

# SECRET

21 February 1961

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Contact and Recruitment of Vera Kowbasniuk SHUMENKO

1. Subject, with her mother, is owner of the Kowbasniuk Travel Agency at 286 East Tenth Street, New York. As the Kowbasniuk family is of Ukrainian derivation, many American Ukrainians handle their travel arrangements to and from the Soviet Union through the Kowbasniuk Agency. On this basis it was decided that Subject should be contacted and, if possible, recruited to furnish information and operational leads.
2. I called Subject on 10 February under the name David Lundholm. An appointment was made to discuss travel plans on 14 February.
3. Following clearance with Headquarters elements of the Office of Security, Central Cover Division, and OO/C, I went to New York on 15 February to contact and recruit Subject. I checked in with [ ] OO/Contacts, where I discussed the case with [ ] who approved of the operational plans. It was agreed that OO/C would be sent appropriate leads obtained from the operation not pursued by SR.
4. I visited the Kowbasniuk Agency at about 1500 hours on 14 February. Present in the office were Subject's husband, who works there, and an elderly Ukrainian-American couple making travel plans with him. I introduced myself to Subject under alias and mentioned my call on the previous Friday. At the same time I presented my Agency ID card and asked whether I could speak to Subject privately on a confidential matter. After a moment's hesitation Subject led me to a room in the rear of the office, where the interview took place.

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5. I stated that it had come to our attention that Subject's agency was handling a considerable amount of business involving travel to and from the USSR and that this traffic was of interest to us. Subject said that she was doing relatively little as compared with some of the larger agencies and that in fact she was not accredited to Intourist herself. I stated that it was our understanding that most of her business involved the Ukraine. She admitted this to be so and added that most of the travel was to and from the Western Ukraine, specifically Galicia and Zakarpatskaya Oblast. Subject, a very talkative person, went on at some length on miscellaneous experiences which were not of immediate interest. I finally broke in on her and asked whether Subject would be willing to provide the Government with travel information which she acquired as a result of her business activity. She asked what this information would be used for. I replied that I could not disclose that but added that we appreciated the fact that her livelihood was involved and that I could guarantee that any use we would make of the information would be prejudicial neither to her nor to her clients. I also stated that there were other ways for us to acquire the necessary information but that she could save us considerable time and trouble by providing it directly. Subject stated that she had very little time and that she was working nights and weekends to keep up. I said that we understood that she was very busy but that she would be rendering us a real service. Subject thereupon agreed to co-operate. I offered reimbursement for any expenses which Subject might incur as a result of her collaboration. She did not indicate that she thought there would be any expense, nor did she seem to be interested in money.

6. I told Subject that I was interested in the following details on travelers going into the USSR: name and address, itinerary, and dates of travel. She was told that we were not interested in any traveler until and unless he had received a Soviet visa. I also asked for information on Soviet nationals immigrating to the United States, but again, only if the person had received an exit visa. I gave Subject a cover address in Washington, to which she was told to send the information she had collected for us.

7. Subject mentioned that she had been in the Soviet Union last year and might be going again this fall with a group of travelers. She would be visiting Lvov, Kiev, and possibly Uzhgorod, although the last was uncertain. She asked whether she might do something for us herself. I answered that I would be interested in learning about her travel plans when they were more firm and would consider her offer at that time.

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8. In closing Subject was cautioned about disclosing to any one the fact of our contact, what had been discussed, or agreed upon. Subject's husband had seen me approach her and obviously realized that something unusual was afoot. Subject suggested that she tell him she had been approached on a routine investigation by a Government representative. Subject said she is periodically approached in just this way because of the nature of her business. I agreed to this, although I had some doubt as to whether Subject would refrain from briefing her husband on the true nature of our meeting. In any case, Subject's husband has been checked out. This aspect of the case should be reconsidered with Subject at our next meeting. In a business enterprise as small as the Kowbasniuk Agency, with Subject and her husband working closely together, complete secrecy between the two is probably not to be expected.

9. Subject obviously knows the travel business well and is able to discuss its ins and outs facily. Despite this facility she is not particularly hep in other ways. She is informed on the political atmosphere in the Ukraine from a human point of view, but does not seem interested or able to draw any more than the most simple overall conclusions. She seems to have a good heart and mentioned several times indignity the unscrupulousness of some other travel agencies and American lawyers involved in cases of Soviet citizens immigrating to the United States. It is my belief that she will perform conscientiously for us, although she might have to be prompted now and then to provide her information in a timely manner. The matter of her own travel to the Ukraine in the fall is of considerable interest. It is my belief that a mechanical mission could well be entrusted to her. Perhaps she is capable of more. Her status as a travel representative, her native ability in Ukrainian, and her previous experience in the USSR would be useful, particularly in a courier-type mission and perhaps also in positive intelligence collection.

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