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Spy Who Never Came Back May Soon Be Declared Dead

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Dr. Blanka Ewa Shadrin of McLean has lived for eight years in uncertainty.

The Polish-born Dr. Shadrin, a McLean dentist, is unsure of her husband's whereabouts, unsure even if he is alive.

What she does know is that her husband, known as "the spy who never came back," disappeared in Vienna, Austria, eight years ago.

A former Soviet naval captain who defected to the United States in 1959, double agent Nicholas Shadrin never returned from a rendezvous with a KGB agent in Vienna in December 1975.

Dr. Shadrin has been informed that the Defense Intelligence Agency is now on the verge of declaring her husband officially dead.

"His status is 'missing,'" Dr. Shadrin said in a telephone interview this week. "For me, it is the best if he is declared dead." She and her husband have joint ownership of their McLean house, other properties and stocks and bonds. She cannot sell any of it without his signature as long as he is considered to be alive.

"I really don't have great hopes" that he is alive, she said in Polish-accented English. "It would be a miracle."

Dr. Shadrin says the intelligence community—except for a few people—turned its back to her in cold silence when Shadrin dropped from sight. She was told to lie to friends about what happened in Vienna. She stayed quiet for a year, but then demanded action.

Shadrin's official "missing" status keeps her dim hopes alive for revived governmental interest in his case. "If he were (declared) dead, there would be no hope. If he's alive, it could be a congressional investigation."

The strange disappearance case was documented by Virginia author Henry Hurt two years ago in the book, "Shadrin—The Spy Who Never Came Back." It was also the subject of an NBC-TV "First Camera" segment Dec. 4.

According to Hurt, Shadrin (born Nikolai Fedorovich Artamonov) was a rising star in the Soviet Navy—at 26 the youngest captain in Soviet naval history, at 27 the youngest commander of a destroyer. He was stationed in Poland in the late 1950s to teach antisubmarine warfare to Indonesians.

Although he had a wife and child in Russia, he fell in love with a 21-year-old Polish dental student. Using his official Navy launch, they motored across the Baltic Sea and put ashore in Sweden, where he asked for asylum in 1959.

The couple then came to the United States, where they married and settled in Arlington County. He worked as an analyst for the Office of Naval Intelligence, later moving to an apparently lower-level job with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

It was about the time of that move (1966) that he started working as a double agent, according to Hurt.

Shadrin had been condemned to death by the Soviet government after he appeared before a House of Representatives subcommittee in 1960.

Despite that, he made several trips outside the country in the early '70s—including one to Montreal and at least two to Vienna—during which he contacted Soviet agents.

On those occasions, he told his wife he had business appointments.

Dr. Shadrin has said she knew nothing of her husband's intelligence work until after he disappeared in Vienna in 1975. Only then did Shadrin's FBI case-worker explain to her the nature of Shadrin's work.

Shadrin's wife thinks the CIA used her husband as bait so that another CIA double agent could enhance his own credibility with the Kremlin. That spy, known as Igor, had convinced American intelligence officials that he could enhance his status in the Soviet intelligence community if he could deliver Shadrin to the Russians, Hurt wrote.

The Russians have countered that Shadrin was feeding them more information than he was supposed to, and that the CIA found out and had him killed in Vienna.

And some people suggest that Shadrin may still be alive in Russia, an implication that he might have gone back to the Soviets.

According to retired Gen. Samuel V. Wilson, a former DIA director and now adjunct professor of political science at Hampden-Sydney College, near Farmville, Va., Shadrin was sent—without surveillance—"to meet his own executioner" in Vienna.

"He was alone, he was unprotected," Wilson said in the "First Camera" segment. "And the Soviets simply fulfilled one of their basic laws, which in shorthand reads, 'Death to traitors.'"

Wilson called the agent's disappearance in December 1975 "a bungle, a sloppy operation. He had no security, he had no protection—as the operation has been briefed to me . . .

"I think he indirectly was betrayed," Wilson said. "I feel that when he agreed to meet with his Soviet case officer in Vienna in December of 1975 that the clandestine operations trade-craft requisite to such a situation was not exercised.

"The thing that I feel rather badly about is that, in effect, a man who had already suffered a great deal psychologically was sent out alone on a dark night into the winter streets of the city of Vienna to meet his own executioner."

Dr. Shadrin has spent years trying to get American intelligence officials interested in pursuing her husband's fate.

Two weeks ago, she said she met for the second time with Lt. Gen. James A. Williams, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. She said she was told the DIA was considering declaring Shadrin officially dead.

"He said he's not going to do it today or tomorrow," Dr. Shadrin said. "I think that means, not, for at least six months."

A DIA spokesman said, "The Shadrin case is always under review. I don't know when the director is going to make a decision."