev did, however, provide some useful information on this subject in his notes.

Nothing happened at the January meeting that indicated that the operation at that point had been compromised. Tolkachev's demeanor was consistent with that of previous meetings, and the written information was con-

sistent with what he had previously provided in terms of subject matter, quality, and quantity. In addition, the case officer had not seen any change in KGB surveillance habits or patterns. Although it is still not known exactly when Tolkachev was compromised, it almost certainly was at some point after this meeting.

Missed Meetings

As a result of the failed photography from the January meeting, it was decided to signal for an unscheduled meeting with Tolkachev in March to ask him to try to rephotograph the documents on the frontline fighter. In addition, OTS had recently tested a new film that could function in low-light conditions, which could be used in the miniature cameras; this film was to be given to him at this next meeting.

In early March, Tolkachev's case officer put up a visual signal that he wanted a meeting. Tolkachev, however, failed to signal that he could make a meeting. In mid-March, he appeared to signal his readiness to meet—this was the second option for a possible meeting in March—by opening one of the transom windows in his apartment between 12:15 p.m. and 12:30 p.m.

In retrospect, it may be noteworthy that he opened a transom window that he normally did not use and which was less visible from the street. Tolkachev may have been trying to indicate that he was in trouble, although there

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At the exact time set for the meeting, the case officer was suddenly jumped by more than a dozen KGB personnel.

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is no other evidence to support this hypothesis. In any event, he did not appear for the meeting. The third alternate meeting was set for late March, but he failed to signal a readiness to meet so no meeting was attempted. For security reasons, it was decided not to try again to signal for an unscheduled meeting but to wait for the next scheduled meeting, which was set for June.

Disaster

On 5 June, which was the first option for a meeting in that month, Tolkachev signaled his readiness to meet. During the indicated time frame, he opened the middle transom window in his apartment, which was the window he normally used. However, the case officer who planned to make the meeting was forced to abort when he encountered heavy surveillance before the meeting, and it was not possible to send an alternate case officer on this occasion.

On 13 June, the second alternate meeting date, Tolkachev's readiness-to-meet signal was again seen. The case officer had not detected any surveillance in proceeding to the meeting site. As he approached the site, the only unusual thing he noted was a woman talking loudly on a radio taxi phone in the area. At the exact time set for the meeting, however, the case officer was suddenly jumped by more than a dozen KGB security personnel dressed in military camouflage uniforms who had been hiding in

some nearby bushes. Several well-dressed men, apparently senior security personnel, quickly appeared to direct the seizure. The case officer was bundled into a van and taken off to Lubyanka Prison. Tolkachev was not seen at the meeting site nor later at the prison.

The treatment of the case officer during his arrest followed standard KGB procedures for such situations. He was physically restrained and thoroughly searched but not physically abused. At Lubyanka, he was accused of being a spy. In front of him, and while being videotaped, the package that he had planned to pass to Tolkachev was opened piece by piece, with some running commentary from the KGB questioners. Getting no reaction, the KGB ultimately notified the US Embassy of his arrest. Detained at 9:40 p.m., the case officer was finally released at 12:20 a.m.

The case officer had been carrying five miniature concealed cameras; four pages of handwritten materials that were being returned to Tolkachev at his request; two architectural books; 20 French and 20 German drawing pens for Tolkachev's son; a large quantity of periodontal

medicine; a book concealment device that contained 250 pages of Western newspaper and magazine articles requested by Tolkachev; and an envelope with thousands of rubles.

An accompanying note thanked the agent for the "very important written information" that he had provided at the last meeting, but stated that it had not been possible to recover the documents that he had photographed. It discussed a new low-light film that it was hoped would be ready for passage to him soon, and described his photography from the previous summer as excellent. The message raised the possibility of providing him with a new document sign-out card so that he could use it to replace the original "as we did in 1980." It cited the CIA's reluctance to provide English-language materials for his son and his female friend because of concern about how he would explain these to his unwitting son. And, finally, the note stated that the enclosed payment of thousands of rubles was "partial payment of the interest due to you in 1985."

The arrest of the CIA case officer was highly publicized in Moscow, but no mention was made of Tolkachev by name or position. As expected, the case officer and his family were forced to leave the country the week following the arrest. It was not until September that Tolkachev was publicly named as having been "arrested in June" for complicity in this intelligence operation.

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**Taking dismissal [from
the CIA] badly, . . .
Edward Lee Howard
placed phone calls to
Moscow.**

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Behind the Compromise

According to overt reporting, Edward Lee Howard, a disgruntled former CIA officer, is strongly suspected of having compromised Tolkachev to the KGB. Howard had been made aware of the Tolkachev operation in early 1983 as part of his preparation for a planned assignment to Moscow that summer. Although this would have been his first overseas tour as a CIA officer, his “clean” background—he had served overseas with both the Peace Corps and the Agency for International Development prior to joining the CIA—made him a good candidate to handle the Tolkachev operation in Moscow.

Howard, however, had problems during a routine security reinvestigation in early 1983, prior to his planned departure for Moscow. He reportedly made some admissions of inappropriate behavior, and still failed to satisfy security investigators that he was being fully honest with them. Based on these problems, it was decided to terminate his employment, which was done in April 1983.

Taking dismissal badly, Howard reportedly started drinking heavily—he apparently had been a periodic binge drinker for some time, a fact that CIA managers were unaware of. He placed phone calls to Moscow in the summer of 1983 on more than one occasion, asking to speak with the CIA chief. These evidently were harassment calls, and the chief correctly saw them

as possible indicators that Howard might ultimately betray CIA secrets in retaliation for his dismissal.

According to articles in the US press, erstwhile Soviet defector Vitaliy Yurchenko told American officials that a former CIA official (quickly determined to be Howard) contacted the KGB in Austria in September 1984 and provided information regarding CIA operations.⁶ According to these accounts, Howard traveled to Europe again in April 1985 and met with the KGB in Vienna, where he provided additional information on clandestine operations.⁷

There is little doubt that Howard betrayed Tolkachev, but it is not clear whether this was done during his September 1984 or April 1985 meeting with the Soviets.

⁶ Yurchenko was a KGB security officer who defected in August 1985. He subsequently re-defected to the Soviet Union in November 1985, leading to an intense debate as to whether or not he had been a valid defector in the first place. Nonetheless, all the evidence that has emerged since then strongly supports the supposition that he was a legitimate defector.

⁷ Howard subsequently fled to the Soviet Union. According to press reports, he died in an accidental fall in Moscow in 2002.

The KGB is known to investigate carefully and systematically any allegations of treason so that they can build an airtight case before they make an arrest. Thus, it is possible that Howard betrayed Tolkachev at his first meeting with the Soviets, resulting in the initiation of a time-consuming KGB investigation. Howard also may not have recalled the exact name and position of the agent, which could have made it initially difficult for the KGB to zero in on Tolkachev. On the other hand, Howard could have held back on providing the most important information that he had at his disposal, which would include his knowledge of the Tolkachev case. He might have wanted to probe the Soviets at his first meeting to confirm their willingness to pay him what he thought he was worth.

As it turned out, Tolkachev's days would have been numbered, even if Howard had not betrayed him. According to overt accounts, Aldrich Ames also passed Tolkachev's name to the KGB when he volunteered to work for them in 1985. Ames claims that he did not provide a full “dump” regarding all the sensitive CIA cases of which he was aware until June; however, he could have provided this information to them in April 1985, when he first passed classified information to the Soviets.

High Marks from the KGB

An article in the Soviet newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* in

February 1990 discussing the Tolkachev case was clearly the work of KGB officials. It contained a number of comments that can only be taken as grudging praise for the CIA:

CIA provided Tolkachev with a cleverly compiled meeting schedule. CIA instructors made provisions for even the tiniest of details . . . the miniature camera came with detailed instructions and a light meter . . . Let us give CIA experts the credit due them—they worked really hard to find poorly illuminated and deserted places in Moscow for meetings with Tolkachev . . . Anyone unfamiliar with CIA's tricks would never imagine that, if a light were to burn behind a certain window in the US Embassy, this could be a coded message for a spy . . . Langley provided touching care for its agent—if he needed medicine, everything was provided . . . In every instruction efficiently setting

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**Tolkachev's
 information was so
 voluminous and so
 valuable that, even
 though he was arrested
 in 1985, the task force
 continued to exploit
 his information until
 1990.**

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out his assignment, they checked up on his health and went to great pains to stress how much they valued him and how concerned they were for his well-being.

A Final Accounting

A senior CIA analyst who had been a member of the small, highly compartmented Department of Defense task force formed in 1979 to review Tolkachev's product and make recommendations on the best ways to exploit it, and who had continued to work on these materials after he came to the CIA in

1981, commented in retrospect on the value of Tolkachev's production. The analyst noted that Tolkachev's information was so voluminous and so valuable that, even though the agent was arrested in 1985, the task force continued to exploit his information until approximately 1990.

Fortunately, no indication has surfaced that either Tolkachev's wife or his son was ever imprisoned or suffered any long-term effects from his treason. Tolkachev clearly took into account the need to shield them fully from his CIA activities, so that they would survive any compromise. At least one report indicates that Oleg Tolkachev is now a prominent Russian architect. To the degree that his son and his wife survived his arrest, Adolf Tolkachev would have been content that he had accomplished his goal of seriously damaging the Soviet system while protecting his family and allowing them to lead normal lives.