I…Spy??

In the fall of 1985, an Indianapolis television station contacted the Academies about a Culver graduate who had been mentioned extensively in a recently published book, *The New KGB: Engine of Soviet Power*. The individual was Xenephon Kalamatiano, Class of 1899, and the stepson of a former member of the Language Department, Paul de Blumenthal.

Prompted by the call, I discovered the Kalamatiano-de Blumenthal saga to be both fascinating and frustrating. It has the flavor of intrigue, a major touch of pathos, a large helping of the bizarre, and posed more questions than answers.

According to the authors of *The New KGB,* William Corson and Robert Crowley, Dimitrevich Xenephon de Blumenthal Kalamatiano was the first American "secret agent" to cross swords with the Russian Cheka, the counter-revolutionary organization which monitored émigrés and conducted domestic surveillance. It was operated by the infamous Felix Dzerzhinsky and his security apparatus and into his net this Culver Military Academy graduate fell.

The Kalamatiano story is filled with contradictions and unanswered questions. Corson and Crowley credit "miscellaneous personal documents" at CMA for some of their material. Yet no one at Central File recalls sharing any private information and, without doubt, two of their statements are patently incorrect. Research requests also came from a U.S. Naval officer, a Ph.D. candidate at the

University of California, the head of intelligence for the Lyndon La Roche organization, a retired foreign service officer in the State Department, and author and former U.S. Ambassador to Kenya Smith Hempstone, CMA ’46.

My search revealed a story that was more soap opera than espionage. It began in western Russia about 1865 when one of the two protagonists, Paul de Blumenthal, was born. He was reportedly of royal lineage and Corson and Crowley indicated that he was probably French “with some pretension to nobility.” He graduated from the Imperia1 University of St. Petersburg and then pursued a degree in jurisprudence.

About 1895, he married the widow of a Greek trader and became the stepfather of her 13-year old son, Xenephon Kalamatiano. De Blumenthal’s liberal politics ran afoul of the czar’s security police when he became involved in a movement that advocated a more democratic Russia. Fearing imprisonment, he and his new family immigrated to the United States and he found employment in DeKalb, Illinois working for Joseph Glidden, the inventor of barbed wire. American citizenship soon followed. He was, however, unhappy working in the manufacturing business and contacted a teacher employment agency in Chicago.

In 1897, the Culver Military Academy offered him a contract in the Foreign Language Department as an instructor of French. The job provided the intellectual life he wanted and allowed his step-son Xenephon to matriculate at the Academy. Kalamatiano was a very bright boy and graduated with distinction in 1899. He

enrolled at the University of Chicago, where he completed his collegiate degree in 1903.

De Blumenthal yearned for Mother Russia and his tenure at Culver lasted for only two years. As the political climate improved in his homeland, he resigned and embarked on what became a long and Dr. Zhivago-like odyssey.

In 1907, Kalamatiano returned to Russia as a sales representative for farm implement manufacturer J. I. Case of Racine, Wisconsin. Though quite successful, he ended his association with Case in 1912 and struck out on his own when he formed the Pan Kivel Company. His knowledge of farming and farm equipment and an ability to speak fluent English, brought great success as a manufacturers' representative for about 30 American and European implement firms. Business prospered, he moved into a fine residential area in Moscow and, in 1913, married a lady who was a member of the Czarina's court.

As the Russian Revolution grew nearer, Kalamatiano's business contacts provided him a treasure trove of intelligence. Corson and Crowley concluded he held a strong anti-Soviet bias. The doctoral dissertation of David S. Fogelsong at the University of Southern California brought new color to Kalamatiano's shadow. Fogelsong's study of Soviet archival materials concluded that, while Kalamatiano was recruited by the U.S. State Department to "gather commercial information," he had moved into the arena of military intelligence by

the time American troops landed in Archangel in August 1918.

It was almost inevitable, too, that his path crossed with agents from Britain and France, including the famous “Reilly, Ace of Spies,” the centerpiece character for a PBS television program on Masterpiece Theater. Cheka infiltration into the “network” of agents expanded and, in August of 1918, Dzerzhinsky sprung a trap which led to Kalamatiano’s arrest. He and 18 others were charged with conspiring to destroy the Bolshevik revolution and plotting the assassination of Lenin.

The trial was a media-like event in the early winter of 1918 with Kalamatiano its focal point. Four of the conspirators were sentenced to death in absentia, eight were pardoned (they were, in reality, Dzerzhinsky’s penetration agents), five received five years at hard labor, and Kalamatiano and a Russian were sentenced to death. The Russian was shot two weeks later. On several occasions, Kalamatiano was brought before a firing squad, given his last cigarette, heard the command “ready, aim” and then was taken back to his cell!

Held at the Lubianka Prison Number 2, his sentence was finally commuted to life, a reprieve attributed to the intercession of Lenin himself. Fogelsong indicates the Bolsheviks were willing to trade Kalamatiano for U.S. labor radical Eugene C. Debs. However, nothing came of this. Eventually the desperate shortage of food in Russia and aggressive actions by Herbert Hoover and his American Relief Administration to pry Kalamatiano from Lubianka in August of 1921 were successful.

In the late fall, Kalamatiano managed to open a line of communication with General Gignilliat and M.C. Hubbell, the chairman of the Language Department. If he could find employment, he could leave Russia. Gignilliat, remembering his father and always ready to help an alumnus, stepped forward and offered an appointment as an associate instructor in Foreign Languages. Kalamatiano and his wife arrived during the first semester in 1921 and settled into his new position as a teacher of French.

Sadly, the ravages of prison life and declining strength made hospitalization necessary. In 1923 Kalamatiano was sent to a sanitarium just outside Chicago. After a short confinement he died on November 9, 1923. Corson and Crowley contend that he died of blood poisoning resulting from a hunting accident. Fogelsong supports this by noting an incident early in November when Kalamatiano froze one of his feet while hunting and several of his toes had to be amputated. Hempstone had a more sinister scenario which implied that the long arm of Soviet intelligence reached into the Hinsdale, Illinois, sanitarium and he was poisoned.

Officially, the death certificate from the County of DuPage, State of Illinois, settled the issue in a less dramatic fashion. It simply states that "Xenephon Kalamatiano, age 41 years, three months and twenty-five days died on 9 November 1923 of 'sub acute septic endocarditis.'"

In a bizarre twist, stepfather de Blumenthal and his family made their personal odyssey across Asiatic Russia and Manchuria, finally reaching Shanghai in 1923. In October

de Blumenthal, with his son Michael, left China and in early November reached Seattle. Unaware of Kalamatiano's death he wired that he was on his way to Culver. The telegram was passed to General Gignilliat who responded on the 10th that, "Deeply regret to advise that Xenephon died last night . . . Mrs. Kalamatiano expresses desire cremation Chicago . . . Are you coming East . . ?" De Blumenthal and his son left immediately for Culver to be met by Kalamatiano's second wife, Catherine, whom he married in 1917. She remained in the community and became well respected as a seamstress. She died in 1927.

A week after arriving, Gignilliat offered de Blumenthal a contract as an instructor in the Foreign Language Department succeeding his stepson! Michael de Blumenthal enrolled as a cadet and graduated in the Class of 1927. In time the whole family was reunited when wife, Larissa, and two daughters, Tania and Sonia arrived in Culver.