

Patriots, a Porsche, and the Soviets

By Jeff Souder

Soviet military intelligence had photos of me and my platoon. Without a doubt. I know this because I saw Soviet spies take the pictures. Though certainly uncommon, being the target of a Soviet spy camera was not unexpected for a Soldier in my line of work at that time in Europe. But the fact that the Soviets also had pictures of my wife and my Porsche is a whole different story. (Probably best told over beers, this is a story I will have to tell on paper until we can again socialize properly!)

While stationed in Germany in the late '80s, I was assigned to the first of many Patriot air defense battalions that were eventually deployed to Europe. The Patriot system was comprised not only of incredibly capable missiles, but also of a brand-new type of radar system using technology never before seen in an air defense system. Our operating area near the Fulda Gap – one of the areas along the border between East and West Germany where NATO anticipated a possible Soviet attack – meant we were of great interest to the Soviets.

Not many persons outside of Europe knew about them, but those who were stationed there during the Cold War might remember the Soviet Military Liaison Mission (SMLM) personnel and their vehicles we were all trained to identify, collect information regarding and, in certain instances, [attempt to detain](#). These trained military intelligence analysts were authorized by agreement between NATO countries and the USSR to travel throughout unrestricted areas of Western Europe to monitor NATO troop activities, ostensibly to improve relations and build trust among the countries. NATO also had similar teams in the USSR. The unrestricted areas in which SMLMs were allowed were typically main transportation routes and the areas in and around major cities.

It was no surprise to anyone, however, that the SMLMs often “got lost” and wandered into restricted areas that often included military training areas and bases, defense manufacturing plants, border areas, and other sensitive places. It was in these areas that military members were charged to attempt to detain or dissuade and report the intelligence agents.

As such, it was not uncommon to see SMLMs skulking around our Patriot training and wartime deployment sites. Our instructions were always to report everything we could about the cars, their occupants, and their activities to the EUCOM MI (European Command Military Intelligence) detachment absolutely as soon as possible after the sighting. It is important to note that military folklore always said that the SMLM cars were hot rods with special racing suspensions, high capacity gas tanks and heavily modified engines so they could get away from anyone attempting to track them. If you saw a SMLM team, you had to gather as much information as quickly as possible before they sped away. I always hoped I would get the chance to catch a spy or at least see one of their super cars up close.

One late fall day in 1987, I was checking on a section of my platoon, which was emplaced near the top of a mountain just inside a tree line. The property was formerly a small ski school and a couple of the beginner slopes were used as pastureland and remained fairly clear of trees. While I was inside one of the vans talking with my Soldiers, one of the perimeter guards called to tell us he had spotted a SMLM vehicle at the bottom of the slope and he could see long telephoto lenses sticking out of two windows. I immediately told him to run down and either detain them or chase them off and I and two others jumped out of the van and took off down the slope after him, running absolutely as fast we could.

It was not a heroic sight to behold. Were it a scene from a movie, we would have looked like Charlie Sheen, Mel Gibson and maybe Tom Hanks gracefully running Chariots-of-Fire style down the steep ski slope as the bad guys ran away, leaving their gear behind. Nope. Not even close. Instead, it was a scene of three normal young dudes weighed down by helmets, M-16s without ammo, full canteens, MRE-stuffed pockets, gas masks strapped to their thighs, dressed in charcoal-lined chemical protective suits trying for all they were worth to stay on their feet as they half ran and half rolled down the mountain. While all of this was going on – seemingly in slow motion – the spies calmly remained in place, snapping pictures. Click...click...click.

By the time we arrived, they had sped away and left nothing behind but lingering exhaust from that supposed race engine. Didn't smell like race fuel either; smelled like oil smoke. What a disappointment.

Initially angry that they had escaped, we later laughed at how we must look in the pictures back in Moscow: freeze frame stills of a bunch of jokers stumbling down a mountain looking mad as hell and completely out of control. We were all determined that the next time we saw a SMLM, We Would Get Them.

Just over a year later, I got my second chance.

Among the many cars and motorcycles I owned those three years I lived in Germany was a '77 924. It wasn't very fast and some might say it wasn't very pretty, but it was mine and I went everywhere I could, as fast as I could! It was a very rare Reseda Green model with a chocolate brown interior, and it is the reference car for that color pictured in [Rennbow](#).

In early 1989, my soon-to-be wife Trisha and I were driving south from Giessen on the A5 one Saturday evening on our way to a Brigade formal dinner ball in Darmstadt.



A young, squared-away Jeff Souder and his smashing wife-to-be, Trisha.

Traffic was moderately heavy for that time of the weekend and we were in the middle lane south of Frankfurt when I saw a SMLM car go by us in the fast lane. I remember it was an ugly green Russian station wagon of some sort. Didn't look all that fast to me. I told Trisha it was our duty to tail them and collect as much information as possible, and I think she responded with some comment about not going too fast and that I wasn't James Bond, but I really don't remember (even way back then I didn't really pay attention to her comments about my driving). So, I downshifted and off we went, weaving around slower traffic, calling on everything that car had to offer...maybe all of what? 125 pure Audi - I mean Porsche - horses in European trim?!

We eventually caught up to them and they moved to the middle lane to let us by. As we pulled alongside, I distinctly remember telling my wife to check them out because I was in uniform and thought the longer I could pretend I didn't notice them as we slowly crept by, the more information she could collect before they were spooked. But much to my surprise, rather than letting me pass they chose to match my speed and began ogling and taking pictures of Trisha who, I must admit, was looking super fine in her evening gown!

She said something like "Hey! These guys are making 'kissy faces' and wagging their tongues at me while taking pictures and waving!" My surveillance plan foiled, I looked over and gave them my most evil 007 look and then tried to accelerate away. And couldn't! Though I had that pedal mashed almost through the firewall and my 924 was giving me its all, it wasn't Bond's DB5 and it just didn't have enough muscle to escape that Soviet spy wagon. The Soviets appeared to just casually cruise along next to us, matching our slowly increasing speed, laughing at our predicament. It was almost as if they knew my personality: neither I nor Bond would ever slow down to let bad guys go by and I needed to get to a phone so I could report my spy sighting!

We went on like this for what seemed like a couple of minutes before - horror of horrors - my beloved Porsche decided to burn a hole in the number three piston. With the wanna-be Mr. Bond and his hot Bond Girl drastically slowing in their smoking car, off the Soviets went, hands and arms out of both sides of the station wagon, saluting us with every hand gesture known to man.



Jeff's Soviet station-wagon chaser.

As we limped to the ball on three cylinders, I was furious not only that the SMLMs had beaten me again, but that they had done it in a station wagon! To make matters worse, my Porsche had let me down and had caused what was surely an embarrassment I would take to my grave. I was so mad at that car!

My anger did not last long. After all, the car didn't leave us on the side of the Autobahn. It got us to a phone so I could report the SMLM sighting (an hour or so too late, but oh well), and it got us to the ball just in time for us to party all evening, just like Bond and his leading lady!

I ended up rebuilding the engine and learned a lot in the process. Then a couple of months later I sold it to buy something newer and faster and more reliable: an '88 Mustang GT that was way more fun on the Autobahn, but not as 007 cool, for sure.

Wish I could tell you I look like Sean Connery, I was driving a Ruf 911, the Soviets couldn't get away, and instead they blew their engine trying, but alas, life hands us few victories as sweet as that!

Hmmm...Maybe I'll tell that one when we meet for beer...

Below is an ad from PCA for Rennbow. The site has more Porsches than you can count, and almost every color ever used on a Porsche (505 colors and 4557 pictures). An interesting way to while away a rainy afternoon. www.rennbow.org



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