

Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

The wonderful adventures of a KGB spy

Two drug abusers and a safecracker failed to free convicted KGB spy Arne Treholt from his Norwegian prison.

As news broke of an attempt to free Norwegian KGB Colonel Arne Treholt from jail, an observer of the northern flank predicted that the next 24 hours would witness an upsurge of creativity in covering the tracks pointing to Soviet involvement in the attempt. Indeed, the next day saw some quite imaginative explanations of what had occurred.

Not only were the accomplices in the break-out revealed to be Treholt's 17-year-old, drug-addicted new girlfriend, a Gambian heroin smuggler jailed with the Norwegian master spy, and an ordinary safecracker, also a prison-mate of Treholt's, but the plot involved escaping from Norway to Africa—thousands of miles away—in a newly bought Volvo car, procured in Sweden by Treholt's girlfriend with money provided Treholt.

Lest anyone infer that Africa be merely a stopover en route to the East, it was disclosed that Treholt, his girlfriend, and the Gambian inmate were to settle in Senegal or Gambia, to open an export-import company for Italian shoes!

The safecracker, near the end of his prison term, would cut a hole in the fence through which the escapees would exit to the waiting Volvo, and then walk back into his cell to serve the rest of his sentence. The story omits any mention of whether, as a reward for helpfulness, he was to subsequently get hired in Treholt's new shoe trading business in Africa, or planned to resume his old profession.

The Danish press added the variant that Treholt, presumably once set up in African business, would offer voluntarily to return to Norway to face a reopened trial, on condition that he be granted free leave from Norway should a new trial fail to acquit him from charges of espionage!

This cock-and-bull story churned out for mass consumption did not make much sense, but it does serve the purpose of drawing attention away from the issues: What's the political context that made the break-out attempt possible, and who authored the plot?

Treholt, rapidly progressing in his Social Democratic career, with access to highly sensitive defense and foreign ministry documents, was caught red-handed on Jan. 20, 1984, as a Soviet spy, and given the strongest penalty possible in Norway since capital punishment was banned: 20 years in prison.

His friends in the Social Democracy, however, insisted that Treholt was innocent, and had acted in good faith, trying to build bridges between East and West, by proving to Moscow that top-secret NATO plans had no aggressive intent. Claims were made that Treholt was the victim of a "judicial murder." As late as April 29 he demanded before the Supreme Court that the case be reopened.

On May 2, Norway's conservative government resigned, to be replaced by the Social Democrats. An intimate Treholt friend, Johan Jörgen Holst, known for his membership in such dubious East-West policy vehicles as the

Trilateral Commission and the Palme Commission, became Norwegian defense minister.

Lo and behold, only days later, Treholt issued a surprise letter, abruptly withdrawing his appeal from ongoing Supreme Court deliberations. Something had made Treholt hope that other methods than an appeal would stand a better chance of shortening his term in prison.

In prison, Treholt was a celebrity, enjoying the full confidence of the director—and the prisoners, being their elected representative. Norway, like the other Scandinavian countries, a democratic kingdom, does not want to oppress its criminals. Treholt, being a top diplomat, had a key to his own cell, enabling him to come and go as he pleased, as long as he agreed to stay inside the guarded confines of the prison fences.

Exploiting the distraction of the prison guards expected during the June 21 telecast of the world championship soccer game between Argentina and France, Treholt and his Gambian fellow-inmate were to discreetly step out through the hole in the fence cut open by the safecracker.

Waiting behind the steering-wheel of the Volvo, Treholt's closest friend for two years, Egil Ulateig, journalist of a male fashion magazine, was to drive them to a safehouse provided by another friend, musician Kjetil Bjørnstad, give them money and false British passports, and have them leave for Africa a day or two later.

But, the story goes, Ulateig lost his nerve and leaked. Whatever the case may be, Treholt was preemptively moved on June 19 to the high-security Ullersmo prison, presumably without keys to his new cell. And Moscow still has to prove to its Western assets that they'll be rewarded for their services.