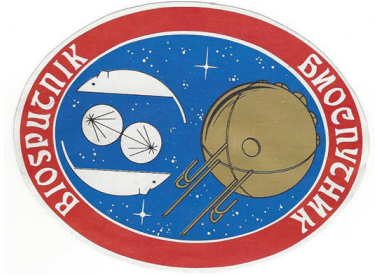


You Have the Right to Remain Silent,...

By **Richard C. Simmonds, D.V.M., M.S.**

The title of this article reflects my introduction to Postal Inspector Wanda M. Conklin on July 9, 1976.

On the 25th of November 1975 the Soviet Union launched an unmanned satellite on a Vostok rocket. The satellite was one of a series of satellites designed to study the effects of the weightlessness of space on living fauna and flora. The flight was officially designated as Kosmos 782.



A number of the biological experiments on board Kosmos 782 were joint US/USSR studies, involving both American and Soviet scientists as co-investigators. Ten of the eleven American studies were being managed from the NASA Ames Research Center (ARC) at Moffett Field near Mountain View, California. At that time, I was the Ames manager for the Kosmos project.

One of the Public Information Officers (PIO) at ARC and I decided that we needed a commemorative cachet of the mission and decided that we would use the Apollo-Soyuz stamps jointly issued by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and the mission patch – all of which were in the public domain. In addition to the PIO and myself, a local philatelist friend agreed to go in with us to pay for the printing, stamps, etc. (all expenses were paid for out of our personal funds). Our intent was to put two of the Apollo-Soyuz stamps on each envelop and postmark the cachet on the date of launch on one stamp and the date of recovery on the second stamp.

One problem with our plan was that the Soviets would not tell us that launch or recovery had occurred until the day after the event (although, as an active duty Air Force officer at the time, I was able to obtain “unofficial” and classified knowledge of the launch and recovery events thanks to our Air Force satellite monitoring systems).



We decided to approach the Postmaster in Mountain View (the “parent” post office of the base post office) and request permission to post facto hand cancel the cachets with the correct dates. Our request was approved and we successfully produced 178 cachets.

Each of my “co-conspirators” received about 30 of the cachets, the printer received 4, and I retained the remainder for distribution as token commemorative gifts to various U.S. and Soviet participants in the project. (I estimated that at least 50 or so were distributed to Soviet personnel in Russia prior to my interview with Inspector Conklin). None of the cachets were sold for profit as of my interview with Inspector Conklin. (I am not aware if any have been sold since then).

The local philatelist who participated in this effort later wrote an article describing what we did for a philatelic newsletter called the “Explorer” (Mar/Apr 1976). In response to the article, he received a number of requests for the cachets from “Explorer” readers who he did not know and denied them all. Apparently, one of the readers who’s request was denied complained to the U.S. Postal Service that we had violated Federal law by post facto dating the cachets; thus, my interview with Inspector Conklin.

After completing her investigation, Inspector Conklin informed me that the Postal Service had decided not to prosecute us (1) since we had done our “dastardly deed” believing that it was legal (we had received the local postmaster’s approval) and (2) if we would surrender all of the cachets for destruction. I indicated to her that their

proposal contained a serious flaw, i.e., there was no way that we would be able to ensure that all of the cachets would be retrievable. (I did not keep an account of who I had given them to either in the U.S. or the U.S.S.R.) And, if some were not recovered and the Postal Service made a big deal out of the matter, the cachet covers not recovered would likely soar in value. (I had estimated that their commercial value was maximally \$5.00 to a very few specialty collectors). My suggestion back to her was that the Postal Service simply forget the whole matter. She responded that she would report my concerns back to her superiors and would get back to me.

To date, in 2016, I have yet to hear from Inspector Conklin or any other Postal Service representative regarding the final disposition of this case!

Dick Simmonds presented this fascinating cover story at the NSSS meeting on Feb. 27, 2016. He is currently trying to locate one of "his" covers to scan for a memento. (See the mock-up of the cover on the right.) Dick collects U.S. and Topical (Space & Veterinary Medicine). He is a veterinarian and retired from active duty Air Force in 1985 (six+ years of his Air Force career was spent detailed to NASA).

