

Location: Moscow. A large meeting room in the headquarters of the Supreme Geodesic Directorate (VGU)

Time: October 1962. The cold war is at its height.

Present: Colonel-General Maxim Fedorov, Head of the VGU
Lieutenant-General Dmitri Alexeev
Lieutenant-General Oleg Ivanov

Foreword (To be spoken by one of the actors playing Alexeev or Ivanov)

Between 1938 and 1990 the Supreme Geodesic Directorate of the Soviet Military, known as the VGU, undertook the most comprehensive global survey ever attempted. The VGU created highly detailed, accurate maps of practically every country in the world, including Great Britain. Today, very little is known about how the organisation was structured and how such incredible results were achieved. Almost the only information available is the evidence of the surviving maps themselves.

Given the amount of time and effort dedicated to this enterprise it is surprising to discover that the maps contained a small number of significant mistakes....

FEDOROV: We now come to the most important item on the agenda. I have received a memorandum from General Kulikov of the Military Planning Directorate.

‘Fedorov. It is my painful duty to inform you of a serious error on Map 24. You will recall that I spent the years between 1948 and 1952 as military attaché at our embassy in London. My task during that time was to collect intelligence to inform the planning of a possible invasion of England by Soviet ground forces. In the course of gathering that intelligence I spent several days in the town of Slog, a town to the west of London. Slog sits at the hub of several important communication networks: road, rail and air. I identified this town as a vital strategic target.

As a result of my work Slog was nominated as a priority objective for air assault in non-nuclear invasion Plan 7. It is to be captured and held by the third and fourth parachute armies in advance of a seaborne landing.

(FEDOROV / CONT'D OVER)

FEDOROV: Unfortunately the current version of Map 24 given to me by your organisation contains no trace of Slog. According to the VGU the town appears not to exist.

I have to submit my review of Plan 7 to the General Staff by the end of the week. I will have no alternative but to draw attention to this mistake unless a satisfactory explanation is provided.

I await your response.

Signed, Kulikov.'

ALEXEEV: Can this be true?

FEDOROV: I am afraid it is. Slog is most definitely not on our map. I have copies of 24 here. SOUND OF MAPS BEING UNFOLDED AND SPREAD OUT

ALEXEEV: Where is it supposed to be?

FEDOROV: That is the point Alexeev. If Slog is not on our map then we will not find it. And it is certainly not on the map.

IVANOV: Do we have any idea where it should be?

ALEXEEV: Or if it really exists? It seems unlikely that such an important town would have been missed completely. Perhaps this is a joke.

FEDOROV: A joke? By Kulikov? I think not. You are aware of his reputation. It is said that Comrade General Kulikov has never forgotten or lost anything in his life. He is certainly not the sort of man who plays practical jokes by fabricating a town. If he says he spent time in Slog then Slog must be there.

ALEXEEV: Perhaps it will be possible to deduce the location of Slog by finding a space where a town ought to be. Here, for example. There seem to be a number of strange blank areas and places with funny names. Stock Poggs, Eton Vick. These cannot be real.

FEDOROV: My dear Alexeev, you forget that Kulikov was there. He visited Slog several times. He will know where it should be.

IVANOV: So what happens if...

FEDOROV: I'm afraid the three of us will be working in the Arctic Circle for a few years. Our map making skills will be employed charting snow drifts. That is, if they are employed at all.

IVANOV: Shit!

FEDOROV: Precisely. I have asked the Section Leader for Map 24 to attend this meeting. Perhaps she can explain what has happened.

IVANOV: A woman!

FEDOROV: Lieutenant Maria Petrova. She has been with us for nearly fifteen years. Her record is exemplary. She doesn't seem to be the sort of officer to make such a mistake.

IVANOV: Comrade General could we...? Would it be possible to ...?

FEDOROV: Put the blame on her you mean Ivanov? An unfortunate error by a subordinate? My own thoughts have gone in a similar direction. But unfortunately this is not possible. Each of the maps, including the version of Map 24 in Kulikov's possession, has been approved and signed by all three of us. I am afraid we are responsible, however unjust that may seem.

Shall we hear what Petrova has to say? PRESSES INTERCOM. Will you send in Lieutenant Petrova please? LOW By the way, she knows nothing of this.

A DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES. PETROVA ENTERS

FEDOROV: Sit down Lieutenant Petrova.

I will get straight to the point Lieutenant Petrova. We are undertaking a review of 24. And it has come to our attention that there may have been an oversight, a serious oversight, in the preparation of the map.

PETROVA: An oversight? What kind of oversight?

FEDOROV: You are not aware of a mistake having been made?

PETROVA: No.

FEDOROV: You are certain?

PETROVA: I think so.

FEDOROV: You think so. What if I were to tell you that we have learned that an entire town has been missed from 24, a town of great strategic importance? What would you say?

PETROVA: I would be horrified Comrade General. I have been working on 24 for ten years. I am certain it is completely accurate. It would be impossible for us to have missed a town. Impossible.

FEDOROV: Nevertheless, we have it on the highest authority that a mistake has been made.

PETROVA: Which town is missing? Where is it supposed to be? I will go back and check the map against all known sources.

FEDOROV: This will not be necessary. We know Lieutenant Petrova.

PETROVA: You know.

FEDOROV: We know.

PETROVA: What do you know?

FEDOROV: We know Lieutenant Petrova.

PETROVA: You know. You mean Slough.

ALEXEEV: We mean Slog!

PETROVA: In English it is pronounced Slough. A strange word and difficult for a Russian speaker but it is correct.

IVANOV: Slow?

PETROVA: Slough, with an 'ow' sound.

IVANOV: Slowg?

PETROVA: Sl__ough

IVANOV: Sloog?

FEDOROV: Never mind about the pronunciation! Lieutenant Petrova, you are admitting that this Slog has been omitted from Map24.

PETROVA: Yes.

FEDOROV: You were aware of this omission but did not inform the Directorate?

PETROVA: Yes.

FEDOROV: You omitted this Slog deliberately?

PETROVA: Not exactly.

IVANOV: Explain please!

PETROVA: It was not exactly a mistake. You will be aware, Colonel-General, that the maps are put together from many different sources. The principal

source for Map 24 is an agent, agent 783. This agent has been in deep cover in England since 1946. You know this of course.

FEDOROV: Continue.

PETROVA: Agent 783 has been very productive, not just in sending information, but also in recruiting for Moscow Centre. He helped to run the Kroger operation which, until it was exposed earlier this year was a very valuable source of military intelligence.

Most of 783's mapping work has been done through photography. He belongs to a local camera club and has taken many photographs of the area, including the airport. As you are aware Comrade General, the presence of the airport makes it very difficult to use spy planes for Map 24. 783 is part of the community. He works for the town council. His work has been exemplary. He has won medals.

IVANOV: For us or for them?

PETROVA: For both.

FEDOROV: Go on.

PETROVA: 783 lives in Slough.

FEDOROV: So why, if he lives there, has this exemplary agent failed to send us information about this town?

IVANOV: Yes, and why, as the officer directly involved with Map 24, were you not aware of the omission? You must have been looking at older maps, cross checking information. Surely the loss of this... Slog, was blindingly obvious.

PETROVA: He ... 783, felt that Slough should not be a target.

FEDOROV: He felt it should not be a target! What gave him the right to choose which towns were targets?

PETROVA: Perhaps if I read you his latest message. REMOVES PAPER FROM A FILE

‘My dear Maria, It is now autumn here and beautiful. I have been taking many photographs of the town and countryside which I will send to you by the usual means.

(PETROVA / CONT'D OVER)

PETROVA: You would love it here Maria. Slough is truly the workers' paradise for which we have all been struggling. The roads are wide and safe. The workers laugh and sing as they cycle to their well built and well maintained factories on the Trading Estate. The stores are full of produce and the hospitals and schools provide free care and education for all. There are cinemas, gardens and playgrounds for the children.

You should see the people here Maria. The proletariat of Slough may not yet control the means of production but only because they do not yet understand their destiny. Their political will is dulled by football matches, pies and beer. But they are good people and will rise up when their class consciousness is fully aroused. We must give them time.

Work is going well. My department is working on the enlargement of the new swimming pool. The nursery has won a gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show. I have also joined the Slough Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra and will be appearing in a performance of the Mikado in the spring. I only wish that you could be here to see it Maria.

I know that the capitalist system is wrong and must be smashed and I will fight against it with all my strength until it is overthrown. But Slough, Slough is good Maria. Slough must be preserved.

(PETROVA / CONT'D OVER)

PETROVA: I realise I may be committing a crime against the state by not putting Slough on your map, but I cannot allow it Maria. I cannot allow Slough to be attacked and destroyed however noble the cause.

I also realise my actions may be putting you in danger. I hope you understand how much this pains me but I have to do it.

I will write again soon.

783'

FEDOROV: Unbelievable.

IVANOV: This message addresses you as Maria, Lieutenant Petrova. Is this not a little familiar for a field agent? It sounds as though you have been colluding in this deception.

PETROVA: We have been corresponding for many years. 783 is my husband.

FEDOROV: Good of you to tell us Lieutenant. Did we know this Comrade Alexeev?

ALEXEEV: Absolutely not Comrade General. I do not have the Lieutenant's file with me but I am sure this illegal relationship has been concealed from the Directorate.

PETROVA: We married during the Great Patriotic War. We were young. After the war my husband became an agent and soon afterwards I joined the VGU. I was lucky enough to work on 24 and to be Section Leader. It meant I could communicate with him.

FEDOROV: And does your husband have a name?

PETROVA: His name is Yuri. I don't know what he's called in Slough.

FEDOROV: I assume you have been planning to defect, to join your husband in this paradise of Slog?

PETROVA: No Comrade General. I am a loyal Soviet citizen and so is my husband. It has been a great sadness to me that we have had to live apart all this time but that has been our fate. When Yuri speaks of Slough my heart aches to be there with him but I would never betray the motherland.

IVANOV: Except by producing a false map.

PETROVA: Yes.

FEDOROV: And you realise that your actions have compromised the Directorate.

PETROVA: Yes.

FEDOROV: Then we have no alternative but to expose your deception. You are likely to be sent to a work camp to be re-educated, a process that will take some time. As for your husband, he may need to be 'replaced'. Do you understand?

PETROVA: I understand. I am sorry to have caused so much trouble.

FEDOROV: You will have plenty of time to be sorry Lieutenant. We all will.

SOUND OF CLOSING OF FILES

A TELEPHONE RINGS

ALEXEEV: Yes.... What is it? ... Bring it in. An urgent message Comrade General.

FEDOROV: That will be all Lieutenant Petrova. You will return to your desk. You will not speak of this meeting to anyone. I repeat, not to anyone. You will have no further contact with agent 783. Do you understand?

PETROVA: Yes Comrade General.

THE DOOR OPENS AND PETROVA LEAVES

FEDOROV: Vodka!

ALEXEEV GOES TO A CUPBOARD AND REMOVES A BOTTLE
OF VODKA AND THREE GLASSES, PLACING THEM ON THE
TABLE

POURING It has been a good career comrades, but shorter than I
would have liked. THE THREE DRINK. THE GLASSES RETURN
TO THE TABLE

THE DOOR OPENS AND AN AIDE ENTERS WITH A MESSAGE

Ah, a message from the General Staff. Perhaps the eager Kulikov has
submitted his report already! FEDOROV GETS UP AND WALKS
AWAY FROM THE TABLE

Comrades, there are times when serving this great motherland of ours
fills me with pride. This is such a time. The message I have just
received contains a list of high ranking army officers who have been
arrested by the Central Committee of the Praesidium for the crime of
high treason. They have been taken to the Lubyanka and were
executed... LOOKS AT HIS WATCH ... ten minutes ago.

Among this group of despicable traitors was one General Vasily
Kulikov of the Military Planning Directorate.

ALEXEEV: So he won't be submitting his report?

FEDOROV: In the circumstances it seems unlikely.

IVANOV: But his review of Plan 7 will still be on file.

FEDOROV: It may be comrade. But even if it is, who is going to believe the work of a traitor? Who is going to believe that the VGU has deliberately concealed the existence of a town of great strategic importance? Sounds incredible, doesn't it? Sounds like another piece of misinformation spread by a devious counter-revolutionary General. No Ivanov, I don't think we have too much to worry about. I think we leave the map as it is.

A toast comrades.

Slog!

IVANOV/ALEXEEV/FEDOROV:

Slog!

END