

What Do You Know About Your Fellow Masonic Brother?

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Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

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Worshipful Master, Worshipful Sirs, Right Worshipful Sirs, Brethren All, Good Morning. . .

Rt. Wor. Dennis Haas contacted me last year and asked if I would be willing to present a program to you this morning. He unfortunately did not say what I should speak on or for how long. So hopefully my program this morning will be of some interest and not be too long.

Two things I would like for you to think about this morning. First: *What do you know about your fellow Masonic Brother?* and second: *That I might travel in foreign countries, work and receive Master's wages and thereby be the better enable to support myself and family.* These words took on special meaning to me a number of years ago. So, what do you really know about me? For 20 years, I worked in foreign countries and received Master's wages for my work. Today, I would like share with you some of my experiences while working in a couple specific locations around the world.

Now Brethren, I am no special person. I am just a regular person like everyone here. I am just a person that was fortunate to have a career at NASA that has spanned almost 50 years and a person who had the opportunity to see and do more than I could have ever dreamed of doing. I am a person that happened to be at the right place, at the right time and to have my work speak for itself. You see Brethren, I was one of the many folks at NASA-Langley Research Center in Hampton, VA that just simply did their job and, in

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the end, was recognized for my work. I truly believe that my managers saw more in me than I could ever see in myself. They are the ones that recognized something about me that allowed me to have a wonderful career. More than half of my career at NASA was spent being on travel. I had the opportunity to travel in foreign countries, work and receive Master's wages and thereby be the better . . . those Masonic values seemed to have applied well. Anyway, I spent over 25 years on travel and have worked in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Italy, France, Austria, and Germany. I spent over five years at Ball Aerospace in Boulder, Colorado and more than eight years at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. I have worked at every NASA Center throughout the country and spent a year at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California leading a team that built the Mars Exploration Rovers. Again, I was provided many opportunities throughout my career and am pleased to be here today to share a small portion of it with you.

Today, I would like to share with you some of my experiences that I had while working in Russia. I made 37 round trips to Russia over a four and a half-year period. That my Brethren, equates to almost 836 hours flying to and from Russia. I recall to this day, when I told my parents that I was going to be working in Russia, the concern my father had. Being a WWII Veteran, my Dad's impression of me working in Russia was not a positive thing. He simply did not like the idea and did not understand why I was needed there. To be honest, I wasn't exactly sure why I was needed there either. I can say that over the 4.5 years of me working there, his attitude towards his thoughts and ideas about Russia did change and many times when I would return home, he would let me know what he had heard about the weather or what was going on politically in Russia.

My work started in Russia five years after the Communist Wall had fallen. Russians did not trust Americans and during my initial trips to the Moscow Region, I did not trust the Russians either. My first trip to Russia was unique in that my Visa showed that I was from Langley, Virginia, not NASA-Langley, but Langley, Virginia, you know, where the CIA is

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located. The result of this was that I was labeled a spy. My luggage mysteriously disappeared for five days, my room was bugged, and I was followed everywhere I went. Everyone I worked with within the Russian Space Agency seemed to know me as a spy and needless to say, those early trips were very difficult. I had an office in the US Embassy in Moscow and also worked in Istra, Russia at a plant named NITEM. This plant built meteorological atmospheric satellites which NASA had contracted them to fly an instrument on. Istra, Russia is located an hour and 40 minutes northeast of Moscow. Conditions in that area were very difficult and accommodations were poor. We were able to find a Le Meridian Hotel in Nakhobino, Russia which made life a little more bearable. Weather conditions were harsh most of the year and I learned what it really meant to be cold. Heat was never turned on until October 1st of each year, no matter how cold it was outside. I recall attending many meetings inside buildings where I stayed in my coat and wore gloves to stay warm. The best I can say is that I survived the winters of Russia.

I also had the opportunity to work in Samara, Russia and in St. Petersburg, Russia. Although working and living conditions were difficult in Russia, the history and culture of Russia is amazing. The appreciation that the Russian people have for music, museums, dance, architecture, and history is captured throughout the country. They are also proud to share their history and culture with others. Every trip I made to Russia, my hosts provided a cultural event for me to attend. It could be a ballet, concert, a visit to a museum or even the famous Moscow Circus. In the course of time, my Russian counterparts came to know me and a level of trust was developed between us. There is a flea market in Moscow named Izmailovsky that sells everything from household goods to clothes to items of historic nature. And if you enough money, you can buy Russia jets, space suits and every type of weapon the Russians have. Getting them out of the country is another issue. After being in Russia for a couple of years, and having them no longer think I was a spy, I found a hat at the flea market with CIA written on it. I bought it and wore it to work one day and the Russians about went crazy, swearing that they knew I

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was a spy. We actually had a good laugh over this, but I did not wear that hat again. I actually gave it to the KGB Agent that was always nearby.

One of my rare experiences in Russia occurred when I had taken a trip to Baikonur, Kazakhstan to visit the launch complexes of the Russian Cosmodrome. I have to mention to you that the only way to get to Baikonur is by train, plane, or camel. There are no roads that lead to the desolate area of Baikonur. And the planes only go there once a week. Being in Baikonur also gave me a newer definition of cold. The normal winter temperatures there are -40 to -60 degrees. I also later learned what it meant to be hot as the summer temperatures are normally 100 – 125 degrees. I made several trips to Baikonur and had the pleasure to experience every extreme of weather they had to offer.

On September 9th, 2001, I flew with my interpreter from Moscow to Baikonur for a site visit. The purpose of this trip was to plan for my NASA team to provide launch site support for the Russian satellite and NASA payload that would be launched from that location. I know that everyone here knows the events that took place here in the US on September 11th, 2001. Unfortunately, I was in Baikonur and did not know what had happened. The AT&T cell phone that I had with me had its international link to the World Trade Towers in New York. When the World Trade Towers went down, so did the communications I had with the US. The time difference between Baikonur and the East coast of the U.S. is ten hours. I had been out to dinner that day with my interpreter and arrived back at my hotel after 10:00 pm in the evening. I recall the young lady at the front desk when I walked into the hotel, the same young lady that had not spoken a word of English to me previously, running to meet me and requesting that I go with her. She took me to a room where they had a large TV and where the German CNN feed was being shown. It was at that moment that I discovered what was happening in the U.S.

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For Government employees deployed in remote areas, the US State Department can activate what is referred to as the "Wardens System" which simply means that they will do all they can to get the Government employees to a safe haven when things in the world become uncertain. I would encourage you all to go on line and see where Baikonur Kazakhstan is located. It is a 4.5-hour flight from Moscow and in the middle of absolutely nowhere. It is however a great place for a launch complex.

At 1:00 am on September 12th, I was awakened at my hotel by a phone call from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow notifying me that they had in fact activated the Wardens System and that they would be sending a plane in to pick me up. I was to be at Yubileiny Airport in Baikonur at 12:00 noon on September 12th for a flight to Moscow. My interpreter and I went to the airport, which really is nothing more than a runway and a shack, processed out via Customs Agents that had been brought in for us, boarded a Russian made Yak-40 aircraft and took off for Moscow . . . or so we thought. Approximately 45 minutes into the 4.5-hour flight, I noticed that we were changing altitude and approaching an airport. No information was provided to us as to why we were about to land as we were the only passengers on the plane and the flight crew had not spoken to us at all. After landing at what appeared to be an abandoned airport (grass growing between the concrete blocks and no activity), I noticed military troops carrying guns marching towards our plane. They boarded the plane and demanded to see our passports and visas. After they inspected our paperwork, they announced that we were both under arrest as illegal immigrants since we did not have proper paperwork to be there. Of course, I need to mention that we had no idea where we were. We gathered our items from the plane and were led to the airport surrounded by military soldiers with guns pointed at us. The flight crew was also taken from the plane and escorted under military guard to another location. My interpreter and I were separated in the airport and placed in different rooms.

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I was asked if I spoke Russian and I replied that I did not. They had one young soldier that spoke English and he was quickly assigned to me. The one point they did not ask me, was if I understood Russian, which I did, and I quickly learned that they were looking for bribes for our release. After 8 hours of interrogations and being accused of causing the 9/11 tragedies in the U.S., and after they finally realized that they were not going to get money from us, they announced to me that as an illegal immigrant that I would be transferred to Almaty, Kazakhstan and imprisoned. Just what I wanted to hear. In another room however, my interpreter, using his old CCCP passport, had convinced the soldiers that he was a good guy and only wanted to get back to his family in Moscow. I What is unique about this is the fact that my interpreter, a Russian Jew, did not live in Moscow. Russian Jews had been persecuted in Russian for many years and he actually had a fear that he would not be able to get back to his wife. In reality, his residence at the time was not in Moscow or anywhere in Russia. He and his wife had moved to Williamsburg, Virginia and he feared that he would not be able to get back to the US. He also told the soldiers that since he worked for me, that if they took me to jail, he would go with me. It is an honor thing for a Russian to support the person they work for no matter what. Of course, I was also the only way for him to get back to the U.S. since he was under our employment. Once the soldiers got tired of us and not receiving any bribe money, they decided to escort us back to the plane. Back on the plane, they surrounded the plane and several soldiers were on board with us. Nice that we were on the plane, but we had no flight crew. I glanced out of the window and saw three people approaching wearing the most beautiful Carolina Blue polyester uniforms I had ever seen. The flight crew turned out to be Kazaks and to this day, I have no idea where the Russian crew ended up. A fuel truck came out to the plane and fueled it and the soldiers finally departed. It turns out that the reason the Russian flight crew had landed where they did was to get fuel, as they were not able to get any fuel when they picked us up at Yubileiny airport. We also later learned that we had landed in the city of Uralsk, Kazakhstan. And later we learned that there actually is a commercial airport in the city of Uralsk, but our Russian flight crew picked the wrong airport, landing at a military airport instead. We took off and during the next 4 hours, I starting getting mad that the US Government had

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activated the Wardens System to get me to safe haven, only to be arrested as an illegal immigrant. When we landed in Moscow, folks from the U.S. Embassy were there to meet us and made the statement to me, "Where have you been, we have been waiting all day for you". Now, I was pissed and the next six hours were spent at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow debriefing members of the U.S. State Department. Two weeks later, I was able to return to the U.S. where my wife declared that I was not going back. During the majority of the time from September 11 to September 18, she had no idea where I was or if I was safe. Needless to say, I did not return to Russia or Kazakhstan for this program, although I have been back to Russia since . . . which is another story.

Now what does any of this have to do with Masonry . . . not much, although I did travel in foreign countries, work and receive Master's wages . . . I do want to share one Masonic item with you. While working in Russia, I looked around Moscow for a Masonic Lodge to attend. As it turns out, at that time, there were only three Masonic Lodges in Moscow, a city of 13 million people. This was because Masons in Russia were persecuted in the past and they typically met "underground". One day while working at my office at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, I noticed a sign in the lobby that simply said "Lodge Meeting tonight" and gave the room number for the meeting. I started asking around and discovered that there was in fact going to be a Masonic Lodge meeting in the Embassy that evening and was invited to attend. I put on a coat and tie, brought my certificate from the Grand Lodge of Virginia which Mt. Wor. Bill Johnson had provided to me, and went to the meeting. Brethren, I was amazed at what I saw. I was the only person there not in a Marine Uniform. Every person there was from the Marine Corps security contingent stationed at the U.S. Embassy. You can only imagine what the floor work looked like and you did not dare to not sit upright in your seat. Perfect ritual work from Masons from all over the U.S. I only had one additional opportunity to attend Lodge there but can honestly say it was a wonderful experience in the heart of Moscow, Russia.

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Brethren, I have rambled on but if you ever need a speaker for a five hour talk about Russia and my experiences working there, let me know and I'll be right there. As I stated earlier, I am just a regular person like everyone here who was at the right place to experience the many opportunities that have been provided. Much like Masonry, being here and being given the many opportunities we all have in Masonry is also a special experience.

So, what do you know about your fellow Masonic Brother? I would suggest that you now know a little more about me and my past work and would hope that you will reach out to other Masons you know and discover their stories. We all have a story to tell and I feel certain, theirs is just as interesting as mine. And yes, I have traveled in foreign countries, worked and received Master's wages!

Worshipful Sir and Brethren, thank you for the opportunity to share a little of my experiences with you today.