

Soviet navy captain  
nikolai artamonov  
history essay



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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [New Intrigue](#) \n \t
2. [The Plot Thickens](#) \n \t
3. [More Developments](#) \n \t
4. [The Disappearance](#) \n \t
5. [What Happened to him?](#) \n \t
6. [Pull Quotes](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

In 1959, Soviet Navy Captain Nikolai Artamonov and his Polish wife, Blanka, boarded a small ship in Poland and set out upon the Baltic Sea for Sweden. They did not even have a compass. It took incredible determination and skill to navigate several hundred miles of stormy waters while also avoiding patrols of the Polish and Russian fleets that controlled the sea, but they eventually made it. Their escape made headlines and served as an eloquent statement of humanity's natural yearnings for a life of freedom.

American intelligence was aware that the Soviet Navy was undergoing significant changes and intended to upgrade its fleet and reorganize it into a more effective force. The defection of a high-ranking Soviet Navy captain was a boon for them and provided a valuable source of clear and accurate information about the latest news in the Soviet fleet.

Artamonov eventually settled in Washington, DC and took on the name of Nicholas Shadrin to remain hidden from Soviet intelligence. He also worked

in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) where he filled in the missing information from agents' reports regarding the strength of the Soviet Navy.

However, was Artamonov really a double spy for the Soviets? Was his entire trip across the Baltic and elaborate ruse? And was his eventual disappearance a kidnapping or the carefully planned defection of a double spy? These questions remain mysteries to this day.

Superficially it appeared to be just another story of a Soviet defection. It was certainly not the first time a Soviet citizen had decided enough was enough and found a way to escape the communist utopia. It soon became apparent, however, that there was much more to this story than met the eye.

It was 1960. Nikolai Artamonov was now working for the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) under his new name, Nicholas Shadrin. The world had by now forgotten the incredible story of his escape from the Soviet Union and he could pass easily as just another government worker. He commuted daily from his home in Maryland to work in Washington, while his wife studied for a license in dentistry.

But two agencies had not forgotten about the Soviet defector, the CIA and the KGB.

There were many in the CIA who had their suspicions about the former Soviet in their midst. Some believed that his story was simply too fantastic to be trusted. They didn't care about the publicity he had drawn. They were more concerned with the very real possibility that he was a KGB trick, a very

successful way for the Soviet Union to plant a double-agent deep in the American military and intelligence system.

The CIA was well aware that the KGB was desperately trying to find a way to infiltrate the upper echelons of America's tightly guarded military and intelligence community, and they were always worried about tricks such as Artamonov's sudden penetration deep into America's most sensitive regions.

To these skeptics, Artamonov's supposed bravery and skill didn't draw admiration for the man, but doubts and concern. Close analysis of the man's entry into Sweden, the route he claimed to have used and other supposed details of his trip, convinced them that the trip had never happened. It was a well-planned and well-executed Soviet ruse to plant a spy in the West.

The skeptics could not offer a clear explanation of why he had been smuggled out nor what type of information the Soviets were hoping to receive from him. All that concerned them was the very strong chance that this man would rise within the American intelligence system and then have access to information that would be very desirable to the Soviets.

The other agency that could not forget the man was the KGB itself. It worked feverishly to discover within which agency he was hiding and what kind of work he was doing for the American government. Why the KGB was so desperate to know remains unclear to this day.

Did they want to find him as a traitor to the Soviet system in order to eliminate him or did they want to demand from him the classified information he had promised to provide at the time he left their hands? This

is just one of the many mysteries in the story of Nikolai Artamonov that remain unanswered.

## **New Intrigue**

A few years passed and neither side saw any progress. America decided to overlook its suspicions about the man, and the Soviet bear fell into hibernation, forgetting temporarily about its erstwhile captain.

But then a development occurred that awakened everyone quite suddenly.

In 1966, CIA Director Richard Helms was vacationing at a resort in Washington State when he received an unexpected, urgent telephone call. The caller identified himself as Igor Kochnov, and informed the CIA Director that he had critical information to give over. He requested an urgent meeting with the CIA.

The name Kochnov was not new to the CIA. He was a KGB operative who was in America under the guise of working for the Russian embassy, a cover which gave him broad immunity from the intervention of American law. Kochnov worked as the head of counter-espionage in his embassy, making sure that the consulate was not infiltrated by CIA or FBI agents.

Interestingly, Kochnov was a son-in-law of the Soviet Minister of Culture, Yekaterina Furtseva, one of the most influential women in the Soviet Union. He was also a grandson of Yuri Andropov, soon to become chairman of the KGB, and eventually leader of the Soviet Union from 1982 until his death in 1984.

The CIA head agreed to meet with him and they soon found themselves closeted together behind closed doors. Kochnov spoke enthusiastically, presenting for the others an image of the bright future that awaited him in the KGB. Then he suggested a deal: the Americans should tell him the new name assumed by Nikolai Artamonov, as well as which department he worked in and in what capacity.

“ My bringing this information to the Soviets will heighten my image in their eyes and they will entrust me with highly classified information, which I will then deliver to you.”

The Americans were not easily taken in by such a ruse. After a heated debate in which many CIA officers voiced quite loudly their opinion of Igor Kochnov, that he was a KGB infiltrator who was seeking to break into American intelligence and should be kept as far distant as possible, it was decided nevertheless to accept the man's offer.

A number of senior officials felt it was worth passing on this information since it would help them uncover the mystery of whether Artamonov was actually a KGB agent or not. On the chance that he was a loyal American worker, they would use him to draw secrets out of the Soviets.

The CIA informed Artamonov that the Russians were interested in him, and they suggested that he present himself to them as a double-agent who was prepared to spy on behalf of Russia. He initiated contact with the Russians and told them that he had become disillusioned with America's false promises of freedom and that he missed his homeland.

The trick worked better than the Americans had imagined. After having searched for him so long, the Russians jumped at his offer. A few days after his initial meeting, a KGB agent approached him and let him know that Russia would accept his offer. Then they discussed details of how he would transfer his information to the Soviets. The Americans were careful to pass on only what is known in the business as “chicken feed,” useless and unreliable information that was interesting enough to keep the Russians involved without compromising American security in any way.

### **The Plot Thickens**

Meanwhile, Igor Kochnov was given the code name “Kittyhawk,” and his mission on behalf of the CIA was launched. He was told that Nikolai Artamonov was now called Nicholas Shadrin and that he worked for the ONI.

The Americans waited for Kochnov to keep his part of the deal and share Soviet secrets with them. It soon became apparent, however, that the information he had to offer was useless, precisely the kind of quality that the Russians were being handed by Nikolas Shadrin! Many American officials were convinced that Kochnov’s offer was nothing more than a trick to extract from the Americans the information Russia wanted about Shadrin.

But America was not yet convinced about Shadrin’s loyalty. It was quite possible that Shadrin was indeed a KGB agent and Kochnov’s ploy was meant to trick the Americans into believing he was working for them by playing a show of Russian interest in the man.

In October 1966, Kochnov’s assignment in America ended and he was recalled to Russia and given a new post accompanying Russian diplomats  
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abroad. His relationship with the CIA slowly came to an end. American agents managed to contact him only a few times and he was not very cooperative with them.

By now it was clear that Kochnov had no other intention than to entice the CIA into revealing Nicholas Shadrin's identity. The Americans could only hope that they had not placed the man's life in danger.

## **More Developments**

Five years passed. It was now 1971. With Shadrin still playing the part of the disillusioned Russian defector who feeds them information from time to time, the Russians decided to send him on a mission.

It all began one night while Shadrin was sitting calmly in his Maryland home enjoying a quiet supper when the phone rang. It was the Russian agent who had set up Shadrin's contacts with the Soviets. The man hurriedly informed Shadrin that he was to proceed immediately to the city park a few blocks from his home.

Arriving in the park, Shadrin spoke the prearranged signal, "The mother is well." He was then met by a Russian agent who informed Shadrin that he was under orders from the KGB to travel to Czechoslovakia for training in sophisticated new espionage equipment.

The Americans were delighted when Shadrin apprised them of the latest development the following day. It was clear that the Russians had fallen for their double-agent and his secrets and were investing in his training in order to advance his intelligence-gathering capabilities.



It turns out, however, that the Americans had overestimated the Russians' faith in their agent.

## **The Disappearance**

In 1975, the Russians asked Shadrin to make another trip to Europe, this time to Vienna, where he would meet with leading KGB officials. Vienna was often used by the Russians for important meetings since it was on the border between the East and West. Now the Americans were even more certain that the Russians had fallen for their man. He received approval from his American handlers to travel to Vienna.

On December 17, Shadrin arrived with his wife in Vienna, where they settled in their hotel under special security arrangements, including two telephone numbers they could call if they encountered any trouble.

The following day, Nicholas met with two KGB officials who briefed him for the “very important” meeting at which he would meet with top KGB officials and they would discuss highly classified matters. Naturally, the CIA was very curious to listen in on the meeting and find out what secrets the men would be discussing. They restrained themselves, however, knowing that the meeting would likely be held under tight security arrangements and if evidence of American interest in the meeting were discovered it would likely blow Shadrin's cover. Instead, the CIA sent Shadrin to the meeting without any hidden recording equipment, relying solely on the man himself to relay all the important information he would hear at the meeting.

On the night of December 20, Nicholas Shadrin received a phone call in his hotel room. It was a KGB agent who, in a commanding voice, ordered <https://assignbuster.com/soviet-navy-captain-nikolai-artamonov-history-essay/>

Shadrin to leave the hotel unescorted and head for the church in the center of town.

By the time he arrived, two KGB agents were awaiting him. After a few moments in total silence, a black car with tinted windows pulled up and they all entered. The car took them on a long and twisted route.

Hours passed. Back in the hotel, Mrs. Shadrin sat alone, nervously awaiting the telephone call her husband had promised her at the first possible opportunity. The CIA operatives, who also awaited the man's report about his meeting, were also growing impatient. What could have happened to keep him for so long?

Morning arrived and there was still no trace of Nicholas Shadrin. The Americans didn't even have a starting point to attempt to follow him. After 24 hours without news, Mrs. Shadrin called the CIA and told them that she was on the verge of suicide. The CIA quickly dispatched a female agent to calm down the distraught woman, but there was little she could do or say.

When five days passed without a word from Shadrin, it was finally clear that he would never return.

## **What Happened to him?**

Numerous theories have been proposed about what happened to the missing CIA agent. Some believe he had been a Soviet agent all along and once his mission in the West ended he simply returned to Moscow. Others say the Russians somehow discovered his duplicity and kidnapped him to be brought

to trial and treated as other traitors were: by being beaten and tortured to death for their crimes against the Soviet Union.

When the Americans tried to contact their supposed agent “ Kittyhawk” (Kochnov) to discover the fate of their missing agent, he was nowhere to be found. Eventually, they succeeded in reaching him, but he claimed that although he knew of the meeting and never saw Shadrin either alive or dead.

A possible solution to the mystery appeared in 1985 when another Russian agent, Vitaly Yurchenko, defected to America. One of his first revelations for the Americans was about Shadrin’s fate. According to Yurchenko, the KGB had intended to drug Shadrin while he was being taken to Moscow, but he was mistakenly given an overdose and died immediately.

Acting on Yurchenko’s information, two CIA agents knocked on Mrs. Shadrin’s door and solemnly informed her that her husband had been confirmed dead.

However, this story was contradicted three years later when the CIA was informed by Russian sources that Shadrin lived and had been seen at the burial of the head of the Russian Navy. The credibility of Yurchenko’s story was further undermined when Yurchenko himself returned to the East and publicly proclaimed in the Russian media that he had been kidnapped and drugged by the Americans and he had never intended to defect!

After all these wild changes-of-direction the question remains: Was Nicholas Shadrin’s appearance a well-planned KGB hoax to feed America misinformation about the Russian Navy? Or was he truly loyal to America and

his supposed sighting at the burial was a mistake, when in fact he was killed by the Russians for his treachery?

Was “ Kittyhawk” nothing more than a tactic to fool the Americans about the value of the Russian defector? Or had they cleverly tricked the CIA into revealing the identity of their sought-after missing agent?

Was Yurchenko’s report about Nicholas Shadrin’s death an innocent mistake or was he sent by the Russians to confuse America about the man’s true fate?

One thing the CIA did learn from the experience was not to trust the tactic of sending men to present themselves to others as double-agents. It became clear that it is impossible to tell for sure whom the agent is really working for. Since the Artamonov/Shadrin case, the CIA has never again tried to send an agent on the premise of acting as a double-agent for the enemy.

## **Pull Quotes**

Was it a well-planned and well-executed Soviet ruse to plant a spy in the West?

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