

Reader's Digest

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Is This American a Soviet Spy?

IN THE ANNALS of Soviet defections to the West, there is no case as bizarre or perplexing as that of Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko. For almost 20 years, his reputation has alternately plummeted and soared as our intelligence corps debated whether he was a true defector or a counterspy. In the end, acceptance was the verdict, and Nosenko is today a respected CIA consultant.

However, new and secret FBI findings—revealed here for the first time—declare that another Soviet, code-named Fedora, who for 15 years the FBI believed was spying for the United States, was actually a double agent under the control of Moscow. These findings raise a host of crucial questions about American intelligence operations—among them the legitimacy of other defectors, including Yuri Nosenko. Here is the story.

Adapted From "SHADRIN: THE SPY WHO NEVER CAME BACK"

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IT BEGINS in 1962 when KGB officer Yuri Nosenko arrived in Geneva, Switzerland, with a Soviet delegation to a disarmament conference. During that trip, he made a secret approach to the CIA and announced that he wished to work for the West. He did not want to defect, however; instead, he preferred to meet with the CIA whenever his KGB duties took him outside Russia. Then Nosenko offered information that suggested he had valuable knowledge in many areas of CIA interest, including KGB recruitment of an American as a Soviet spy.

After this initial contact, No-

senko returned to the conference. The CIA officer flew to the United States convinced that the CIA had secured the prize of all prizes in intelligence: an "agent in place"—a spy who would work for America in the very heart of the Soviet secret service.

The officer's enthusiasm disappeared shortly after he reached CIA headquarters. There he was told a secret that only a handful of CIA officers then knew. Another KGB officer, a man named Anatoli M. Golitsin, had defected to the United States six months earlier and stated that the KGB had penetrated the CIA at a high level. He had also

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warned that the Soviets would send out false defectors to deceive and confuse Western intelligence and to divert any investigation that would lead to the KGB spy in the CIA. (Indeed, a number of highly placed Soviet intelligence officers did appear, among them a United Nations diplomat whose code-name, Fedora, would become inextricably linked with Nosenko.)

The thrust of Nosenko's information was that there was no Soviet penetration of the CIA. His leads about KGB recruitment of an American spy pointed to the U.S. military.

In the following weeks, a meticulous examination was made of all that Nosenko had told the CIA officer. When it was compared to what Golitsin had revealed and to other information, the CIA was led to believe that Nosenko had been sent as a disinformation agent by the KGB. If he ever contacted the Americans again, it was agreed, there would be no hint of this determination. He would be met secretly and debriefed so that the CIA could learn what he wanted to say. But as long as these suspicions prevailed, he would never be accepted as a true defector.

Nothing was heard from Nosenko for 19 months. Then, in January of 1964, two months after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, he appeared in Geneva again. He stated that he wanted to defect to the United States—and he offered an irresistible temptation.

He said that he had been in charge of the KGB file on Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who had assassinated President Kennedy.

A Confirmation of Lies. A crucial question centered on whether the Soviet Union had played any role in the President's murder. For it was known that Oswald had defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and had remained out of sight until his return to the United States in 1962.

All knowledge of Soviet procedures indicated that the KGB would be intensely interested in Oswald, who had arrived in Russia just after leaving the Marine Corps, where he had served as a radar operator at a military base in Japan. During that period he had visual access to the U-2 spy plane which his unit had tracked on the radar screens. The U-2 flew on covert reconnaissance missions, many of them over the Soviet Union. Upon his defection Oswald had told a U.S. embassy officer that he wanted to provide the Soviets with useful information.

Nosenko's statements about Oswald, during his second series of clandestine meetings in Geneva, astounded the CIA in 1964—and continue to astonish virtually everyone to this day. He declared that the KGB never had the slightest interest in Oswald and never gave him even a routine debriefing. If there were any lingering doubts that Nosenko was dispatched by Moscow, this preposterous account quashed them. But the CIA faced a quanda-

ry. The Warren Commission would soon begin hearings on the assassination. The FBI would need to be apprised of Nosenko's report. No one could risk turning away the only purported Soviet source who might shed light on the President's assassin.

As the CIA men debated the question, Nosenko steam-rolled a decision by insisting that he had received a telegram recalling him to Moscow immediately. This created urgent pressure on the Americans to reach a decision. Nosenko was spirited to American soil.

When the FBI learned about Nosenko's defection, it turned to Fedora, the Soviet U.N. diplomat who had been providing the Bureau with information since 1962. From his inside knowledge of KGB activities, Fedora was able to confirm that Nosenko had been sent the recall telegram. When a question arose about Nosenko's rank in the KGB, Fedora corroborated Nosenko's claim that he was a lieutenant colonel. In general, Fedora supported Nosenko, which encouraged the FBI's ready acceptance of the new defector.

But there was another urgent reason why the FBI wanted to accept Nosenko as legitimate: he was saying just what FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wanted to hear about Oswald's activities in the Soviet Union. Hoover was determined that Oswald be adjudged a "lone nut" by the Warren Commission. Such an assessment would relieve

any FBI responsibility for Oswald having been on the loose in Dallas.

Nothing seemed awry about Fedora's corroboration of Nosenko's rank—or in Fedora's confirmation that Nosenko had received a recall telegram—until later, when Nosenko admitted that he had been only a captain in the KGB. Still later, the National Security Agency, through an analysis of cable traffic between Moscow and Geneva, established that no recall telegram had been sent to Nosenko. Confronted, Nosenko confessed his deception.

This curious corroboration between Nosenko and Fedora of demonstrable lies—and other similar connections—gave strong support to CIA suspicions that both sources were being manipulated by Moscow. While the CIA did not have jurisdiction over Fedora, it could certainly call the shots on Nosenko. Thus began one of the strangest episodes in American espionage.

"Sent to Deceive." The first two months of Nosenko's debriefing in the United States took place under normal conditions applied to any defector. The purpose was to judge the scope of his knowledge, the areas of his expertise, and to gain enough information to provide a basis for extensive debriefing over the months, even years, that would follow. The CIA had already found so many oddities in Nosenko's material that the officers handling the case believed he was a false agent. But Nosenko was not told of these conclusions, and indeed the door was

always open to the possibility that he could prove his bona fides. He was treated like any other defector.

One of the strangest aspects of Nosenko's information was the overlap with material that Anatoli Golitsin had provided. Six months prior to Nosenko's first contact, for example, Golitsin had given details of listening devices planted in the American embassy in Moscow. Independently, Nosenko gave the same information. For four years, he said, his assignment was to spy on embassy personnel. Asked if there were microphones in the new embassy wing, he said there were none. Later more than a hundred were discovered there.

Golitsin also gave leads to a high-level KGB penetration of the British Admiralty. He had had only part of the picture—substantial clues that ultimately would have led to fruition. Nosenko was able to fill in a gap, which lent support to the proposition that some of his contributions were of great value.

But to a trained counterintelligence eye, this dovetailing suggested a Soviet decision to promote Nosenko by giving him information on cases already compromised by Golitsin.

The significant point is that under normal debriefing, Nosenko's credibility continued to sink in the eyes of the CIA. By April 1964, there was such an accumulation of lies on Nosenko's ledger sheet that the CIA concluded that its friendly efforts to elicit truthful information from

him were useless. There was a unanimous feeling among the officers then handling Nosenko that he was a Soviet agent. It was clear that he was of no value as a source for the Warren Commission, simply because his information on Oswald was hopelessly contradictory, much of it patently false. Nosenko was placed under hostile interrogation in an effort to make him confess that he was a Soviet agent.

Fifteen years later, the officer in charge of Nosenko in the early days described the situation to a Congressional committee:

"Nosenko's story of Oswald is only one of scores of things that Nosenko said which made him appear to be a KGB plant. If the Oswald story were alone—a strange aberration in an otherwise normal performance—perhaps one could just shrug and forget it. It is not. We got the same evasions, contradictions, excuses, whenever we pinned Nosenko down. [This] included Nosenko's accounts of his career, of his travels, of the way he learned the various items of information he reported and even accounts of his private life. All of those irregularities point to the same conclusion: that Nosenko was sent by the KGB to deceive us."

Changes of Fortune. The years that followed were terrible for Nosenko. He was kept under conditions far worse than those of any modern U.S. prison. He was deprived of daily showers, television, writing, any form of entertain-

ment. For part of the time he was even deprived of reading material and exercise. The questioning and the detention went on for hours and days and, finally, years. But no matter how tightly knotted Nosenko's lies and contradictions became, he refused to admit that he was a Soviet agent.

In the spring of 1966, with Nosenko still in detention, there appeared in Washington, a promising young KGB agent who came to be known as Igor. He claimed to be eager to work for the United States. In order to enhance his position in the KGB, he successfully solicited assistance from U.S. intelligence officials in the purported recruitment of a Soviet defector named Nicholas Shadrin, who was now a well-adjusted American citizen. Shadrin was put to work by the Americans as a double agent against the Soviets—pretending to have been recruited by Igor. Nine years later Shadrin vanished, presumably into Soviet hands, while on an assignment in Vienna.

In addition to recruiting Shadrin, Igor had a potpourri of urgent business. Among other things, he told American officials quite specifically that he could vouch for the fact that Nosenko was a true defector.

Igor's certification occurred at the nadir of Nosenko's crumpled fortunes. His story, oozing deception, was in shambles. Yet it was clear Nosenko was not going to break. There was no alternative

but to bring the matter to some conclusion.

Finally, in late 1968, after years of increasingly wrenching internal debate and an official re-examination of the case, the CIA granted Nosenko his bona fides. Though Richard Helms, director of Central Intelligence during this period, approved Nosenko as an independent contractor for the CIA, he has made it clear that he intended Nosenko to be settled into American life in a manner in which he could pose no threat. Even though Helms agreed to award Nosenko his bona fides, his suspicions of the odd defector had never diminished.

For several years Nosenko, living a private life, drew a paycheck from the CIA for various non-sensitive duties. But his association with the FBI was extensive. At last, the FBI could fully utilize its two mutually corroborative sources—Nosenko and Fedora.

Meanwhile, Nosenko's small band of supporters at CIA continued to grow, even though some of his original detractors remained strongly influential. During the mid-1970s, tumultuous changes racked the Agency, following the replacement of Richard Helms by William Colby. In early 1975, after the resignation of most of Nosenko's chief detractors (over unrelated matters), the men who supported Nosenko moved into positions of influence. Almost at once Nosenko was brought into the

Agency as a counterintelligence consultant.

The consternation among those who originally suspected Nosenko was overwhelming. It was seen, as utterly incomprehensible that a man so widely suspected as a Soviet plant could suddenly be resurrected, considered rehabilitated, and placed in a position of trust in the most sensitive section of the CIA's clandestine services. He remains there to this day.

A Serious Stumble. In the wake of the torrid debate over Nosenko, there is a quagmire of dissension. The professionals who originally suspected Nosenko are on one side. On the other are those who in subsequent years have managed to win enthusiastic support for Nosenko from the highest intelligence officials in the land. The few original doubters still in the intelligence services are mute; others, long retired, seem almost resigned to the proposition that Nosenko has won lasting acceptance. Only a few believe the case should be re-opened to examine the question of what Nosenko's acceptance means to the U.S. intelligence services.

One of the most bizarre aspects of the matter is the fierce intensity one encounters from Nosenko supporters for merely questioning his total acceptance. According to an official statement from the CIA, Nosenko "continues to be used as a regular lecturer at counterintelligence courses of the Agency, the FBI, Air Force, and others." In this capacity, he is in direct contact with

this country's most carefully concealed covert personnel—by any standards a peculiar place to put a man with such an unprecedented background. But these supporters are stymied when they try to explain why anyone can be reasonably sure Nosenko is a true defector. In the end, they say there is no way to show a reporter the significant reasons because doing so would reveal sensitive information.

Nosenko's friends today claim that he has provided vital information to the United States on various cases which cannot be revealed. They suggest that he can be credited with providing information on more than 200 cases of great significance. When told of this, Nosenko's detractors suggest that perhaps once he was released from CIA custody he was provided with new information by the Soviets—much of it very good intelligence—to bolster his chances for full acceptance.

Whatever the truth, Nosenko is established as a respected participant in the U.S. intelligence community, a position attained by few Soviet defectors. He is accepted by both the CIA and the FBI.

But along Nosenko's rocky rise to respectability, there was one serious stumble—one that might have left his supporters in a state of humiliation if not full-blown suspicion. It happened in 1978 when the House Select Committee on Assassinations, looking into the history of Lee Harvey Oswald, undertook an examination of Yuri Nosenko.

As the only nonpartisan, non-intelligence group ever to have full access to the file on Nosenko, the committee reached the official conclusion that this strange defector was a liar. The official report states: "the committee was certain Nosenko lied about Oswald—whether it was to the FBI and CIA in 1964, or to the committee in 1978, or perhaps to both." The committee, explaining that its purpose was not to determine the validity of Nosenko other than in his statements about Oswald, stopped short of drawing wider conclusions. But it was firm in its assertion that Nosenko, the man who brought the message from Moscow that the KGB never had the slightest interest in Oswald, is a liar.

"I Was Telling the Truth." In addition to the committee's thorough review of the files, intelligence agents and officials were called to testify about Nosenko. At nearly every juncture, their testimony—even when trying to support Nosenko—was devastating to the proposition that he was the sort of man who should be accepted by the U.S. clandestine services to give lectures on counterintelligence and be handsomely paid.

Take, for example, the testimony of Bruce Solie of the CIA Office of Security, the man who orchestrated the original clearance of Nosenko in 1968. Solie and Nosenko became friends, and later when Nosenko was married Solie served as his best man at the wedding. In a sworn deposi-

tion, Solie quickly conceded that he was uninformed about Nosenko's positions on Oswald. But Solie agreed that the Oswald aspect of Nosenko's testimony is "an important part to be considered" in any evaluation of Nosenko's bona fides.

Staff counsel Kenneth Klein struggled to understand why Solie was willing to accept Nosenko's statements on Oswald even though he claimed he had never asked him a single question about Oswald during the CIA re-examination that finally cleared Nosenko. The best answer Klein could elicit was that Solie was willing to accept whatever Nosenko said as true unless he was shown information to the contrary—a peculiar philosophy for a security officer.

Finally, Klein asked Solie if it was proved that Nosenko was lying about Oswald, "Do you think that would change your opinion as to whether he was bona fide?"

"It sure would," Solie replied.

John Hart, a former high CIA official, was brought out of retirement in 1978 by CIA director Stansfield Turner to explain the Agency's position on Nosenko. Curiously, Hart announced he knew almost nothing about Nosenko's Oswald connections, even though the committee had asked the Agency to send someone to speak to that point. Pressed by an incredulous Congressman, Hart finally arrived at the following statement:

"Let me express an opinion on Mr. Nosenko's testimony about Lee

Harvey Oswald. I, like many others, find Mr. Nosenko's testimony incredible. Therefore, if I were in the position of deciding whether to use the testimony of Mr. Nosenko in this case or not, I would not use it." This was an odd contrast with his own statements, and with an Agency response to an interrogatory submitted to the committee two weeks earlier, asserting that the CIA believed Nosenko's statements about Oswald were "made in good faith."

But none of this was as damaging to Nosenko as his own appearance before an executive session of the committee. Kenneth Klein opened his questioning with a summary of what Nosenko had told the staff up until that point: "You have testified that the KGB did not even speak to Lee Harvey Oswald because he was uninteresting; and that you decided he was not interesting without speaking to him."

From that point on, staff counsel Klein elicited new and astonishing contradictions and inconsistencies. Repeatedly, Nosenko retreated to the explanation that Klein was using material that Nosenko had provided while under hostile interrogation. But when Klein asked if the hostile interrogations ever led him to lie, Nosenko stated, "No, I was telling the truth." Indeed, most of Nosenko's information on Oswald—including details that the committee concluded were lies—is contained in an FBI report of early March 1964, a full month before

Nosenko was placed under hostile interrogation.

Nosenko complained bitterly to the committee about the conditions of his long and solitary confinement. He repeatedly insinuated that his treatment went far beyond spartan conditions, even claiming that he had been improperly drugged. A number of officers from the CIA and FBI swore to the committee that they never saw any evidence that Nosenko had been drugged or physically abused. Finally, Nosenko conceded that he had never even been slapped.

In the end, as Nosenko sunk deeper into a morass of contradictions, he begged committee chairman Louis Stokes to stop the questioning. He submitted that he should not be questioned about anything he said during the period he was under hostile interrogation, although he swore that he always told the truth about Oswald. The committee stopped the questioning.

In its final report, the committee made the following statement:

"[The committee] questioned Nosenko in detail about Oswald, finding significant inconsistencies in statements he had given the FBI, the CIA and the committee. For example, Nosenko told the committee that the KGB had Oswald under extensive surveillance, including mail interception, wire tap and physical observation. Yet, in 1964, he told the CIA and the FBI there had been no such surveillance

of Oswald. Nosenko indicated there had been no psychiatric examination of Oswald subsequent to his suicide attempt, while in 1978 he detailed for the committee the reports he had read about psychiatric examinations of Oswald.

"In the end, the committee was unable to resolve the Nosenko matter. The fashion in which Nosenko was treated by the Agency—his interrogation and confinement—virtually ruined him as a valid source for information on the assassination. Nevertheless, the committee was certain Nosenko lied about Oswald. The reasons range from the possibility that he merely wanted to exaggerate his own importance to the disinformation hypothesis with its sinister implications."

One might expect such a conclusion by a committee of Congress to have a negative bearing on Nosenko's position in the intelligence community. Not at all. In fact, not a single major publication is known to have even mentioned that the House committee concluded that Nosenko had lied. Immediately, as if to assuage Nosenko's hurt feelings over his humiliation before the committee, CIA director Turner issued a private statement to his employees reviewing selected aspects of the case and concluding: "Today Mr. Nosenko is a well-adjusted American citizen utilized as a consultant by CIA and is making a valuable contribution to our mission."

Fedora Unmasked. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Nosenko story is the fact that his acceptance is linked to other defectors—including Fedora and Igor—who have come under intense suspicion.

The thorniest of these linkages involves Fedora. Not only did this agent corroborate specific lies in Nosenko's story, he went much farther. He told the FBI that the KGB was so distraught over Nosenko's defection that its operations in New York City were shut down. This odd and unsubstantiated claim looked even more peculiar when the CIA confirmed that KGB operations were continuing in Switzerland, a country where Nosenko had served and where presumably he knew of operations about which he could provide sensitive information.

The basic questions about Fedora's bona fides first were made public in 1978 by Edward Jay Epstein in *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*. Epstein revealed that the FBI had placed great faith in Fedora and fed him large quantities of U.S. secrets in order to enhance his position in the KGB. Showing Fedora's links to Nosenko, Epstein concluded: "If Nosenko was now ruled a fraud, then Fedora would seem to be a part of the same Soviet deception. And if Fedora were really under Soviet control, it could bring down the entire FBI counterespionage structure like a house of cards."

Still highly protective of its source Fedora, the FBI began a secret investigation to determine the source for Epstein's information. In fact, there was such alarm within the intelligence community that serious stories circulated that Fedora—by then back in the Soviet Union—probably had been tortured and executed by the Soviets as a result of the revelations. The result of the search for Epstein's source is not known.

Far more important, however, was a subsequent investigation by the FBI aimed at assessing Fedora's bona fides. By 1980 this investigation—one of the most tightly held secrets in the intelligence community—had ended with the FBI's electrifying conclusion that *Fedora was a Soviet agent, that he was under Moscow's control during the years of his association with the FBI, including the period when he was giving urgent support to Nosenko.*

One might expect such a conclusion to lead to a re-examination of all related cases and sources, including Nosenko and one of his chief certifiers, Igor. But as of the summer of 1981, this had not happened. The finding on Fedora—until now

known only to a few intelligence officials—is viewed as a piece of history unrelated to anything going on today in U.S. intelligence.

It is far from clear why officials have refused to pursue the seemingly pointed implications of the FBI's new findings, or why they do not want to reopen the bewildering Nosenko case. And it is astounding that every sign indicates that Igor is still considered a valid source—even in light of his certification of Nosenko, even after the manipulation and the tragic loss of Nicholas Shadrin.

A public revelation that any one of these curious defectors is a false agent could have awesome bureaucratic repercussions. If one falls, others must fall, creating havoc inside intelligence services where crucial analyses and long-term plans may have been built upon the supposed reliability of these sources. The most ominous question is whether it has become simpler to live with Nosenko and other sources with whom he is linked, than to cast out any one of them and risk tumbling the whole internal structure of cases and strategies.

"Shadrin: The Spy Who Never Came Back," from which this article was adapted, will be available at bookstores in November. You may also obtain a copy (postpaid) by sending a check or money order made out to Reader's Digest Press in the amount of \$13.95 to Reader's Digest Press, 200 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10166.