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The man who was Stalin's body double finally tells his story

By WILL STEWART

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The narrow, baggy eyes and droopy moustache are unmistakable ? features that terrified half the world, condemned millions to a cruel death and which even today are an instant symbol of monstrous despotism.

Yet the man who so clearly has Joseph Stalin's face upon his shoulders is not Stalin at all.



Convincing: Felix Dadaev (left) in the late forties and the real tyrant Joseph Stalin, who feared for his life

Despite the careful curve of the brows and the immaculate hair, these pictures show someone else entirely, someone who has never been supreme leader of the Soviet Republic.

This, as the Russian public has been learning, is Felix Dadaev, a dancer and juggler who, amid the desperate defence against Hitler's invading armies, was ordered to the Kremlin to work as Stalin's body double.

For more than half a century, Dadaev remained silent, fearing a death sentence should he dare to open his mouth.

But at the age of 88, and with the apparent approval of the Putin regime, he has finally come forward to tell a quite remarkable story.

It takes him from the ruined streets of Grozny all the way to Yalta on the Black Sea coast for the historic three-powers showdown, where Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt fought to determine the shape of post-war Europe.

Dadaev's new autobiography explains that he was one of four men employed to impersonate the supreme leader, taking his place in motorcades, at rallies, on newsreel footage and wherever ? as at Yalta ? Stalin feared he was in particular danger.

The Russian media has been enthralled. For years, speculation about Stalin's body doubles remained just that, with the truth locked away in the KGB archives and protected by the culture of paranoia.

Dadaev is the first living proof that the stories were correct.

Even now ? with the Russian security services resurgent ? it is unlikely that his book, *Variety Land*, would have been published without official approval.

Brief statements from the KGB archives, the state film industry Mosfilm and the state-run Academy of Security, Defence, Law and Order have supported Dadaev's version of events.

"Even when I was young, my friends joked that I looked like Stalin," he recalled.

"By the time my make-up and training were complete, I was like him in every way, except perhaps my ears. They were too small."

Trained at the personal request of Stalin, Dadaev attended rallies and meetings across Russia wearing the leader's trademark Red Army cap and heavy overcoat encrusted with medals.

He rarely had a speaking part but, in an age before television, his carefully copied appearance and mannerisms went down well.

It helped that he had trained as both an actor and illusionist.

Dadaev was born in the Caucasian highlands of Dagestan and, when his family moved to Grozny, in Chechnya, he began taking ballet lessons ? quite normal for a Russian boy in Soviet times.



Spot the difference: Felix Dadaev (left) even fooled Stalin's closet aides

At the age of 16, he had been offered a place in the State Singing and Dance Band of Ukraine.

But war broke out and, instead of joining a tour of Britain with the band, Dadaev was posted to a concert brigade, where he performed as a dancer, juggler and illusionist.

He was required to fight, too, and was so badly injured during the Russian liberation of Grozny in 1942 that his family was told he had been killed.

"I was one of seven 'corpses' delivered to a hospital, but another guy and I were still alive," he said.

That "death" was the start of a strange double life. One evening in 1943, he was flown to a cottage near Moscow where officers from the NKVD (predecessor of the KGB) demanded that he forge a new and distinctive identity.

"I was flattered, of course ? proud to look like the leader, proud to think what my friends who teased me about looking like him when I was young would say now," he said.

Just into his 20s, Dadaev was a great deal younger than Stalin, but make-up and the strain of war meant that he could pass as a 60-year-old.

"We had all experienced so much suffering that I looked much older than I was," he said.

He spent months in training, some of it under the eagle eye of Lavrenty Beria, Stalin's feared chief of secret police.

He watched movies of Stalin to perfect the mimicry of his movement and intonation.

Dadaev's book recalls his first terrifying attempt to play Stalin in front of the leader's comrades at the Kremlin.

"Remember, this plan was devised by the chiefs of all those frightful committees," he said.

"There was much riding on the plan. Perhaps I did not fully understand all the responsibility.

"Everybody shivered. Even among those men at the highest level, everyone was scared. The main thing, they said, was to keep silent at the first meeting if Stalin was not in the mood for conversation.

"But if he was, to be laconic and say something to him in his own voice.

"After a sleepless night, at 9am they brought me to the Kremlin. First General Vlasik, head of Stalin's personal security, came by.

"He was stunned, then, after a pause, nodded his head approvingly. Then he studied my jacket and gown, paid attention to my slightly bent left arm and glanced at my boots.

"I was waiting with fear in case he noticed my fake grey temples.

"I had a make-up artist but he couldn't be with me all the time. So I learned to do it myself.

"But my ability to copy Stalin's manners, voice and walk was far more important."



Secret revealed: Felix Dadaev in his military uniform today

Today, General Vlasik's daughter Nadezhda Nikolayevna confirms Dadaev's role.

"Yes, they used doubles," she said.

"All the tricks to distract attention from the leader were invented by my father.

"He was so involved in the work, and loved Stalin so much, that he suggested fantastic ideas." Dadaev was talented ? and lucky. Had he failed to convince Vlasik or Beria, he would almost certainly have been shot to protect the secret plan.

As it was, he was banned from seeing his relatives and bound by a non-disclosure agreement that remained in force long after Stalin died.

Dadaev met his doppelganger on only one occasion, in the Fifties, and even then the encounter was brief.

"He smiled and gave me an approving nod and that was it," he recalled. "Stalin had four doubles in all. He was very afraid of attempts on his life.

"Spies surrounded him and every trip was thoroughly planned. For example, doubles were often substituted for him on the way to the airport.

"Several cars were used to distract anyone watching. I often took those trips."

Initially, Dadaev's meetings were limited to leaving the Kremlin and driving off in Stalin's car.

"He progressed to meeting party officials, and once, Dadaev stood on the mausoleum in Red Square instead of Stalin.

"It was a sportsmen's parade," he said.

"Everyone was sure it was Stalin himself. I walked to the mausoleum with members of the government, then stood on the central dais, smiling and greeting the passing columns.

"The key thing was to get the step right. When Stalin was among his entourage, his walk was prompt and firm.

"But at receptions or meetings, he walked slowly and pensively.

"My confidence was bolstered as soon as I came out and was greeted by government members saluting me.

"We went directly to the mausoleum. I could see there were no suspicions. Yet again the KGB had pulled it off."

Dadaev's biggest mission came as Stalin flew to Yalta for the famous conference in February 1945.

Stalin's flight was kept top secret while a later one with Dadaev on board was publicised.

"Two flights were arranged, with one of them aimed to distract everyone's attention," he said.

"Nobody ever wrote about it, no one knows about it. I was a decoy to draw the attention of foreign intelligence. Stalin was already in Yalta.

"But it didn't work. Two attempts were made in Yalta to kill the real Stalin. Our intelligence failed. I was back in Moscow by then.

"Seven high-ranking intelligence officers lost their posts. They were lucky to lose just that."

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