

THE NICK SHADRIN ENIGMA... ONI'S LAST SOVIET DEFECTOR

The Soviet naval officer and defector who led multiple lives and ultimately lost his life in a bungled KGB attempt to kidnap him and return him to the USSR

By Rear Admiral Tom Brooks, U.S. Navy (Retired)

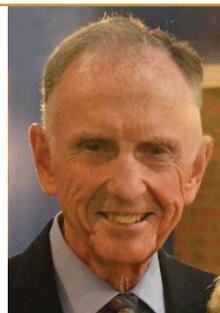
The year is 1959. By all reckoning, Nikolai Fyodorovich Artamonov was destined for great success as a Soviet naval officer. A 1949 graduate of the Frunze Higher Naval School (equivalent of the U.S. Naval Academy), in seven years he had reached the rank of Captain Third Rank (Lieutenant Commander equivalent¹) and had been given command of the Skoryy-class destroyer *Stremitelnyy*. Some 75 Skoryy DDs were built between 1950 and 1953, and the Skoryy was the backbone of the Soviet Navy's destroyer force. A very prestigious command for one so young.

Artamonov's destroyer appeared to be something of a show ship. In the almost three years he had been in command, the ship had been assigned to pay calls in Copenhagen, Malta, and Portsmouth, England — a privilege normally reserved to the most impressive ships and reliable commanders. And now the *Stremitelnyy* was being sent to Poland to train Indonesian sailors who would form the crew of a Skoryy-class DD scheduled for transfer to Indonesia.

Artamonov was an excellent candidate for this sort of representational duty. He was tall and good-looking with a full head of dark hair, and had a friendly, outgoing personality. Although known as a strict disciplinarian, he was quite popular with his crew as well as with his Polish Navy counterparts and made friends easily while in Poland. One of these new friends was a pretty young Polish dental student named Ewa "Blanka" Gora. Despite Blanka's typical Polish inclination to dislike Russians, a romance developed and soon became very serious.

Artamonov had a wife and son in the Leningrad area but told Blanka that he could easily get a divorce. But Blanka wanted no part of living in the Soviet Union, and Artamonov could not move to Poland. He decided that Blanka was the woman he wanted and that the only avenue available for them to have a life together was to escape to the West. Thus, a plot was born.

On a pleasant spring evening in early June 1959, Artamonov and Blanka set out in his ship's 22-foot motor launch for a "fishing trip." In addition to fishing equipment, they brought along food and extra gasoline, but nothing else. Equipped with



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nothing more than the launch's magnetic compass and a navigation chart, they embarked on a 24-hour journey across the Baltic to Sweden. They ran into an unexpected storm and high winds, but in a remarkable display of navigation and seamanship, they managed to land in Sweden within a mile or two of Artamonov's intended landfall. They turned themselves over to Swedish police and requested asylum. From there the wheels of international diplomacy began to grind and they ultimately were handed over to the CIA for resettlement in the United States.



Nick Shadrin, passport photo (Courtesy of DIA).

There was great excitement in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) when it was learned that the captain of a Soviet Navy destroyer had defected. A preliminary debriefing team was put together to make a quick determination of just who this man was and what he might know. At the time he was only known as DS-3005. The CIA soon gave him a new name — Nicholas George Shadrin — and turned him over to ONI. Nick Shadrin would become the last Soviet defector to be sponsored/handled by ONI.

It quickly became apparent that Shadrin was no ordinary Soviet naval officer. He was remarkably well-informed, knowledgeable,

¹ The officer rank structures of the Soviet Navy were not exactly parallel. A Soviet Captain Third Rank wore three stripes on his sleeve like a U.S. Navy commander, but Captain Third Rank was the fourth commissioned rank (O-4), like a U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander.

intelligent, and inquisitive. A potential warehouse of information concerning the Soviet Navy, he was put to work as a consultant/analyst within ONI and a years-long debriefing process began. In the course of this he befriended a number of U.S. Naval Intelligence officers, to include then-Captain Rufus Taylor (later to become Director of Naval Intelligence and then, as a Vice Admiral, Deputy Director of DIA and ultimately Deputy Director of CIA). Later Shadrin would befriend Lieutenant General Sam Wilson, who was to become the Director of DIA, and Admiral Stansfield Turner, who was to become the Director of Central Intelligence. Shadrin had a remarkable ability to win friends and influence people.

Shadrin was very content with his position within ONI, despite the fact that he was given no security clearances. Thus, in his view, his opportunity for advancement was severely limited. Blanka completed the courses required for her dental degree and opened a practice in suburban Virginia. It would appear that the re-settlement of the Shadrins was going well.

Then, in 1962, Shadrin's career in ONI came to an end when DIA took over all defectors from the service intelligence organizations. Shadrin became a DIA employee assigned to an office full of other defectors, none of whom had clearances, and whose job it was to review and analyze Soviet and Warsaw Pact handbooks and open source documents. Shadrin disliked the job, but gave it his all nonetheless. While working at DIA he completed his PhD at George Washington University. His dissertation studied the growth of Soviet maritime power.

The story now fast-forwards to the 1966–67 timeframe. The KGB station in Washington DC had been charged to locate Soviet defectors residing in the United States. One way or another they were to be eliminated — either by assassination or by returning them to the USSR. Artamonov/Shadrin was one of the targeted defectors.² He was approached in a shopping center and handed a letter from his wife in Russia pleading for him to come home. He subsequently was told that all would be forgiven if he agreed to spy for the KGB. When Shadrin reported the approach, the FBI decided that this could be turned into a very valuable operation and asked Shadrin to become a double agent. Shadrin was very hesitant to get involved in something as dangerous as a double agent operation. But he spoke with his friend and mentor Vice Admiral Rufus Taylor and was encouraged to play along with the KGB.³ The Director of DIA had given permission for the operation, but no one else in Shadrin's DIA chain of command was ever made aware of it. Convinced that this would gain him his long-sought U.S. security clearance, Shadrin made the decision to play along — a decision that was to cost him his life.

The operation proceeded apace, with Shadrin filling dead drops with classified “feed material” provided him by his FBI case officer. The KGB appeared to suspect nothing. But that changed in 1973 when his FBI handlers allowed Shadrin to go to Montreal for a meeting with a KGB officer who allegedly was the head of KGB illegal operations in North America. Agreeing to an overseas meeting was a very dangerous step, but the FBI could not resist the bait of uncovering the head of KGB illegal operations, and they assured Shadrin that Canada would be perfectly safe. What the FBI didn't know was that the KGB had an informant within the counter-intelligence branch of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and when the FBI informed the RCMP of the intended meeting, Shadrin was completely compromised.⁴



Votivkirche on the Ring Platze in Vienna. This was the church where Shadrin met with KGB agents on his final night in December 1975.

The KGB allowed the operation to continue for two more years, but with little contact. There are varying versions of what happened after that. According to KGB Major General Oleg D. Kalugin⁵, who was the head of KGB counterintelligence at the time of Shadrin's disappearance, the KGB re-initiated contact and lured Shadrin to Vienna with the intention of kidnapping him. Other popular book versions of the story allege that Shadrin re-initiated contact at the direction of the FBI.⁶ Whatever the facts might be, the trip to Vienna was on. In December 1975, Shadrin and Blanka traveled to Vienna en route a “ski vacation.” The name and telephone number of a CIA contact were provided in case assistance was required. Shadrin wrote them on an index card and gave the card to Blanka. CIA/FBI did not put in place any countersurveillance.⁷ Shadrin went off to meet with the KGB and was never seen again.

² Kalugin, Oleg, *Spymaster*, New York, Basic Books, 2009, pp. 104–108

³ Hurt, Henry, *Shadrin; the Spy Who Never Came Back*, New York, McGraw-Hill Company, 1981, p. 23

⁴ Kalugin, op.cit. p. 173

⁵ Kalugin, op.cit. pp. 174–5

⁶ Hurt, op.cit., p. 201

⁷ Hurt, op.cit., p. 204

Over the years a number of strange stories appeared regarding what became of Nick Shadrin. In 1977 the Soviet publication *Literary Gazette* published a lengthy article maintaining that Shadrin had been kidnapped and executed by the CIA.⁸ A dozen years later an even more bizarre story appeared claiming that Shadrin had been sighted in the USSR at a memorial service for the recently-departed Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov, the former commander-in-chief of the Soviet Navy. According to this account, Shadrin was married to Gorshkov's daughter and attended the service in full naval uniform with his naval officer son at his side. His entire time in the United States had been a Soviet ploy from the very beginning.⁹ No corroboration of this outlandish tale has ever been provided.



Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley Jr., presents Dr. Blanka Shadrin a drawing of her husband, Nicholas Shadrin, after unveiling his plaque on the DIA Patriots Memorial (Photo courtesy of DIA).

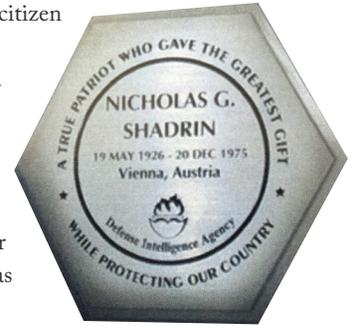
But over time, and subsequent to the fall of the Soviet Union, the true story has come to light. In a book published in 2009, Kalugin, who was present at Shadrin's death, confirms that the KGB kidnapped Shadrin with the intention of returning him to the Soviet Union for "questioning". A Soviet court had already found Shadrin guilty of treason, which provides for the death penalty, but killing Shadrin was not the intent of the kidnap team—those sort of "wet" operations were undertaken by a completely separate part of the KGB. In attempting the

kidnapping, the kidnappers had used chloroform to knock Shadrin out. But Shadrin was a big man and resisted. The chloroform was not enough. A more powerful sedative was injected into him in so strong a dose that it killed him. Again, according to Kalugin, his body is buried in a cemetery outside Moscow under an assumed name.

While Kalugin is now a United States citizen residing in Maryland, there are those who would disbelieve what he reported merely because he had been a KGB officer. Perhaps he was deliberately misleading U.S. intelligence. But the same story of Shadrin's end had previously been told by double-defector Vitaly Yurchenko in 1985. The issue was put to rest by the British-recruited spy Vasili Mitrokhin, who was exfiltrated from the USSR in 1996 and brought with him copies of KGB files dating back to 1972. Those files confirmed the story told by Yurchenko and Kalugin.

On December 13, 2019, the Director of DIA, Lieutenant General Robert Ashley Jr., dedicated a marker on DIA's "Patriots Wall" in memory and recognition of the contributions of Nicholas G. Shadrin. A subsequent DIA Public Affairs release hailed Shadrin as a "Cold War Hero."

The new generation of intelligence professionals were proud at the recognition given to one of DIA's unsung heroes who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation. Although some retired intelligence veterans were surprised to see this happen, the overwhelming majority were delighted and applauded Lieutenant General Ashley's courage in bringing substantive closure to the Shadrin case after more than four decades, and with Blanka Shadrin in attendance. She was very pleased that, after so many years, recognition was rightly afforded by DIA as the agency to step forward and acknowledge Shadrin's contribution. As a gesture of gratitude, she handed to the DIA Chief Historian the index card that Shadrin had given her the night of his disappearance which contained the two contact telephone numbers she was to call "if anything went wrong". Blanka had carried that card in her purse for 44 years!



⁸ Borovik, Gendrikh, *They shoot Horses, Don't They*, appearing in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 17 August 1977, in Russian pp. 14 et seq.

⁹ Corson, Trento, and Trento, *Widows*, in particular see Chapter 15, pp. 254–265

Author's note: The author first met Nick Shadrin at debriefing sessions in the early 1960s. Subsequent meetings were at social events, with the last contact being at a Red Tie Luncheon in the early 1970s. At no time was the author aware of Shadrin's involvement with the FBI. In fact, it is likely that no one in the Navy was aware. The author never had the pleasure of meeting Blanka Shadrin.

Nick Shadrin was a brave man and a patriot. Blanka was a courageous and dedicated wife who endured suspicion and inuendo over the fate of her husband for the last 45 years — all unfounded. In her own way she was every bit as brave and every bit as patriotic. This article is dedicated to her.

Editor's note: Many thanks to DIA's historians (especially Orlando Pacheco) for their assistance and contributions to this article, including photos.

REFLECTIONS ON NICK SHADRIN

By Norman Polmar

I knew Nick Shadrin. He was right out of central casting for a major Hollywood film studio. He was tall, good-looking, gregarious, had a good sense of humor, spoke English well, and asked thoughtful questions. If the KGB had sought a person to penetrate the U.S. intelligence community, they could not have selected someone more suitable — and acceptable by Americans — than Nick Shadrin.

In the early 1970s, as a contractor, I was a consultant to Dr. N.F. (Fred) Wikner, special assistant to the Secretary of Defense, and to Rear Admiral Earle F. (Rex) Rectanus, the Director of Naval Intelligence. Also, I had recently returned from a visit to the Soviet Union as a guest of the Institute of U.S. Studies and the Soviet Navy. This was significant because, while I did not meet the head of the Navy, Admiral Gorshkov, I did meet his principal deputy, Admiral Kasatonov, and the subject of Gorshkov came up during discussions in Moscow and Leningrad.

It was believed that Admiral Gorshkov, who had been commander-in-chief of the Navy since 1956, was on the verge of retirement. (He did step down in 1985!) Thus, Dr. Wikner asked me to write a paper on “The Soviet Navy after Gorshkov.” With Wikner’s approval, I discussed the subject with Admiral Rectanus. During one of our meetings he suggested that I meet with a “Nick Shadrin.” I had heard the name before but knew virtually nothing about him... just that he was a former Soviet naval officer living in the United States. The admiral gave me a few comments about Nick and told me to be extremely careful not to discuss intelligence “means and sources,” and to tell him nothing personal about the people I knew in the U.S. Navy and the government.

I contacted Nick and took him to lunch in downtown Washington — to a restaurant next to the National Theater, as I recall. We hit it off immediately. He answered my few questions without hesitation and gave me considerable “food for thought” on the subject.

A couple of weeks later we again met for lunch. This time I brought along a few pages of my draft paper for Dr. Wikner. He read them and made several perceptive comments. A few days later he sent me a few additional — and very useful — comments by mail.



Shadrin, fishing with his German Shepherd
(photo courtesy of DIA).

We met a couple of more times, sometimes with no “business” to discuss. He gave me insights into the Soviet Navy as well as the society in general. My wife and I invited Nick and his wife, Ewa, to our home, with friends, for drinks and dessert. My wife had purchased a balalaika when in the Soviet Union and it hung on a wall in our family room. Upon seeing it, Nick snatched it down and began playing and singing.

Score another point for central casting.

They came to our home a couple of times, and Nick always impressed our friends who were with us.

One day Ewa called with panic in her voice. She declared that Nick had been kidnapped by the KGB and asked if I would meet with her lawyer. I did so, and he wanted me to check with my Soviet contacts for any news of Nick. The few people to whom I raised the subject — at the embassy here in Washington and in the USSR — all said that they knew nothing about him.

Many years later, during the 1990s, when I was in Russia seven or eight times, I raised the subject to Admiral Chernavin, the successor to Admiral Gorshkov as commander-in-chief of the Navy, and to a few other people with whom I was working. Without exception, and without rancor, all said that they knew only what they had read in the press — Russian and foreign. None expressed any personal views about Shadrin.

Some people still believe that he was “too good” to be what he appeared to be. I believe that I can claim to have been a friend of Nick Shadrin — or Nickolai Fedorovich Artamonov — albeit very briefly. And to use the vernacular, “he was a good guy.”