

## Agent Orange

by Stephen Langford

©2017

### Chapter 1. The Missing Agent

The captain of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit casually opened a folder containing a stack of papers and photos. He was seated at a plain metal desk in an equally Spartan room of concrete block. The locked metal door was attended by an armed soldier.

Seated opposite the Stasi captain was a man shivering from the dank cell he had inhabited for the past two days. His haggard face exhibited a week's growth of beard. His body, while fit, already bore the evidence of dehydration and forced fasting. He was wearing only the underpants he had had on when the team of Stasi agents captured him at the seedy East Berlin bar on Metzgerstraße. He was shackled to the chair by both hands and feet. Immediately behind the prisoner a lower-ranking Stasi officer loomed.

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" the captain asked quietly, not looking up from the packet in front of him.

"Ja, ich spreche eine moderate Menge an deutschen," the prisoner answered quietly. One side of his face was heavily swollen from an earlier beating. He swallowed painfully and continued, "Ich verstehe nicht, warum..."

"Ich bin Kapitän Franz Junger," the captain interrupted. "Ich arbeite für das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit." He now looked squarely into the prisoner's eyes. "I speak your native language, if you prefer." When the prisoner nodded weakly, Captain Junger went on in excellent English. "You were about to say that you don't understand why you're here. We both know this is a lie."

"No, Captain Junger. I really don't know." The prisoner's tone was a mixture of indignation and anxiety.

Junger affected a sigh of impatience and bemusement. "I'm going to ask you a series of questions. The first thing—the most important thing—that you must realize is that I already know the answers to these questions. You see, I have a comprehensive record of your activities while you've been here in Berlin: where you've been, whom you've seen, photos, even tape recordings of your conversations. It's all right here." He indicated the file. "So let us start with the most obvious truth about you. The name on your passport is just a...the term is cover, I believe. You are a spy."

"Captain, this is shameful," the prisoner said emphatically. "Look at me, a British citizen. Held for two days in deplorable conditions, stripped virtually naked, held down and beaten, and with no opportunity to contact my government. This is not justice!"

Junger held the prisoner's angry gaze for a few moments and then said softly, "Gerolf."

The Stasi underling standing behind the chair raised the policeman's wooden baton he had been holding in his right hand and brought it crashing down onto the prisoner's shoulder, snapping the clavicle. The prisoner

screamed in pain several times, until at last he was reduced to writhing and groaning. The shackles were tight enough that bruises and small cuts were beginning to show on his wrists and ankles.

Junger drew a passport from beneath the photos and opened it. "Yes, you might very well be a British citizen. You have the paper work and the accent." He read the pages of the passport slowly. "France, Spain, Italy...you do get around, don't you...Herr Penfield? Mr. Prentis Penfield. Of course, we both know that isn't your real name, is it...spy?"

"But my name *is* Penfield," the prisoner answered through gritted teeth. "You have the passport in your very hands. I demand to speak to my embassy!"

The captain looked up. "Gerolf!" Immediately the prisoner tensed and twisted, expecting another blow from the baton, but it did not come.

*Mind games*, the prisoner thought to himself.

"Sure, sure. Penfield," the captain said with a mirthless grin. "And you own a British machine company, then?"

"No," the prisoner answered. "I'm just a buyer. I was here to sign contracts to purchase small engine parts from Schuller Präzision. I was cleared into the country. I have the right papers. Well, I had the right papers until..."

The baton again, not nearly as hard as before but now it did not take much force to send the prisoner into agony. It was a full minute before the captain spoke.

"You must listen to me. It's really a simple mathematic formula. Lies equal pain. You say you are a British citizen. But our Abschnitt der Sprachwissenschaft, the men and women who study linguistics, have reported that your British accent is very good...but not perfect for a man with a British passport and a London street address. No, rather they detect the traces of the American East Coast. These language experts are very professional and very meticulous. Why, they even claim to know that your accent is from a region between New York and Virginia. They are even willing to state, in written form, mind you, that you are actually from the middle of the state of Pennsylvania! Now really, how can we help but be impressed with their exactitude? So you see my dilemma with your story."

Another surprise rap with Gerolf's baton. Before the prisoner's cry of pain and his sharp breathing could again subside, the captain continued.

"A man with a fake passport and an American accent doesn't say to me, British business man. It says—" He leaned forward. "C—I—A."

The prisoner's mind was racing. The first thing he had to do was detect the subtle signal Junger was sending to Gerolf. It would at least give him a split second to ready himself for the pain. More importantly, it would give him a little morale boost, a slight win over these brutal bastards even if he was the only one who knew it. The techniques would become more severe. His agent training at Camp Peary taught him to resist to the last possible bit of strength, but to expect the worst. That was always the big question. If captured, would he break?

If he broke, what would he divulge? He only hoped he could hold out long enough to save that Russian poet's life...

"CIA?" he finally said incredulously. "You can't be serious. Captain, my name *is* Prentis Penfield."

Gerolf raised the baton once more.