

THE WORLD

A colourless man who slaughtered millions

By PETER KERR in New York

On a chilly night in May 1960, Peter Malkin approached a slight, baldish man walking home on a suburban street in Buenos Aires.

"One minute, sir," Malkin said. A second later, his beefy forearm snapped around the man's neck, and Adolf Eichmann, the former Nazi SS officer responsible for the slaughter of nearly six million people, was himself under arrest by the State of Israel.

"I had to wear gloves that night," Malkin, a former Israeli intelligence agent, recalled. "I knew all the commands that came through that mouth. I had to put something between me and it."

This month, on the 25th anniversary of the trial and hanging of Eichmann in Israel, Malkin spoke out for the first time in America about his role in the undercover team that captured Eichmann, who had been living in hiding in Argentina.

Until recently Malkin had maintained secrecy about his experiences. But at the opening of a new exhibit this month about the Eichmann case at the Jewish Museum in New York, and in subsequent interviews at his home and office, Malkin recalled the mission.

As a master of martial arts and disguises, Malkin was chosen by the Israeli intelligence services to seize Eichmann, the SS lieutenant colonel assigned to engineer the Final Solution to the "Jewish problem." For more than a week in 1960, Malkin was Eichmann's guard in a safe house in Argentina.

Malkin, whose sister, nephews and cousins were killed in Poland under Eichmann's orders, was one of the first people to discover that one of the century's most sinister figures was essentially a colourless, ordinary man.

"Here I see a man like you and me," said Malkin, staring into the distance as he remembered the bedroom of the villa where Eichmann was manacled by the leg to a bed.

"I had held his hand and I wondered, 'How could this be?' I tried to imagine six million, a row of six million waiting for their trains but didn't work. I couldn't see it. It wasn't real."

Malkin describes his occupation today as a consultant with expertise in "security and anti-terrorism."

Now 58, Malkin was born in British Palestine. He said his earliest memories were of the 1930s, when his family returned to live among relatives in Poland.

They left again for the safety of British territory shortly before the German invasion of 1939, but Malkin's sister, her three children and dozens of his childhood friends were left behind.

"My mother said, 'Look, look at them good, because you will never see them again,'" Malkin said. "I remember most my cousin Yitzhakale, always carving with a piece of wood in his hand images of the prophets."

At the age of 14, Malkin joined the Jewish underground, and he served as a sapper in Israel's army during the Israeli-Arab war of 1948. Malkin said he had been a veteran of secret operations by the time Eichmann was found in Argentina.



Eichmann ... claimed actions ordered by German Government.

The Israeli Government believed Eichmann had to be kidnapped without Argentina's knowledge because legal extradition was likely to fail.

In his book on the Eichmann mission, Isser Harel, the chief executive of Israel's secret services, identified Malkin as Eli Yuval and said he was

selected for his strength and his ability with disguises.

On one Friday night before he left he disguised himself as a foreign student — using a device that changed the appearance of his mouth and the sound of his voice — and showed up in time for dinner at his mother's house in Haifa.

For several minutes, he said, he had her convinced that he was a stranger visiting at the request of her son. When he revealed his identity, his mother was startled.

"She yelled, 'You are going to kill me,'" Malkin said with a laugh. Later that evening, his mother guessed that he was going away on an important mission, he said. She would not believe his denials.

"Even a secret agent," Malkin said, "can't lie to a Jewish mother."

Eichmann had been living in Argentina under the assumed name of Ricardo Clement since 1950. A team of more than a dozen Israeli agents converged on Buenos Aires from various European cities early in 1960, and on May 11 they moved to capture Eichmann as he walked from the stop on his commuter bus to his home on an quiet suburban street.

The agents carried no weapons and hid their plans and identities from Argentine authorities.

Looking through binoculars from an observation post, Malkin watched Eichmann walk that route on the nights before the capture and watched through Eichmann's living-room window as the seemingly innocuous,

middle-aged man played on the floor with his six-year-old son.

"I had imagined a criminal much larger," Malkin said. "I memorised the sound of his footsteps."

On the appointed night, as two cars with other agents waited nearby, Malkin intercepted Eichmann near his home. At the last second, Eichmann stepped back in surprise.

As Malkin grabbed him, Eichmann let out a short scream. The two fell into a ditch, and several other agents grabbed Eichmann's arms and legs and shoved him into a car.

To the surprise of the members of the team, Eichmann was a pliant, even helpful prisoner. He quickly volunteered his true identity and explained that his actions had all been ordered by the German Government.

As the team waited for an El Al airliner that would secretly take him back to Israel, Eichmann was imprisoned in pyjamas in a bedroom with his eyes covered. Each day he was given exercise and fed kosher food, cooked by an Israeli agent who was orthodox.

As time passed, the two men began to talk. "I told him, 'You have a beautiful boy. I saw him through the window,'" Malkin recalled. "He reminds me of another boy that could be have been his brother. It was my sister's son. The only difference is that this boy is dead."

At this, Malkin said, the prisoner clenched his teeth and looked terrified.

"He said, 'It's not my fault; he was Jewish,'" Malkin recalled. "He said, 'I have nothing against the Jews. On the contrary, I love Jews.'"

And with that, Malkin recalled, Eichmann began to recite in Hebrew a prayer often said by Jews on their way to execution: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one ..."

"This drove me crazy," Malkin said. To distract himself, Malkin, who is an amateur artist, began to draw and paint in a tourist guidebook, pictures of Eichmann and Yitzhakale, among other children he knew in Poland.

Shortly before Eichmann was sneaked aboard the Israeli airliner dressed as an airline officer, Malkin's commanders said they wanted the prisoner to sign a statement saying he was going to Israel voluntarily.

To get him to sign, Malkin said, he had Eichmann dress in the airline uniform, made up his face to look as young as it was when he commanded his SS troops and had him look into a mirror.

Suddenly given back his identity by a figure of authority, Eichmann seemed to regain his strength, Malkin said. He poured Eichmann a glass of wine and played some flamenco music.

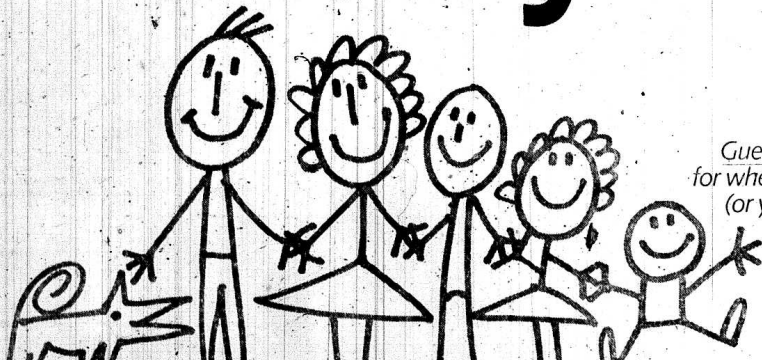
"In a uniform, he felt good again," Malkin said. "I said, 'Why don't you sign.'"

Eichmann agreed. It was a dozen years later, long after Eichmann's ashes had been scattered across the Mediterranean, that Malkin revealed his role in the case to someone outside the Israeli Government. It was in a whisper to his mother as he lay dying and unable to speak in a hospital in Haifa.

"I said: 'I captured Eichmann. I captured Eichmann.'"

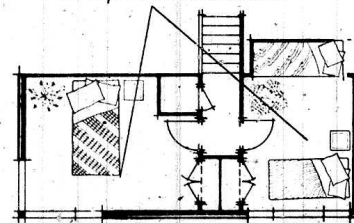
The New York Times

Family. Planning.



Guest room/Study
for when friends drop in
(or you drop out).

Kids' bedrooms
upstairs let you stay
on top of the situation.



Master bedroom
and ensuite
well away from the
little 'angels'.

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