

AFTER MANY DAYS

**My Life as a Spy and
Other Grand Adventures**

Shirley H. Perry



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AFTER MANY DAYS

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***For Andrea, for Rob
and for Marilyn***

*Cast thy bread upon the waters:
for thou shalt find it after many days.*

Ecclesiastes 11: 1

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4 August 1999

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I Spy

*From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic,
an iron curtain has descended across the Continent*

—Winston Churchill

“**O**h, no! No! That can’t be right!” My stomach churned. This could not be happening! I was trying not to panic, but was very close to tears. So much for the sophisticated feeling I had when I walked up the ramp and stepped aboard the sleek, new ocean liner, the *SS United States*, that would be taking me to Europe.

I’d had a wonderful time in New York City the day before, topped off with an evening at the theater. Seeing a play on Broadway was an experience like none other for this drama major from the Midwest. I’d had the “dog seat”—K-9—that the usher assured me was the lucky seat in the house. I was thinking that nothing could go wrong given such a fortuitous start to my overseas adventure.

But go wrong it did. The purser had just informed me that my steamer trunk was not on the ship’s manifest. I tried to figure out

why since I knew from the bill of lading that it had been shipped in plenty of time. It had to have arrived, I insisted.

"I'm sorry, miss, but I have no record of it," the purser replied, not too patiently.

"What can I do? It's got to be here. Can I look for it?" I was desperate. All my worldly goods were in that trunk. I couldn't arrive in Europe with a just a suitcase!

In fact, I couldn't even sail with just a suitcase. My whole assignment abroad with the CIA was in jeopardy.

"Well, yes, you could get off the ship and go down to the loading dock and see if you can find it," the purser offered, having no better suggestion. "But, the baggage area is as big as a football field. Start with the first class section."

Of course I'll start there, I thought, since I have a first class ticket, but that seemed too smart-alecky to say, so I simply turned away and headed for the gangplank. Then it hit me. If I couldn't find my trunk in the first class section I would have to troop through the all the other sections. The ship was sailing in an hour and a half. Did I have enough time? What about Tod? He was coming to bid me bon voyage and had promised to bring along a bottle of champagne. What about my happy, carefree send off?

It was a warm September day and along with my confidence, my hair was unraveling. I had started out with a perfect pageboy and looked quite smart in my gray flannel suit, with its flared skirt and fitted, double-breasted jacket. My costume was completed with white gloves and a brand new purse but now I crammed the gloves into my purse, took out a handkerchief to blot my perspiration, and set out to survey the loading dock.

The baggage was organized in large sections marked off alphabetically. I walked up and down row after row, looking for my

trunk under each letter—it could be anywhere! I saved my closest scrutiny for the letter H. Along with Shirley Hendricks, it seemed as if most of the passengers had a last name beginning with H. I stood on tiptoe to peer across the fence-like barrier and tried to check out every piece of luggage. Nothing. I was sweating as I approached the end of the H's. No trunk in sight.

I was plowing on to the next row when I spotted a grouping set somewhat apart from the rest. It was a collection of expensive designer trunks and suitcases and hatboxes belonging to someone else whose last name also began with H. One of the handsome trunks was right next to the fence and I could read the name on a tag: Rita Hayworth! Despite my anxiety, I had to pause to admire the ensemble—all the pieces in beautiful tan leather with brass trim. This pleasing picture was marred by a most discordant note, however, for there, in the midst of this elegant assemblage, like the proverbial black sheep of the flock, stood my plain, black steamer trunk! The lost was found! I was overjoyed. As I raced back on board I wondered how the dock workers could have made such a glaring mistake.

The purser assured me my trunk would be plucked out of Miss Hayworth's pile and put in the hold under my name. I was finally free to enjoy a glass of champagne with Tod who had been searching frantically for me and looked as wilted as I and as worried as I had been. Predictably, the sparkling drink and the festive atmosphere quickly changed our mood and we had time for a fast tour of the salons on the promenade deck before the signal sounded for all visitors to debark. That warning suddenly seemed so final and somehow ominous as we kissed goodbye and promised to write.

There was music, confetti and a great swirl of people milling

about as the ship inched away from the dock, bound for Le Harve. I was caught up in all the excitement but when we sailed past the Statue of Liberty, the realization that I was leaving the United States hit home. I was going so far away. What would await me? Would I be homesick, would I be happy? I was teary-eyed and felt quite alone as I watched the great lady fade into the distance.

But how could anyone be sad aboard such a glamorous ship? I was cheered at finding flowers from my family in my stateroom, and some from Tod and a college beau, too, along with cables from friends and a special delivery letter from a beloved aunt. And, besides, I had met two good looking exchange students who were returning to Germany after studying in Indiana. Clem and Otto and I had a great time exploring the ship together, from the boiler room to the top deck, and they invited me to the dances down in third class where there was plenty of beer and pretzels and lots of loud music. Up in first class, we dined on Beluga caviar, bisque of lobster royale and could choose from ten entrees and countless desserts. I ate it all up.

My accommodations were very nice but I was scarcely in my stateroom except to change clothes and sleep so I seldom saw my roommate; in fact, I don't even remember who she was. The *United States* was the world's largest and fastest ship and whisked us across the ocean in five days. The crossing was an incomparable experience and at Le Havre I boarded the boat train in high spirits. On the ride to the Gare St. Lazare in Paris, I happened to share a compartment with Elia Kazan. What a happy happenstance for this theater buff to sit across from a famous director of stage and screen and chat with him. Though I can't recall what words were said, I can't forget the feeling of inclusiveness I had and the feeling of being so grown up.

I spent a couple of delightful days seeing the sights in the City

of Light and made a visit to the apartment of two charming French women where my Uncle Tommy lived while he was stationed in Paris during WWII. He had worked for the Illinois Central Railroad in Alton, IL, and was in the Army Transportation Department, Second Military Railway Service that landed at Utah Beach in Normandy eleven days after D-Day. My uncle was part of the group that struggled to transport a dinky steam locomotive across the sand and up to the top of the cliff. My cousin, Dave Byrnes, remembers his dad saying they finally got the engine to Cherbourg where they found a railroad track and then used the engine to pull freight cars of supplies. This effort had proved to be extremely difficult because none of the French railroad equipment was compatible with the U.S. engine. Dave has a newspaper article with a photograph showing his dad placing a U.S. flag on the first steam locomotive to cross from France into Germany! On 25 Feb 1945, his headquarters in Paris closed as of 2400 hours and my uncle returned to the United States.

In 1952, right before I left for Europe, Uncle Tommy gave me the address of Madame Sauvage and Madame Villeneuve who lived on the *rue Hippolyte Lebas* not far from the St. Georges metro stop on the *rue Notre Dame de Lorette* on the way to Montmartre. Now I made my way there. I had phoned first—it was a brief and probably to them an hilarious conversation, given my rudimentary capability *en Francais*, but I succeeded in identifying myself and announcing my imminent arrival after declining, I hoped politely, Mme.Villeneuve's directions that had begun to confuse me. With the aide of a trusty city map, I managed to find their place without too much delay.

The mesdames, two lively little ladies, were gracious hostesses and served café au lait and cake and peppered me with questions

about my uncle, whose photograph they still had prominently displayed on an end table. Clearly, they adored him—and missed him—and I did my best to fill them in on the developments in his family informing them that Uncle Tommy now had a daughter in addition to his young son and that he was back working on the railroad in Alton, Illinois.

I left their cozy apartment feeling less strange in this celebrated foreign city and planned to come back one day. There was so much yet to see, so much more to learn about this culture that dated back to 55 BC! I was dizzy with the prospect. Everything was new and exciting to me, someone still impressed with the size and history of St. Louis. I have kept the card those dear ladies sent me my first Christmas in Europe for they were my first acquaintances abroad, they had welcomed me to the Continent.

It was time to travel on to my final destination, Vienna, a city that would prove to be more exciting than Paris saturated as it was with intrigue and espionage. I caught the fabled Orient Express for a ride through the magnificent Alps to Salzburg, Austria. There, I transferred to the daily U.S. military train affectionately dubbed “The Mozart Express” that ran through the Soviet Zone and was exempted from search by occupation agreements. It took me safely through the Zone to Vienna.

Austria had been divided into four zones of occupation in 1945. The Russians occupied the eastern zone, an area that ran west to the Enns River and included Vienna, the capital. The U.S. zone started at the Enns River and went west to the German border and included Salzburg and Linz. The British and French occupation areas ran along southern Austria, from west to east.

Vienna itself was some ninety miles inside the Soviet zone. Like the country, Vienna was a divided city. There were five sectors, one

for each of the occupying powers and a fifth, the First District or Innere Stadt, was an International Sector governed and guarded by each of the occupation forces on a monthly, rotating basis. U.S. Army regulations prohibited the taking of photographs of Soviet soldiers, equipment or installations. The only exception to this ban was on the day each month when control of the International Sector changed. Then, photographs could be taken of the Soviet personnel present at the Palace of Justice where the change-over ceremonies were held. While people could move freely within the Vienna city limits, few Westerners and NO CIA employees entered the Soviet sector.

Vienna! The easternmost outpost of the West. It is actually east of Prague and far behind the Iron Curtain Churchill christened when he spoke at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in March of 1946. His description of the split between East and West came to symbolize the schism of the Cold War era that followed the end of the shooting war. Although World War II was over, a new battle between ideologies had begun, one that was fought clandestinely by spies on the field of espionage.

After the defeat of Germany in May 1945, Stalin stopped all cooperation with the Western intelligence agencies and, by 1946, the major espionage services faced the new fight. Europe was swarming with countless agents—the supply swelling to meet the demand. In Austria, and especially in Vienna, where people were hard pressed to make an honest living, spying became a supplemental source of income.

Given its location, Vienna was also an ideal destination for defectors and refugees escaping Czechoslovakia or Hungary as well as a launching pad for Western agents heading for Eastern Europe. It was also swarming with hundreds of Russians—mili-

tary, diplomatic and intelligence personnel who were the “hard targets” that CIA headquarters tasked the station to recruit. The city was also full of operatives from the Western intelligence agencies as well. Vienna became, actually, an intelligence battleground as we fought to penetrate the Soviet establishment. We had such a paucity of information on the USSR that even a private in the Red Army would have been a welcome source, for up until the early '50s, it was believed that neither the CIA nor any other Western espionage agency had been able to recruit a single Russian official.*

Enter one Lt. Col. Pyotr Popov, a case officer on the Strategic Intelligence Desk of the GRU, the elite Soviet Military Intelligence Directorate, under cover in Vienna. And, one Shirley Hendricks, an assistant on the Soviet Desk of the CIA station in Vienna.



Upon graduation from Washington University in St. Louis, I'd been awarded the faculty prize for outstanding senior and, along with that, a graduate fellowship. Armed with the fellowship and my Phi Beta Kappa key, I set out on an uncertain future, enrolling as a graduate student in the psychology department at my alma mater because I didn't know what else to do. The choice was not one I was really enamored with and I soon became bored and uninspired.

I also needed a part-time job to make ends meet, so one day when I was perusing the bulletin board at the employment office I spied a cryptic notice that intrigued me. I went inside to quiz Mrs. Settle, the sole employee, about it. She was uncharacteristically uninformative.

*William Hood, *Mole* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982, p.28).

Lowering her voice, she told me in conspiratorial tones only that it was an interesting government job, then she opened the top drawer of her desk and fished out a fifteen-page application form. She handed it to me without further comment. It was labeled a “personal history statement” that turned out to be far more than a statement, but very personal. I labored over it and finally sent it off—to the Central Intelligence Agency! The very act seemed daring and the prospect of working in Washington, D.C., was very exciting. With the optimism of youth, I quit my graduate program and went back home, in nearby Illinois, to await my preliminary clearance, buoyed up by expectations of adventure and independence.

It took all summer. But at last I was off to Washington where I spent three months in a make-work typing pool, referred to as typing pool hell by those of us swimming around in that limbo, waiting for my top secret clearance to come through. I had booked a room in a women’s hotel in Washington and stayed there, at “menopause manor” as it was called, until I met several other new CIA recruits who, like I, wanted a place of their own. Together we moved into a large home off Dupont Circle where we were ensconced on the top floor, in four small rooms that were formerly the maids’ quarters. There was a large living room and an adequate kitchen and, best of all, access to the roof where we could sun and see all over the city.

The last hurdle for clearance was the polygraph test. I was apprehensive because I had been receiving unsolicited copies of the Communist Party’s *Daily Worker* when living in St. Louis and had a hard time getting it stopped. So, when I was asked, right before the test, if I had anything to explain, wow, did I! My palms were still sweating when I was hooked up to the machine, but I passed and went on to my appointed job, one that turned out to

be the choicest assignment of all—to the Soviet Desk—the highest priority operation in all of the covert side of “the company,” as we called the agency. It was pure good luck.

I spent about a year in Washington, working in the old “temporary” Army barracks on the Mall and learning a lot about the Soviet Union and about tradecraft and espionage in general. The highlight of our indoctrination was a session with none other than Alan Dulles himself—he of OSS fame and the first head of the CIA—who addressed the new recruits at length.

Work days on the Desk were busy ones, and so interesting. I was often running name traces, hurrying along the length of the interconnected temps to the building at the farthest end, then delving into cabinets crammed with the files on everyone whose name or organization had ever come to the attention of the CIA. So many of the folders were filled with flimsy, onion-skin paper, the third or fourth copy of some original document whose fuzzy print made reading a challenge. But I found that piecing together the references to get a clear picture of a subject and reporting it back to the field was quite satisfying, not to mention important. I liked filing in my office, too; it was a chance to see information on the current operations and eventually I was able to read in on certain cases.

Soon I had another bit of pure good luck. I was recruited by the head of the Soviet Desk in Vienna, Peter, to transfer there to be his assistant. I was thrilled. My parents, however, were not. While my cover story identified me simply as a typist, my parents knew I was with the CIA, but they had no idea about the real nature of the work I was doing, nor did anyone else. It was just as well.



The early '50s were an exciting and challenging time at the Vienna station. Its Soviet operations branch was occupied with compiling biographical data on Russian targets; such files were the backbone of good intelligence gathering. Ideally, this data should include photos that could be shown to double agents to confirm a subject's identity and other data. The chief of operations, William Hood, concluded that the station needed a mug book and our technical department cleverly devised a way to assemble one.

The station's tech man found a small 35mm camera called "the Robot" in a Viennese camera shop. It had a spring that when wound would automatically advance the film and cock the camera after each exposure. This was placed inside our car's talisman, a little stuffed tiger. Since it was common practice for drivers to display such mascots in the rear windows of their cars, it was a perfect camouflage for our purposes. Then, our non-descript car was parked in the *Innere Stadt* near the crosswalk the Soviets used to go from their hotel headquarters to a favorite restaurant across the street. Nearby, a case officer hung around; he had a concealed radio that could trigger the camera when a desired target started to cross the street.*

We were able to collect dozens of photos this way and slowly our case officers identified the subjects by showing them to agents working in the vicinity of the Soviet installations and using other sources. And this is where I came in—I was one of two keepers of this mug shot book, analyzing the various bits of information sent in from the case officers and writing up each subject's biographi-

*Ibid, pp. 74-76.

cal data. Then I would file the subject's information in the proper *Leitz* notebook according to the Soviet organization he worked for. This took time and a lot of it was speculation for without an inside source, we couldn't be certain how reliable our analysis was. But now the station had an inside source—Popov!

Soon after my arrival, the station was focused on the recruitment of Lt. Col Popov. He provided the CIA with the innermost secrets of Soviet intelligence and military developments. Popov was in the GRU, which was charged with military and foreign intelligence. He was a classic double agent—*our* double agent. And now, we could vet our mug books. As it turned out, we did pretty well. According to Hood, a third of the case officers cited by Popov were in our files, correctly identified as GRU operatives and now, with the information he gave us, we had the cover names, true names, and specific operational assignments of the ranking GRU staff in Vienna. We were getting to our hard targets.*

I was getting the lay of the land as well. I'd been billeted at the Cottage Hotel, where Americans were put up upon arrival, and stayed there until I found a roommate and a house in the city. In the hotel at the same time was a CIA family also awaiting housing. The husband was most welcoming. In fact, he took it upon himself to stop by my room in the evenings and inquire after my well being. I politely let him in at first but when he started to talk about burning our candles at both ends I realized he wasn't trying to quote poetry but was propositioning me. It wasn't hard to keep my door locked and be unavailable and, fortunately, I moved out shortly thereafter. Maybe he had better luck with the next new arrival.

Not long after that, one of men at the office offered me a ride

*Ibid, p. 77.

home from work. The weather was nasty and I gratefully accepted. We were having an animated conversation and I was enjoying his company immensely, when, all of a sudden, as he drove under an overpass, he displayed more than witty repartee. This conversation stopper left me tongue-tied but I couldn't stop staring. I had a pretty good idea of what he was asking for even though I had always declined such invitations in the past. While I wasn't going to accept now, I also wasn't going to jump out of the car—after all, it was raining...hard. I decided to make light of the situation in hopes he wouldn't feel too embarrassed—never mind my own mortification.

I finally came up with, "Hey, you're going to catch cold." I tried a little laugh.

"Yeah, it's pretty frosty in here," was all he could muster. Certainly not an apology for offending me. I guess I was supposed to be flattered by his magnanimous offer, but I wasn't going to apologize either for not accommodating him. He managed to get the errant party back where it belonged as we drove on, each of us searching for something else to say until, at last, we reached my house. I dashed out and ran for my door. I was soaked, but safe inside.

I dreaded the next day, when I would encounter him at work. We were certain to see each other and we did. We didn't acknowledge each other. This silly behavior went on for a while until one day, when we met in the hall, I couldn't help but smile. He did too. The next time I saw him, we both laughed, relieved. Much later, when he learned I was to be married, he extended his best wishes and told me he'd always have a soft spot in his heart for me. I thanked him but couldn't suppress a knowing smile. He must have been reading my mind for he laughed a little and leaned in to whisper, "And you know what else..." I did indeed.

THANKSGIVING DAY

Spying is a stressful business and none of us at the Vienna station was spared its effects. So two of my colleagues and I planned to get away over a Thanksgiving—my first in Vienna—to Salzburg where one of my girl friends had an invitation to a holiday dinner. None of us had a car and we had decided to take the Mozart when we learned that a company guy was driving through the Soviet zone on Thanksgiving Eve. So we hitched a ride with Boris, setting out in the early evening in this man's dilapidated old car with an unreliable heater. And it was cold, starting to snow, in fact.

We drove by the checkpoint right outside Vienna where our license number and time of entry into the zone were recorded by the U.S. Military Police. This was done in case a car didn't turn up at the exit point in Enns within the allotted time—approximately two hours. In such a case, the MPs would set out to find the tardy travelers. We were to find out how well the system worked for about half way on our journey through the Soviet zone, as we approached the town of Amstettin, the car sputtered and simply rolled to a stop!

Boris cranked and cranked, but it would not start. The chances of working successfully on the old vehicle in the freezing, pitch-dark night on the main road through Soviet territory were slim indeed, so Boris declared he would walk into the town to look for help. This didn't seem smart. Americans, especially those with the CIA, should not be loitering in the zone, and what could he find open at this late hour anyway, I wondered? It was almost eight o'clock. But, off he went while we three huddled together in the back seat and tried to keep warm. Boris eventually returned, with-

out help, of course, and we were pondering our fate when we heard a vehicle approaching.

By now it was snowing hard and we couldn't see who had pulled up. It became abundantly clear in just a few moments though—it was the Soviet patrol. The worst was happening! Before I could contemplate the extent of the trouble we were in, we were ordered out of the car at gun point and into the soldiers' jeep that took us directly to the Soviet *Kommandantura*, a regional Soviet military headquarters, in the town. Our suitcases were left in the broken down car.

There we were locked into two cells—we three women in one, and, we assumed, our male colleague in another, apart from us, where we couldn't see him. If ever an American was picked up by the Soviets in their zone of Austria, he was allowed to make one telephone call to notify friends or family and arrange to get out. CIA employees who had a breakdown in the zone were not to wait until it was discovered that their car was late reaching the check-point. The procedure in such an event was to phone, as soon as possible, an emergency duty officer at the Vienna station who, in turn, would phone the Military Police instructing them to go post-haste to the rescue.

Together, we four were allowed one phone call and it appeared that this responsibility would fall to the car's driver; we "girls" were not allowed to call and were ushered straight into our cell. We trusted that Boris made the call and could but sit and wait and pray the MPs would arrive soon.

I'm sure our hosts didn't know whom they had in custody, ostensibly we were just a low-ranking translator and three secretaries, so we did our best to appear as insignificant and unworried as possible. But I was scared when a pimply-faced private entered

our cell and sat down on a chair facing the wall-backed wooden bench we three perched on, shifting his AK-47 authoritatively and staring menacingly at us. After this intimidating show of control, he gave us a sideways smile, exposing some really bad teeth. Actually, the look was more like a leer. Carol, one of my companions, was eyeing him with a silly smile of her own. I jabbed her in the ribs.

“Carol, what are you doing?” I said under my breath. “Stop smiling at him! Don’t give him any idea that we’re at all friendly.”

“But if we act friendly, we could get him to bring us something to eat, or some water,” she countered.

“And you’d eat something he’d bring us? Besides,” I added, trying to sound reasonable and ominous at the same time, “you don’t know what he’d expect in return.” I could imagine our having to take off our jewelry and watches or empty our purses in payment.

Carol seemed convinced to drop her smiling strategy and we sat for a while in silence. Suddenly, the soldier stood up and started to pace, shifting his rifle from one shoulder to the other. The sound startled us. Kathy, my roommate, was seated on the other side of Carol. She looked worried.

“We’ve been here for almost three hours now and there’s no sign of the MPs,” she said, pointing out the obvious, much to our distress. It was close to midnight.

“I hope Boris made the call,” I responded. My comment only made us more tense.

I began to wonder what would happen if the MPs didn’t come soon. Would the Soviets subject us to hostile interrogations? Would they report our capture to their Soviet superiors, to their intelligence officers? Would they search us? Would we be kept incommunicado? What would they do with Boris? I was conjuring up dire situations and searching for responses, all the while trying

to believe that none of these scenarios would happen yet wanting to anticipate the worst.

My pessimistic thoughts were interrupted when the Soviet officer who had been sitting at a desk in the outer part of the large room that housed our cell summoned our guard. The officer looked over at us and conferred with the private. What now? Were my fears going to come true? Are they preparing to take us, one by one, into some dank, dark room to be questioned and threatened? We each had our cover stories straight and had followed procedure so far, but we were tired and hungry—and vulnerable. The officer then dispatched another private out of the room and sent our guard back to us. After a while, the errand boy returned with some sandwiches and tea—for everyone. Our captors weren't completely without compassion, after all. I figured it was safe to eat what the soldiers were wolfing down so we hungrily and gratefully joined them.

After the meal, we three had another concern. With a combination of gestures and a bit of German, we made ourselves understood and were escorted by our gun-toting guard to the WC. This was an experience we wished we could have done without, however, it afforded us a chance to re-enforce a no-talking policy and to give ourselves a pep talk.

Once we were resettled on our wooden bench, the lieutenant entered our cell. Despite my anxiety, I was captivated by the presence of a real Soviet officer. He wasn't just an entry in my mug book, he was the living, breathing enemy—a Communist up close. He appeared increasingly curious about us and asked our names again and what our jobs were. Did he regard us as enemies, too? He spoke to us in halting English and I quickly became apprehensive. We were required to give out only our names and cover organiza-

tions, and that's all we did, but what worried me was the thought that he could understand English better than he could speak it. Had he overheard anything significant? He seemed to be fishing for information, but I just shrugged and Carol and Kathy followed suit, playing dumb. I wasn't sure how long we could keep up the charade nor what the consequences would be if the officer became more insistent. I was becoming more and more nervous when, thanks be, I heard a commotion outside. The officer left the cell, making sure the private still had us under guard.

There were loud voices and suddenly, we saw the U.S. MPs and Boris! A Soviet soldier was unlocking our cell and we were rushed out to two waiting jeeps. I think Carol waved goodbye. After picking up our luggage from the abandoned car, which the MPs assured Boris would be towed to a garage, we sped away to the checkpoint. How relieved I was! How refreshing the cold wind felt after the stuffy air in the cell. How thankful I was to be free again to feast with friends on Thanksgiving Day. At the checkpoint, we had to call and wait for our friends to drive out from Salzburg to rescue us. Finally, in the wee hours of the holiday, we went to bed—safe and sound at last.

This brush with the enemy only reinforced my dedication to our mission there and my allegiance to my comrades-in-Cold-War-arms. We were a brave band of intelligence officers stationed behind the Iron Curtain and, together with the families of those who had them, were good friends as well as colleagues. We dined at each other's homes, shared each other's joys and tribulations and, in general, looked out for one another.

And, we partied together. Charades was the rage at many of our parties and the favorite title for acting out was "portion garbled, being serviced." This phrase in a cable from headquarters occurred

with maddening frequency and usually appeared in place of the most significant information the cable was expected to relay. It could evoke furious and frustrating reaction among case officers and made for a most dramatic pantomime on the part of the actor who drew that assignment. “Plausible denial” was another oft-acted expression; I never knew if its real use was ever invoked but did know that it could be.

Rank was not a determining factor on our social scene. The chief of station entertained everyone at his home—I’ve kept an invitation from Jocko R., the station chief when I arrived, for after-dinner drinks. He worked at a different location from the operations personnel who occupied the *Stiftskaserne*, an old American military police office. The station’s senior officers always went to the chief’s office for meetings, so our paths seldom crossed. However, from time to time, I would see Jocko at the Bristol, the American hotel and watering hole. One time, I was at the newsstand at the hotel looking over the magazines when he approached. I ventured a comment on a particularly disturbing cover story.

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” he replied grimly. Actually, he always seemed a worried man to me the few times I saw him.

Still, while we all knew each other well, we respected the boundaries of privacy and did not become a socially incestuous society living only in the cocoon of community.

We vetted our “outside” friends and contacts and our personal relationships were guided by the same “need to know” credo we assiduously followed in our professional lives. We were not immune, either, to the common afflictions of the human condition—changing relationships. There was the usual grapevine speculation about “who’s dating whom,” and there were marriages, divorces, and re-couplings, but nothing that derailed the job at hand.

With all the closeness our group experienced, we could have become a contentious ensemble, but we did not. Our mission was the overriding motivation for cooperation and collegiality. There was little of the typical workplace competition but, rather, an enduring esprit that served to unite us all in our common objective.

Sharing all the tensions, successes, and failures of this life behind the Iron Curtain, with its professional demands and personal frustrations, we thought of ourselves as unique. We were, actually, having been recruited especially for this assignment—we were a small collection of talented, calculated risk-taking, dedicated agency employees who became a closely-knit, smoothly operating unit. The male cadre was known as “The Vienna Choir Boys” and while we “girls” weren’t specifically included in that sobriquet, we certainly thought of ourselves as part of the team. Together, we were, in fact, the elite corps of intelligence operatives among the many present in Vienna then. There were also the U.S. Army agencies with whom we maintained contact and shared certain information. Allied intelligence organizations had representatives there, too; however, we had little contact with them in the field. And, of course, there were the enemy services that were our targets.

In that four-power city, we with the CIA forged a bond that has lasted for decades. At our reunions, we reminisce about those days and about those who are no longer with us. Those of us who remain share a special connection and I shall always be thankful for that.