

# No fishy stuff, chief

To: Director, Central Intelligence Agency  
From: Agent X-23  
Subject: Surveillance of Russians in Houston.

Sir:

I am sending this report by regular mail rather than by diplomatic pouch or IT&T courier, as I really don't think my findings merit top secret classification. In fact, I tried to telephone you but I kept getting a recording telling me that the number I was dialing was not in service.

I used my cover as Stan Redding, Chronicle reporter, on this assignment. It seemed the simplest way to get things done and I think it went off well. I know I faked out the National Aeronautics and Space Administration people. They even made photographs available. Copies of the pictures obtained, in black and white, are enclosed.

As you will learn, X-27 was more than a trifle off in his assertion that something "fishy" was going on at NASA, that a lot of Russians were down there buttering up our astronauts and space brass and playing footsy with the locals. I met with X-27 at his usual contact spot, Sambo's, where he had picked up his information. Frankly, chief, I don't think Sambo's is the ideal place to gather reliable intelligence. Pancake freaks are rarely on the inside of anything but syrup jars.

Continued

*Russians observed by our agent are Nicolas Timacheff, foreground, and Col. Aleksey Arkhipovich Leonov, the first man to walk in space, about to land a pair of king mackerals. Tod Habib stands by to gaff Col. Leonov's catch during a deep sea expedition in the Gulf of Mexico.*

continued

It took me only a few minutes to learn the Russians at NASA were Soviet cosmonauts and space scientists, chief. They were here as guests of the U.S. Government (Olin Teague abstaining) to discuss plans for the joint U.S.-Soviet space flight in 1975! Hell, it was all over the newspapers, almost every day, but X-27 says at this point in time he isn't reading the newspapers. Just John Birch Society newsletters.

I checked out the whole situation thoroughly, as a matter of routine. I made contact with the Russians at the King's Inn, where they were staying. Actually, I made contact with George DeMontrond, his wife, Betty, and Brig.-Gen. Tom Stafford, the honcho of America's astronaut corps. There was some "fishy" business afoot, I learned, but it was the kind a lot of people are geared for most of the time.

The 10 Russian cosmonauts, it seems, were full to the follicle pits with guided tours of parks, museums, college campuses, medical centers, historical sites and scenic overlooks. So Gen. Stafford, DeMontrond (one of the hosts for the visitors) and Deke Slayton, a member of the U.S. prime crew for the 1975 mission, asked the Soviet spacemen what they would most like to do before returning to the U.S.S.R.

The delegation opted unanimously to go deep sea fishing, honest to Nixon!

I went with them, again just as a matter of routine. We put out from Galveston on three sea-going motor yachts owned by local businessmen — food executive Wayne Goettsche's "Nirvana," banker Charles Stubblefield's "Panacea" and banker Jim Lyon's "Sea Lyon." "The Nirvana" and the "Panacea" are 44-footers, and the "Sea Lyon" is a 54-foot cruiser. I don't know what any one of the three cost, but I can tell you, chief, that we'll never be able to afford one, not even moonlighting as security guards at Watergate.

I went out on the "Sea Lyon," with the DeMontronds and Gen. Stafford. Lyon didn't go out, but his wife, Ann, did, and except for some kooky ideas concerning sharks — which I will detail later — she has to be one of the world's most charming women.

The cosmonaut corps was headed up by Gen. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Shatalov, but I did not get to talk to him much as he was on another boat. The space explorers aboard the Lyon vessel included Col. Aleksey Arkhipovich Leonov, the first man ever to walk in space, Maj. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Dzhani-bekov, Valeriy Nikplayrvich Kubasov, Aleksandre Sergeyeovich Ivanchenkov and Boris Dmitriyevich Aundreyev.

Russians have a great sense of humor, I learned immediately. "What is all this 'vich' business in the middle name?" I asked one.

"Every Russian man is born a sonofavich," he told me gravely. The whole group cracked up.

Now, chief, you know I am a mom's apple pie, love the flag, early spring, U.S. Navy

type American. I hope my patriotism won't be questioned when I say I liked these dudes.

Take Leonov. We boarded the "Sea Lyon" at 6 a.m., and we weren't clear of the channel before the colonel dipped into his diddy bag, pulled out a foot-long dried fish, sliced it up with an Arkansas toothpick and started sluicing it down with beer. The colonel gave me a piece of the fish. It tasted like salted shoe leather. The Russians may be short on wheat but they're long on brine.

Leonov was eating it like good cake, softening it up with suds.

"Do you really like this fish?" I asked him, picking some salty bones from my tongue.

"Not actually, but it gives me an excuse to drink beer," Leonov admitted, laughing. You have to admire a man who thinks like that.

Leonov has the features of a happy toy bulldog and the disposition of a contented bartender. He is not a big man, but he is muscled like a miniature Charles Atlas. He is famed in Russia for his weightlifting feats.

Like a lot of Americans, he is something of a redneck. He doesn't like the Red Chinese. If he knows that every sixth child born in the world is Chinese, he is probably determined not to have more than five.

Once at a function in some foreign capitol, an Oriental rushed up to Leonov, hand outstretched. "Colonel, I am a great admirer of yours," the man said, beaming.

Leonov took the man's hand and began to squeeze. He has hands like stone crushers. "Please, Col. Leonov, I am a Korean!" yelped the admirer.

If the colonel is the happy hooligan of the Soviet spacemen, Maj. Dzhani-bekov is the philosopher-statesman of the space trekkers.

He is a suave, elegant type. Square jaws. Piercing eyes. The Russians probably use him on their jet jockey posters.

But everything he says makes sense. He was visiting America for the first time, but he has been to many other nations. "This is a beautiful country. Most countries have natural beauties," said the major.

"But the people are the same everywhere. People are good. I like people."

He is a patriot divorced from politics. "I am not good at discussing the pros and cons of politics, communism, capitalism or other isms. I love my country. My country gave me an education. It gave me the opportunity to do what I love best to do. It made me what I am today. Why should I not love it?"

I buy that, chief. I was reared by the U.S. Navy and educated by the United States government and I have little use for a man who won't stand up for the country that made him.

All in all, it was an exotic, memorable afternoon. None of the Russians had ever been deep sea fishing. Some had never been fishing, period. Bill Curry, skipper of the "Sea Lyon," Tod Habib, the chief mate and leading seaman, Gen. Stafford and DeMontrond helped rig the fishing gear and instructed the Russians in the handling of the big rods and reels.

I think Bill Curry could find game fish in

the Great Salt Lake Desert. When one of the first hook hitting the water, a big king mackerel set the line to singing. The first Russian to land a fish was, of course, Leonov.

Habib took the fish off the hook, Leonov looked at the size of it, and did a little space walking around the afterdeck. He grabbed my left arm and laughed. "Did you ever see such a big fish, friend?" he chortled. Remembering the Korean, I affirmed it was the biggest fish I'd ever set eyes on, bar none.

We were 50 miles out, among some rigs, and Bill Curry found every school of mackerel in the area. Those cosmonauts were pulling those kings in like they were getting them out of a can. Leonov inspected each one to see if it was bigger than his.

I don't fish as a rule. I signed a non-aggression pact with fish a long time ago. I don't bait my hooks and they don't bite. So I resisted requests to try my hand at landing one until one flopped on the deck and bit my leg. In self defense, I took over a pole or whatever they call those things you catch fish with. I am a faithful reader of Bob Brister, so I know what to do when a king hit the line. I brought him in and Habib giggled him. "Biggest one today," he grunted, hoisting it aboard. Leonov was coming forward to look. "Quick, throw him back," I told Habib. "The colonel might want to shake my hand!"

He slapped me on the back instead, catapulting me into Kubasov's arms. "The colonel likes you," grinned Dzhaniybekov. It was reassuring news.

Then the sharks moved in and started zapping the fish as the Russians reeled them in. Big, nasty devils. Dorsal fins as big as mainsheets. Circling the Sea Lyon in pairs and darting in to rob the hooks. I wanted to call in some destroyers or light cruisers, but Ann Lyon laughed at me.

"Sharks won't attack you," she said. "Why, if a shark comes up to you while you're in the water, just punch him in the nose!" Mrs. Lyon made a very pretty feint with one little fist.

Well, maybe she has the moxie to punch a shark in the nose, but the day I try to hang a haymaker on a Mako, you can transfer me back to the Rotary surveillance detail.

I'm still not sure of the significance, but all three boats rendezvoused at 1:30 p.m. and everyone toasted everyone else in champagne and ate hot tamales. The sharks grabbed the shucks as we tossed them overboard.

I had been ribbing Leonov all day. Having been the first man to walk in space, I'd tell him, I thought he should also be the first mortal man to walk on water.

He didn't try to walk on water, chief, but after downing some hot tamales, he remarked he thought he'd cool off, and dove right into the sea. Practically every Russian on all three boats followed him into the water! With sharks in sight!

I was a little nervous for awhile, I tell you. I mean, I could just hear Henry Kissinger ex-

unfortunate incident and the entire Soviet space corps had been eaten by sharks, but we'd give them the Nebraska wheat crop as compensation, so don't push any buttons, OK?

But after larking around for awhile, the Soviet cosmonauts climbed back aboard their respective boats, and we all headed back to Galveston. We caught 75 or 80 big fish.

We ate them, too. The Russians hold to a 'waste not, want not philosophy, and the cosmonauts had the King's Inn chef cook up all those mackerel and staged a fish feast. Each of them chipped in from his own pocket to say thanks to the America hosts.

"They have no budget for entertaining," explained Gen. Stafford. "And they did want to have a party, to show appreciation, so they pooled their personal liquor assets and finances, and it ought to be a pretty good bash."

Was it ever. I had never been to a Russian reception, but I had heard that vodka was the main liquid refreshment.

They do drink the stuff. Col. Leonov was the first man I encountered at the affair. He had a friend whom he introduced, Col. Anatoly Vasil'yevich Ivanchenkov. Leonov pressed a glass in my hand, and Ivanchenkov filled it from a bottle with a Russian label.

"Russian water," grinned Ivanchenkov, a stocky, weatherbeaten man with an infectious charm. Clink, clink, clink and down the hatch. The two colonels waited for my reaction.

I wanted to react. I felt like I'd swallowed a glass of scorpions. But I maintained an air of Indian stoicism.

"Better check your liquor dealer, Colonel," I told Ivanchenkov. "He's ripping you off with watered whiskey."

Leonov whooped and cracked two of my ribs with a bear hug. "Good man — Good man!" he said, and gave me his prime crew button.

I've been to fandangoes with more casualties. Only one man, a Russian, went under a table. He crawled out, stood up and claimed foul — he'd slipped on an empty bottle. A committee of three Soviets and three Americans examined the evidence and the circumstances and ruled in his favor. I thought it was a good call.

I met a lot of good people that night, Russians and Americans. I especially enjoyed Ivanchenkov and the civilian head of the cosmonaut program, Dr. Aleksey Stanislavovich Yeliseyev.

"You come to Moscow, be my guest," Ivanchenkov kept insisting.

I think I ought to go, chief. I know you know that X-27 has a thing going with an American vodka distillery, so I don't put much credence in his claims concerning our recent business deal with the U.S.S.R.

But wheat is the principal ingredient of Russian vodka, chief. I think we ought to check this out as a matter of routine.