

Art Buchwald in Monaco**Onassis Gift to Prince
Mostly for the Birds**

By Art Buchwald

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MONTE CARLO, Apr. 12—

Aristotle Socrates Onassis, the Greek shipping operator and majority stockholder in the company that controls the gambling casinos and best hotels in Monaco, has just been asked to give Prince Rainier III a wedding gift.

"The best wedding gift you can give me," the Prince wrote Mr. Onassis, "is to stop the sport of pigeon shooting in Monte Carlo."

Shooting at live pigeons is an old European custom and apparently the Prince would like to abolish it in his tiny principality, where even the pigeon population is at a premium.

Onassis Agrees

"All right," Mr. Onassis told this correspondent. "I'm going to give the Prince his wedding present. I already gave Miss Kelly a diamond bracelet and our company gave her a diamond and ruby tiara for a wedding gift, but if the Prince wants me to stop our pigeon shooting contests, I will. Frankly, I didn't know until I came down here that they shot live pigeons. I thought they used clay ones."

"How do you feel about the wedding?" we asked Mr. Onassis, who has been invited.

"It's wonderful," Mr. Onassis said. "And I can substantiate that. To begin with, Miss Kelly is a wonderful girl. She's one of the few movie actresses I know who has divers' shoes."

"Divers' shoes?"

"Yes, she not only has her feet on the ground, but she's got lead in them."

"Good for Princes"

"She'll do a lot of good for the Prince." He has been a terribly unhappy fellow to date. He's been living alone for four years in a palace surrounded by nothing but executives. What fellow wants to live with executives? After the sun sets you want a wife and friends. You want to forget you have a sense of duty. I think she'll give him the home life he has missed."

"Will the marriage help business in Monaco?"

"We have all the business we can handle now," he replied. "But it will make the place a little more romantic. It will make it a little warmer. And more human, particularly if there are children. It would be a blessing for all of us if Miss Kelly lived a normal life here. Up until now the Prince hasn't been seen much in Monaco, but perhaps she will switch him around."

Mr. Onassis and the Prince were very good friends up until about two years ago. They used to go to night clubs and stay up until 4 a. m. together. But for a reason that Mr. Onassis said he didn't know, the friendship cooled and they haven't passed the time of day to each other since. It was about the time Mr. Onassis bought a yacht for the Prince.

We asked for an explanation.

It Happens

"I don't know, it happens to the best of people," he said. "You take a fancy to a girl and then lose interest in her. The nicer the girl is to you after that, the more you dislike her. Maybe it's something like that."

Mr. Onassis also told us, "If I'm going to give up pigeon shooting I would also like to give up gambling."

"You're kidding, naturally," we said.

"No I'm not kidding at all. I'm against gambling. I always have been. I would like to make the casino into a church. We could call it the Madeleine de Monaco."

"Lots of people have the

wrong idea about this place. They're under the impression that the Casino supports the whole principality. It was true thirty years ago. There wasn't a stone or tree that didn't come from Casino profits. But now we're lucky to break even. We have to support the ballet and the opera and pay the wages of 750 people."

"But where does the money come from?" we asked.

10 Per Cent Tax

"First of all there's a 10 per cent sales tax on everything in the country. You don't see it because it's included in the price of the item. Then, in exchange for customs duties on tobacco, the French government gives Monaco a lump sum of money. The entire revenue comes to between \$6,000,000 and \$7,000,000. After paying for water, gas, utilities, the police, the fire department and the other functions, as well as \$150,000 allowance to the Prince, there is a surplus left of \$2,000,000. The Casino plays no part in the revenue. We pay the same 10 per cent tax as anybody else."

"Don't you think you could make the Casino pay eventually?"

"Never," Mr. Onassis asserted. "Gambling in the old days here used to be an exuberance of luxury and wealth. This kind of luxury is gone. I don't like to take money from little people who don't have a shirt on their backs. There is a Spanish proverb, 'If you're going to be a woman of ill repute and make no money, you might as well be an honest woman.'"