

## My International Intrigue

### Tamas Gombosi

It was September 1983, the height of the cold war. A few months earlier the Soviet Union has shot down a Korean passenger plane that violated its airspace. US President Ronald Reagan has called the Soviet Union "Evil Empire" and all interactions between Soviet and US officials were severely limited.

A few months earlier Svetlana Savitskaya become the second woman who traveled to space. Her flight was shortly followed by the space flight of STS-41G on Challenger. Among the crew was the first female American astronaut, Sally Ride.



From left to right: Sally Ride, Bertalan Farkas, Svetlana Savitskaya and Tamas Gombosi

The annual conference of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) was held in Budapest, Hungary, just a few months later. The Soviet and US delegation included the two space faring women, but due to the mounting political tension, the US delegation was under strict instructions not to allow a meeting between the two of them.

I was a member of the local organizing committee and since I had strong connections to both the Soviet space program and NASA, I was put in charge of the local activities of the cosmonauts and astronauts who attended the meeting (in addition to Ride and Savitskaya several other astronauts and cosmonauts attended the meeting). I frequently interacted with Sally and Svetlana who both were quite disappointed that they were not allowed to meet.



Svetlana Savitskaya and Tamas Gombosi

Finally, we worked out a little conspiracy. I arranged a late night meeting at the home of the first Hungarian cosmonaut, Bertalan Farkas. We picked up Sally and Svetlana at their residences and the meeting finally took place at 9 pm. It was fun to translate from English to Russian and back between Sally and Svetlana. Since I have a heavy Hungarian accent in both languages they were equally disadvantaged. Actually, they did not seem to mind the accent at all. The conversation went on till 5 am, when we smuggled them back to their rooms.

This was my contribution to end the cold war.