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## Talking Proud --- Military

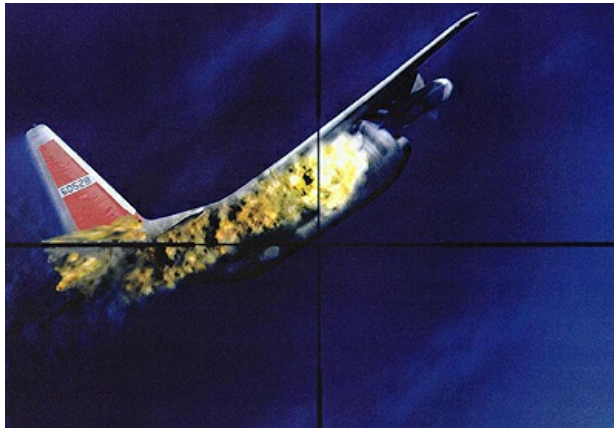
### Airborne Peripheral Reconnaissance, Cold War losses

*"Silent Sacrifices"*

By Ed Marek, editor

See: <http://www.talkingproud.us/AboutMe/AboutMe.html>

August 7, 2013



The "Cold War" followed immediately after the end of WWII. The Cold War was a sustained state of political and military tension largely between the US as the leader of the West, which included the NATO Western European nations, and the Soviet Union (USSR), as the leader of the East, which included the Warsaw Pact nations. Each of the leaders had nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them.

The Cold War ran from roughly 1946-1947 through 1991. The WWII Alliance between the West and the East fell apart immediately after WWII was over. Each side set itself against the other.

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The Soviets, having taken most of eastern Europe and East Germany, set up what Winston Churchill called the "Iron Curtain." In a letter to President Harry Truman, Churchill said, "[A]n iron curtain is drawn down upon their front. We do not know what is going on behind." That we did not know what was going on behind that curtain to the east formed the foundation of the need to find out. From that grew almost immediately the requirement to fly airborne reconnaissance over the USSR and around the periphery of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact.



The problem for the West after WWII was that it knew almost nothing

about the Soviet Union following the War. The US did not know where its bases were, what was there, how best to get there if we should have to attack, the US did not even have good mapping data of the Soviet coastline. The challenges for the US were many, but fundamentally, the main challenge was to look as deeply into the Soviet Union as physically and militarily possible.

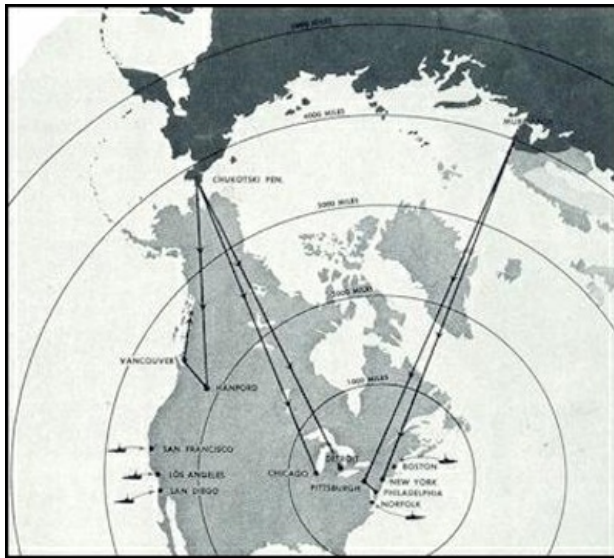
Both the US and the USSR were suspicious of the other, and gravely worried about the other attacking them with nuclear weapons. Furthermore, each side wanted to strengthen their influence, the Soviets wanted to consolidate their power and build a buffer zone between themselves and Germany. To do this, they had to exert tight control over East Germany and the US had to build up its military strength in West Germany.

At first, each side worried about bombers, then they worried about intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and later downstream submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM). During the early Cold War, bombers and ICBMs would dominate. Initially, the US worried most about Soviet attacks against Alaska, and, as a result concentrated on Siberia. But those concerns would rapidly expand to the possibility of Soviet nuclear attacks against the breadth of the US. The US had to know more, much more, about the size, composition and disposition of Soviet forces deployed behind the Iron Curtain. The US was especially interested in the state of Soviet air defenses, radars, anti-aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, and fighters.

As a result, in late 1946 the US began flying reconnaissance missions that collected signals intelligence (SIGINT) which included communications (COMINT) and electronic (ELINT) intelligence, and photographic intelligence (PHOTINT). Collection by human means, known as human intelligence (HUMINT) went full speed ahead but this was very dangerous and had only limited capabilities to get the military capabilities knowledge needed.

In 1947, the newly formed US Air Force (USAF) sought permission to flyover Soviet territories, especially over Siberia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) rejected the idea. In 1948, the State Department restricted US reconnaissance flights to peripheral missions at standoff distances no closer than 40 miles.

During the years 1949 and 1950, the geopolitical landscape changed a lot for the US. Communist forces took over all of China, with nationalist forces allied with the US having to run to the island of Formosa, now known as Taiwan. All of eastern Europe under Soviet influence and control became communist states. Then, in 1950, the North Korean communists invaded the Republic of Korea and a full-blown war was underway through 1953. The prospects for a global communist movement grew as did the probability that the Soviets might attack the US and Western Europe.



The Soviets had the capability to fly Tu-4 nuclear equipped bombers located on the Chukotskiy Peninsula, directly across the Bering Straits from Alaska, on one-way missions to attack American population centers. Soviet bombers flying from the Kola Peninsula bordering Finland had the same capability. Among other things, the US had to find out where the bombers were exactly and, as important, had to figure out what routes would best penetrate the Soviet Union for a US bomber attack. Said differently, where was the Soviet air defense system the weakest.

In December 1950, Truman authorized two deep penetration flights of the Siberian area. A B-47B bomber was taken off the assembly line for the mission. But the airplane was lost on the ramp due to a fuel leak and fire. The British in the meantime had formed a "Special Duty Flight" of three aircrews to fly US-manufactured RB-45Cs and together with USAF crews, practiced from Barksdale AFB, Louisiana. Three of these aircraft painted with RAF insignia launched from a RAF base and flew separate tracks at night at 35,000 ft. over the Baltic states, Belorussia and Ukraine. The Allies listened by intercepting Soviet air defense communications (COMINT). The Soviets scrambled fighters but none could find the RB-45Cs. They all returned home safely with a treasure trove of photography of hundreds of different intelligence targets. They also found the Soviet air defense system incapable of handling such an intrusion.

There are different views of the conclusions drawn from the take. First, there was no immediate threat of a Soviet attack against the West. On the other side of the coin, Soviet Long Range Aviation was clearly going to be a problem and planning would have to be to destroy it before those bombers could attack the West. This conclusion placed a premium on knowing how best to do that.



The US now ramped up overflights as more and more information became available that the Soviets were deploying their Tu-4s throughout the Soviet Union and fighter bases were becoming increasingly active with state-of-the-art fighter aircraft, such as the MiG-15. The Tu-4, shown here, was a carbon copy of the US B-29. The Soviets disassembled one of our B-29s that had made an emergency landing in the USSR during the war

and duplicated the bomber, part-for-part.



Then, as part of a Soviet May Day parade in 1954, the M-4 jet bomber made its first appearance flying over Moscow. That caused great concern and the US now sent flights over the Kola Peninsula in northern Russia to look for them.

The US and Britain continued overflights for many years employing RB-45s, RB-47s and even tactical reconnaissance aircraft. They encountered flak and MiGs. Early on, the MiGs did not attack, but as time passed, they began attacking but surprisingly, the US and RAF aircraft were either able to elude the flak and fighters or they simply outran them at altitudes at which the fighters were ineffective.

Nonetheless, it became obvious that a new aircraft was required for such flights, and that led to the development and evolution of the U-2.

In late 1956, after the Soviets protested the flight of three RB-57Ds over the Vladivostok Maritime Region, President Eisenhower ordered the termination of the overflight program. He resumed it employing the U-2 in 1957 but was forced to terminate it again after the Soviets successfully shot down a U-2 flown by Francis Gary Powers on May 1, 1960.

I wanted to mention the overflight reconnaissance program at least briefly since many brave pilots risked a lot to fly these missions. They are worthy of a study on their own. I ran across a good place to start, ["Military reconnaissance missions over Soviet Union, alone, unarmed and unafraid."](#) I commend it to you. It served as the main source of the information I just provided.

As the Soviets and their allies improved their air defense systems over time, overflight reconnaissance became less and less a desirable activity and one best assigned to the developing satellite capabilities. So I will stop here with this subject.

The purpose of this report is to address peripheral reconnaissance losses to the Soviets during the early Cold War years. Some of these missions will be ELINT, COMINT, COMINT and ELINT, PHOTINT, PHOTINT and ELINT and whatever other combination they might have quietly inserted into the aircraft. I had the good fortune of a very good source from which to start.

Michael L. Peterson has written a thorough report on a group of losses entitled, ["Maybe you had to be there: The SIGINT in Thirteen Soviet Shootdowns of US Reconnaissance Aircraft."](#) The National Security Agency (NSA) published his work in the *Cryptologic Quarterly*. I am not sure of the date of publication. It was classified at what is known as the Special Compartmented Intelligence (SCI) level, but was declassified and approved for release by NSA on May 8, 2012.

NSA is the national agency responsible for the collection of SIGINT. The thrust of Peterson's report is to show the evolution of the role played by SIGINT in helping to explain what happened during the losses of 13 US reconnaissance missions. I will address only 12 of these, leaving out the Francis Gary Powers U2 loss since so much has been written about it.

| Date               | US Service | Aircraft Type   | Location                       |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| April 8, 1950      | USN        | PB4Y2 Privateer | Baltic Sea                     |
| November 6, 1951   | USN        | P2V Neptune     | Sea of Japan                   |
| June 13, 1952      | USAF       | RB-29           | Sea of Japan                   |
| October 7, 1952    | USAF       | RB-29           | East of Hokkaido/Kuril Islands |
| July 29, 1953      | USAF       | RB-50           | Sea of Japan                   |
| September 4, 1954  | USN        | P2V Neptune     | Sea of Japan                   |
| November 7, 1954   | USAF       | RB-29           | East of Hokkaido/Kuril Islands |
| April 18, 1955     | USAF       | RB-47           | Off Kamchatka Peninsula        |
| September 10, 1956 | USAF       | RB-50           | Sea of Japan                   |
| September 2, 1958  | USAF       | C-130           | Soviet Armenia near Turkey     |
| May 1, 1960        | CIA        | U2              | Sverdlovsk, USSR               |
| July 1, 1960       | USAF       | RB-47           | Barents Sea                    |
| March 10, 1964     | USAF       | RB-66           | East Germany                   |

Let's pause for just a moment. During the years I will discuss, 1950-1964, NSA received considerable support and talent from the three military services, in what were called Service Cryptologic Agencies, SCAs.



The USAF employed the major air command known as USAF Security Service (USAFSS) to serve in this role; the Navy used the Naval Security Group (NSG), and the Army assigned the tasks to the Army Security Agency (ASA). While each SCA followed their military department's chain of command, they received their tasking from the NSA, or from commands and agencies authorized by NSA to task the SCAs. Quite often an airborne crew would have pilots, navigators, electronic warfare officers, engineers, gunners etc. who were assigned to a flying unit, while the SIGINT positions would be manned by people from one of the SCA's units. You'll see some references as we go on to the SCAs.

One more pause before we get going. Please keep three things straight in your minds.

First, Peterson addressed the SIGINT collected by US and other allied parties reflecting the reconnaissance missions and fighter reactions. The SIGINT provided mostly friendly intercepts of Soviet tracking of the reconnaissance aircraft and reacting fighters, and friendly voice intercepts between the Soviet pilots and their ground controllers involved in the shoot downs. This is useful because it gives an idea of where the Soviet air defense system said the reconnaissance aircraft and reacting fighters were, and reflects how the Soviet pilots conducted their attacks. It is also useful to compare with friendly radar tracking of the aircraft. As you probably know, the Soviets implemented very tight command and control and the tracking data had to be passed to higher echelons over great distances. Furthermore, Soviet pilots were usually under strict control from the ground. The Soviets would employ HF communications for these, especially with their bombers on long range flights. But as time went on, the Soviets employed VHF communications with their air defense fighter pilots who were flying in relative short range from the ground controllers. VHF communications are line-of-sight. So we had to employ either high towers, or situate intercept sites on mountain tops, or better yet, fly peripheral reconnaissance. I will add briefly that there were all kinds of Soviet communications available only to airborne SIGINT reconnaissance because of the frequencies employed and the designs of the communications systems used.

Second, many of these missions themselves were collecting SIGINT, much of which was lost because they were shot down. The net result here was that we often did not have access to the pilot-controller communications because of the shoot downs. But on occasion, we had ground stations close enough to the action and equipped and designed to handle line-of-sight VHF communications.

Finally, The US employed cover stories for these missions. Some were said to be weather reconnaissance, navigational training and mapping reconnaissance for example. In other cases the US would acknowledge the mission was a photography mission but one did not always know exactly all the kinds of equipment that may have been on board. You will learn, for example, that the Strategic Air Command (SAC) put SIGINT equipment aboard their PHOTINT missions as a means to protect themselves; I believe I read a report that said they put SIGINT positions aboard all their aircraft for a time to protect them; that is, to get an idea whether and how the Soviets were reacting. SAC and Navy electronic countermeasures (ECM) aircraft would also intercept ELINT signals as a means to perfect their ECM tactics and equipment designs.

I will attempt to blend Peterson's SIGINT intercepts of Soviet communications information with operational and friendly radar reports to give you as full view of what happened during these flights and attacks as I can. In a few cases, we had survivors who added some information to the stories involved.

Please note I am only talking about missions targeted against the USSR and Soviet reactions. And remember, we will be talking only about missions peripheral to the USSR. Many similar missions were flown against China, North Korea and North Vietnam but I will not address those.

It is important to recognize that for the most part, the peripheral reconnaissance missions were conducted in great secrecy. The SIGINT missions especially were very secretive because of the character and importance of the cryptologic information and methods we employed. I point this out because the crews involved were "Silent Warriors." They were out there sometimes armed with a few cannons, many times unarmed, without escort, often on radio silence, and quite often at considerable distances from friendly airfields and search and rescue support. All together, those who perished and those who did not, and the many who are still doing this kind of work today, receive very little notice and accolade. It is important, I believe, to read this report and remember the sacrifices they made and continue to make.

Well, at long last, let's get started.

Soviet air defense fighter aircraft first attacked a USAF RB-29 ferret mission over the Sea of Japan in October 1949, but the RB-29 escaped unhurt. The word "ferret" means in this case "to search out tenaciously." For political reasons, the US did not use reconnaissance in these early days, preferring to call them ferret missions. Peterson wrote that over the next 23 years, the Soviets made 30 documented attacks on US reconnaissance aircraft and even more on Allied aircraft conducting similar missions. The first successful shoot down occurred on April 8, 1950, the last on March 10, 1964.

Let's see what we can learn about 12 of these.

#### **USN PB4Y2 Privateer, Baltic Sea, April 8, 1950**

In response to national policy, the Navy began, I believe in 1950 or perhaps 1949, a highly secretive program known as the Special Electronic Search Project (SESP) which was a program designed to equip certain aircraft with SIGINT equipment and man them with SIGINT trained crews. By the time period we are covering, Navy SIGINT operations were

accomplished by NSG personnel. The NSG evolved out of earlier Navy SIGINT efforts and formally adopted this title in 1950.



On April 8, 1950, four Soviet La-11 fighters piloted by Boris Dokin, Anatoliy Gerasimov, Tezyaev, and Sataev intercepted the PB4Y2 "Privateer" (BuNo 59645) over the Baltic Sea near Liepaja, Latvia (I will show you a map in a few moments). During WWII, the Soviets occupied Latvia and incorporated it into the Soviet Union after the war. The Privateer was flying at 12,139 ft, 8 km southwest of Liepaja, Latvia.

There are reports that say the Soviets gave the Navy pilots the "follow me" signal, the Soviet flight leader reported the USN pilot simply waved goodbye, and so the Soviet controller told the pilot to shoot it down. At least one Soviet pilot did that off the coast of Liepaja, Latvia.

According to interviews with Soviets long after this engagement, they would have much preferred to get the Navy aircraft to land so they would have the aircraft and the crew. That said, the Soviet attacking pilots were told not to harm any survivors and to circle around them until submarines or other boats could get there to retrieve them. This is thought to be the first publicized Soviet shoot down of a US reconnaissance aircraft.





There were 10 souls aboard, all lost. Their remains were never recovered. The crew included: Lt. John Fette (photo middle), Lt. Howard Seeschaf (photo right), Lt j.g. Robert Reynolds, Ensign Tommy Burgess (photo left), AD1 Joe Danens, Jr., AD1 Jack Thomas, AT1 Frank Beckman, CT3 Edward Purcell, AL3 Joseph Bourassa, AT3 Joseph Rinnier, Jr. I believe Fette was the pilot.

This PB4Y2 is a derivative of the USAF's B-24 Liberator. In WWII, she was used as a long range patrol bomber. In the Korean War, they were used as "Firefly" night illumination aircraft dropping parachute flares to detect enemy infiltration. The Navy also used them for SIGINT flights off the coast of the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PB4Y2 was a good candidate for this mission, since the SIGINT intercept equipment in those days was of the "vacuum tube" variety, bulky, and heavy, and the aircraft provided a long dwell time capability.



This PB4Y2 was home based in Port Lyautey, French Morocco, presumably to fly missions over the Mediterranean Sea. [This photo](#), contributed by John Brady, CTCM, USN (Retired), shows a group of VP-26 (NCU-32) "Trident" aircraft on the tarmac at Port Lyautey. VP stands for patrol squadron and NCU-32 designates a Naval Communications Unit, each one numbered.

One of the Privateers left for Wiesbaden, West Germany seven days before this flight over the Baltic. The PB4Y2 was named "Turbulent Turtle" and was assigned to VP-26 NCU-32, Det A.



She departed from Wiesbaden at 10:31 local time. This photo, also contributed by John Brady, is the aircraft that was lost, but that is not the crew that was lost. She reported flying over Bremerhaven, West Germany in the north, and sent her last radio report about four hours and ten minutes after launch. Nine hours later the USAF Flight Service at Frankfurt reported her overdue. A major Search and Rescue operation began right away employing Navy and USAF aircraft. That effort terminated on April 11, 1950.

One of the Soviet pilots involved, Anatolij Gerassimov, has said he saw the US aircraft burning in the middle, then he said he saw ten parachutes, and then the aircraft exploded. There have been many reports, unconfirmed, of sightings of Navy rafts with people in them, and there have even been reports that the aircraft and some crew were taken to Moscow, and subsequently imprisoned. [Dick Pohlmann, a TVY Documentary Filmmaker](#), has written a most interesting paper on the idea that some crew was captured, and this paper includes conversations with Gerassimov. I commend it to you. There have been other Soviets who said they secretly salvaged the aircraft and took it to Moscow. No one in the public domain to my knowledge is sure. John R. Schindler, writing, "[A dangerous business: The US Navy and National Reconnaissance during the Cold War.](#)" published by the NSA, said the US did recover some of the wreckage and described the wreckage as "bullet ridden." I am a tad uncomfortable with this report since it also said Soviet MiG aircraft conducted the shoot down when in fact it was La-11s.

Interestingly, Pohlmann said that Gerassimov said there were many US flights in this area dropping material and agents for the "forest brother," Lithuanian guerrillas fighting the Soviets at the time. He also said the Soviets lost many pilots chasing after these aircraft because of bad weather, and the pilots lobbied hard to either shoot down the US aircraft or not go after them at all.

The Baltic Sea in the early Cold War years was a hot-bed of intelligence gathering. The Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, were among the most heavily fortified Soviet areas in the world which attracted a great deal of reconnaissance attention. Airborne SIGINT reconnaissance could hear into the USSR, Poland, and East Germany. At this point in time, spring 1950, the Soviets were very sensitive to protect their atomic testing program. On August 29, 1949, the Soviets conducted their first atomic test known to the Soviets as "First Lightning." USAF aircraft equipped to "sniff out" nuclear fission evidence from the air discovered that a detonation had occurred. President Truman announced it on September 23, 1949 and the Cold War was on in a very serious way. I mentioned earlier that the Soviets attacked an USAF RB-29 ferret mission over the Sea of Japan in October 1949, but the aircraft got away unscathed. This shoot down of the Navy aircraft was the first successful Soviet attack.

The Soviet La-11 entered production in 1947 and ended in 1951, with about 1,182 having been built. She was a long range piston-engine fighter, early post-WWII. This engagement with the Navy's Privateer was the first "combat" engagement for the La-11. She was designed to escort Soviet

bombers destined for the US and had wingtip tanks installed for extra fuel. She carried three NS-23 cannons, all in the nose. Her maximum speed was 419 mph, she could operate up to 33,650 ft., and had a range of 1,585 miles.



US intercepts of Soviet tracking was sparse, according to Peterson. This map reflects an approximation of where the Soviets said the Navy aircraft was between 1221Z and 1441Z when it was lost in tracking. The ground intercept stations could only tentatively correlate the cessation of tracking on the PB4Y2 with it being shot down. The Soviets tracked up to five fighters flying for about 45 minutes, but the tracking was continuous for only one of the fighters. I have seen reports saying the PB4Y2 came as close as 8 and 16 kms all the way to 40 kms from the Latvian coastline. The Soviets claimed the aircraft was 21 kms over Latvia, while the US maintained she was operating over the high seas.

On July 15, 1950 Soviet fighters intercepted an USAF B-29 ferret mission over the Sea of Japan but the USAF aircraft escaped unharmed.



In September 1950, US fighter aircraft shot down a Soviet A-20 bomber (graphic shown here). Legend has it this was in retaliation for the Baltic attack, saying it flew too close to US Naval forces. I personally question whether this was a retaliation as that was not the American style for its reconnaissance losses. Douglas Aircraft of the US made the A-20 bomber and the Soviets bought more than two-thirds of A-20B aircraft from the US during the early 1940s, when the US and Soviets were allied against the Germans.

**USN P2V Neptune, Sea of Japan, November 6, 1951**



Once again, Soviet La-11 fighters piloted by Lt. Ivan Lukashev and Lt. Moise Shebukin shot down a US Navy reconnaissance aircraft, a P2V Neptune (BuNo 124283) over the Sea of Japan on November 6, 1951. The USN aircraft was flown by Navy Patrol Squadron Six, VP-6, the "Blue Sharks." The US Naval Institute has said it was on a SIGINT mission, advertised as a weather reconnaissance mission. This photo shows her with just propellers, but she was outfitted with turbojets outboard each of the propeller engines.



The P2V was flying off the coast of Vladivostok in the Soviet Far East.



Ten souls aboard, three officers, seven enlisted men. Two of the officers were Lt. j.g. Judd Clarence Hodgton (left) and Lt. j.g. Sam Rosenfeld (right). The rest of the crew included Ensign Donald Smith, Aviation Ordnance Man Reuben Baggett, Aviation Machinists Mate Paul Foster, Aviation Electronics Man Paul Jric, Aviation Electronics Technician Erwin

Raglij, and Aviation Electronics Man Ralph Wigert, Jr., and Aviation Machinists Mate Jack Lively.

VP-6 at the time was stationed at Barber's Point, Oahu, Hawaii. Once again, the Soviet pilots tried to get the Neptune to land, but its crew refused. The La-11s intercepted the P2V about 7-8 nm off the coast in the area of Cape Ostrvynoy and shot her down about 18 nm off the coast.

Vladivostok was the location of a major Soviet naval base, home of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, akin to the USN's Pearl Harbor home of its Pacific Fleet. Remember, it is also 1951, and the Korean War was on. You can see what a lucrative SIGINT collection area this must have been, with Far East Russia, China, and North Korea all in close proximity. For its part, Vladivostok was a closed city to foreigners for more than 70 years, and was only opened in 1992. During the Cold War for certain, it was a massive military installation

The P2V was designed for day and night land-based anti-submarine warfare, electronic countermeasures (ECM) and long range patrol. She would acquire many missions including rocket attack, night torpedo attack, mine laying, bombing, photo and SIGINT reconnaissance. She entered service in March 1950. The P2V-3W aircraft was outfitted with SIGINT gear, mainly ELINT. ELINT was especially important to the Navy in order to better understand the threat systems on land and at sea. Some experts believe the P2V-3W was the first "secret spy variant" of the Neptune. One source, Air Vectors, said this:

"Neptunes would be significant participants in covert 'ferret' missions around (and sometimes over) the borders of the Soviet Union and other Communist bloc nations to characterize adversary defenses. They sometimes ran into trouble. The story of these secret spy missions only began to come out in the 1990s."

The Cold War Museum's website presents a ["History of US Naval Fleet Air Reconnaissance."](#) In this history, the author comments on both the PB4Y2 Privateer and the P2V Neptune:

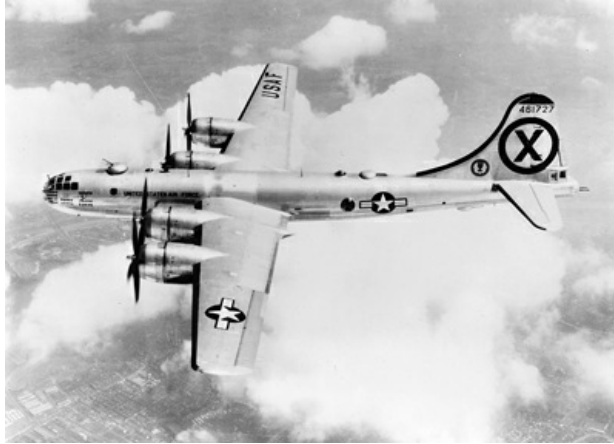
"Both Privateer and Neptune aircrews performed routine electronic reconnaissance in support of their anti-submarine and surface surveillance missions worldwide. Additionally, their electronic recce operations often paid high dividends in the intercept of information which was of Navy and national interest, well beyond the mission support function. Perhaps it was the Communists' appreciation of this fact that accounted for several of their attacks on 'normal' VP aircraft during the 1950s."

The US did not obtain many SIGINT intercepts of the shoot down effort. HF air-ground voice communications of the intercepting aircraft were collected. About 90 minutes after the shoot down, the Soviet pilot reported, "...an aircraft of the Neptune type was detected. It was shot down. It is burning on the surface (of the sea)." The controller at Vladivostok later told all aircraft to cease operations and return to base under radio silence.



The Navy bought a limited number of the P4M Mercator aircraft, which competed against and lost to the Neptune, but looked much the same. The Navy used it as a reconnaissance aircraft and put her into service with VP-21 in 1950. VP-21 deployed to Port Lyautey, French Morocco and remained in use there until 1953. The 18 surviving Mercators were modified from 1951 to be SIGINT reconnaissance aircraft, the P4M-1Q to replace the Privateer. The crew was increased to 14 and then to 16. On January 23, 1962 Soviet fighters attempted a rocket attack against one flying a Baltic Sea mission, but were unsuccessful in bringing her down.

#### **USAF RB-29, June 13, Sea of Japan, June 13, 1952**



This photo is of an USAF RB-29 from the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (SRS) over Korea. As a sad aside, this particular aircraft (s/n 44-61727) was shot down by North Korean MiG-15s, perhaps over China, on July 4, 1952. Eleven of the crew were taken prisoner, two others died. But let's get back to the Soviet actions.

On June 13, 1952, Soviet fighters shot down an USAF RB-29 (s/n 44-61810) over the Sea of Japan or near the Kamchatka Peninsula. There were 12 souls aboard. No remains or survivors were recovered. The US government in 1956 claimed an officer it believed to have been a member of this crew was seen in East Germany and that the officer said he had been wrongfully convicted under Item 6 of Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code.

This aircraft has been reported by [Bill Welch of the 31st and 91st SRS](#) as carrying "special photographic" capabilities, at least during 1950-1951, while flying over North Korea. This was said to be the K-30 aerial camera with a focal length of 100 inches, and taking a 9x18 inch photo. She was a big camera system and a special floor was built into the forward bomb-bay. It shot out the left side of the aircraft. Welch said, "We photographed practically every mile of coastline from Hong Kong to Port Arthur. And from Vladivostok up to Kamchatka and back. We were frequently intercepted by fighters, Mig-15s, along the Chinese coast (We once got a good K-30 shot of one flying about a mile off our wing) and Soviet prop-driven Yak-9s and LA-5s up north of Japan. We managed to get away in every case." Welch left the Air Force and learned of this shoot down in a letter from a friend.

Almost nothing is known about how this shoot down in 1952 happened or what happened to the crew thereafter. Two Soviet Pacific Ocean Fleet fighters were active in ground controlled intercept operations and may have been involved.

Major Sam Busch, the aircraft commander, is said to have told his wife prior to this flight that after flying six reconnaissance flights over North

Korea, "He and his B-29 crew had received their diciest assignment: bait the Soviet Union with a flagrant violation of Russian air space on a secret mission to determine the strength of Soviet electronic intelligence."



A paper written by Jim Bard, Capt., USAF (Ret.) for the Korean War Educator entitled, "[Airplane crashes, 91st SRS Losses.](#)" said the RB-29 was nicknamed "Southern Comfort" and that it was shot down by a MiG-15, south of Mys Ostrovnoy about 120 miles from the Russian coast. This is the same area where the Neptune was lost. Wikipedia said two Soviet Naval MiG-15s attacked Southern Comfort and that the MiGs were flown by Captain Oleg Piotrovich Fedotov and 1st Lieutenant Ivan Petrovich Proskurin. A [paper attributed to 1st Lt Robert A Mitchell, 91st SRS](#), said the same thing.



This is a photo of the crew that was lost. **L to R, Front Row:** 1st Lt. Robert J. McDonnell, Navigator; SSgt. Roscoe G. Becker, Right Scanner; SSgt. Eddie R. Berg, Tail Gunner; Leon F. Bonura, Left Scanner; MSgt. William H. Homer, Flight Engineer. **L to R, Back Row:** 1st Lt. Samuel D. Service (posthumously promoted to captain), Radar Operator; 1st Lt. James A. Sculley, Pilot; Major Samuel N. Busch, Aircraft Commander; SSgt. William A. Blizzard, Radio Operator; SSgt. Miguel W. Monserrat, Central Fire Control Gunner; A1C Danny Pillsbury, Camera Operator. TSgt. David L. Moore is not in the photo, but flew aboard the ill-fated mission.

This crew was from the 91st SRS and launched out of Yokota AB, Japan at 1007 hours. Official records said it was on a classified surveillance mission of shipping activity in the Sea of Japan. Radar contact was lost at 1320 hours. The aircraft failed to return to base. Radio intercept operators in Japan intercepted transmission from Soviet aircraft reporting they had shot down this RB-29. Philly.com reported Major Busch's last words heard

on the radio were, "Let's get out of here." During a Search and Rescue (SAR) mission on June 14, an empty six man raft was sighted, right side up, about 75-100 miles off the Soviet coast, but conditions prevented salvaging the raft.

In a hearing held on June 20, 1996 by the House Committee on National Security, Congressman John Fox of Pennsylvania told the chairman, "In 1992, President Yeltsin admitted that the plane had been shot down and that some airmen had been taken prisoner and may still be alive. Their fate is still unknown." Apparently later one of Yeltsin's generals said that there was only a possibility that captured servicemen were alive.

As far as I can tell, this entire event remains a mystery.

The RB-29 began flying SIGINT missions in 1948. As a general rule, in those days Soviet fighters could not operate at the altitude flown by the RB-29. Most initial missions were flown by the 72 SRS from Ladd AFB, Fairbanks, Alaska, against the Soviet Far East and Siberia. Early missions carried photographic and SIGINT equipments. These initial missions did not produce much. On August 5, 1948 President Truman authorized the RB-29s to overfly the USSR. They would as a matter of routine fly for up to 30 hours, covering 5,000 miles operating up to 35,000 ft. These missions discovered that the Soviets had large gaps in their air defense radar coverage, and the RB-29s began exploiting that, going in deeper and deeper. Up in this area, the Soviets had no fighters able to handle the RB-29. As a result, no RB-29s were lost in these missions. As an aside, finding these gaps in radar coverage was crucial for the US strategic nuclear bombers identified to strike targets in the USSR.

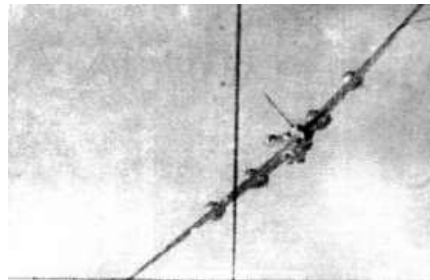


At the time, the only Soviet aircraft that had a chance against the RB-29 was the MiG-15 (shown here). The MiG-15 jet fighter was among the best air superiority aircraft in the world at the time, if not the best, rivaled only by the US F-86 Sabre. It had the capacity to operate at 50,850 ft. The MiG-15's mission was to intercept and kill USAF B-29s which posed the strategic atomic threat to the Soviet Union. So the MiG-15 was to be an air defense fighter. In the Korean War the B-29 caused the North Koreans the most problems keeping their logistics and supply lines open. The MiG-15 was employed against the B-29s and caused considerable trouble for our bombers until the F-86 got there.





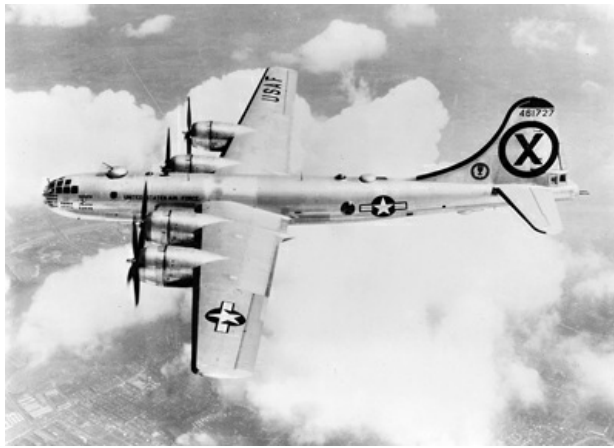
The major problem the American pilots in Korea faced with the MiG-15 is they knew precious little about it. They knew it could fly higher than their F-86 Sabre (shown here), they knew it was fast, they knew they flew in massive formations at high altitudes, they knew that they required ground intercept controllers to guide them, and, thankfully, they would learn after some missions that it was very unstable in a dive. The North Korean MiG-15s, mostly flown by Soviets, had a field day against the B-29 bombing force striking at targets deep into North Korea in a place called MiG-Alley, fairly close to the Chinese border. In fact, many of the MiGs flew out of Chinese bases, and they swarmed often with 100 or more aircraft attacking.



Here you see a B-29 over North Korea in a MiG-15's sites. I did a story on this subject on February 20, 2012, entitled, "[MiG Alley Korea War, the first jet vs. jet aerial warfare.](#)" You might wish to visit that story, or just the section entitled, "[The MiG-15 and F-86 make their debut.](#)" to learn more about the MiG-15 and the B-29 bombers tangling up in northwestern North Korea.

The deal was, however, that the B-29s over North Korea were escorted by the F-86s. No such escorts were flown for the RB-29 or any other of the reconnaissance aircraft being described in this report.

**USAF RB-29, Sea of Japan, October 7, 1952**



The Soviets shot down a RB-29, nickname "Sunbonnet," 9th SRS, with eight souls aboard off the east coast of Japan's northernmost island Hokkaido, near the tip of the Kurile Island chain, on October 7, 1952. Once more, little is known. A year after the shoot down, a study of COMINT intercepts revealed that Soviet air defense systems tracked the RB-29 for about an hour before shooting it down. The Japanese Nemuro radar facility detected an aircraft coming from the direction of the Kurile Island chain about 20 minutes before the attack and warned the RB-29 of another aircraft in the area. The RB-29 acknowledged receipt of that warning and then got a visual on it about 20 minutes later. However, they did not identify the aircraft and decided to remain in the area for about another hour.

The Soviets said they tracked USAF F-84 fighters to assist the RB-29 before it was shot down and the Soviets also tracked rescue aircraft responding to the crash. However, at the time of the shoot down, the USAF said there were no other US aircraft in the area at the time.

About an hour prior to the shoot down, the RB-29 was tracked over Hokkaido airspace. The Air Force said she was at 15,000 ft. altitude. About 13 minutes later, the RB-29 began heading east toward an area claimed by the Soviets to be their airspace. The USAF said this other aircraft was approaching the RB-29 heading westerly toward her. The Air Force said the radar tracks of the two planes merged about eight miles northwest of Nemuro, which was inside Japanese territorial airspace. The merged tracks continued overflying Japanese airspace and continued to the southeast, and then disappeared from the radar scope. It is presumed the intruding aircraft was Soviet and that after it shot down the RB-29, dove below radar coverage, which would explain why they both disappeared from radar coverage.

The RB-29 sent a Mayday distress call. There was a voice distress call, assumed to be from the RB-29, where a member shouted, "Let's get the hell out of here."

The Soviets admitted firing at the aircraft but would not comment on what happened to it. The crew consisted of Captain Eugene M. English, pilot; Captain John R. Dunham, navigator; 1st Lt. Paul E. Brock, co-pilot; and crew members Sgt. Samuel A. Colgan, SSgt. John A. Hirsch, A1C Thomas G. Shipp, A2C Fred G. Kendrick, and A2C Frank E. Neail III.

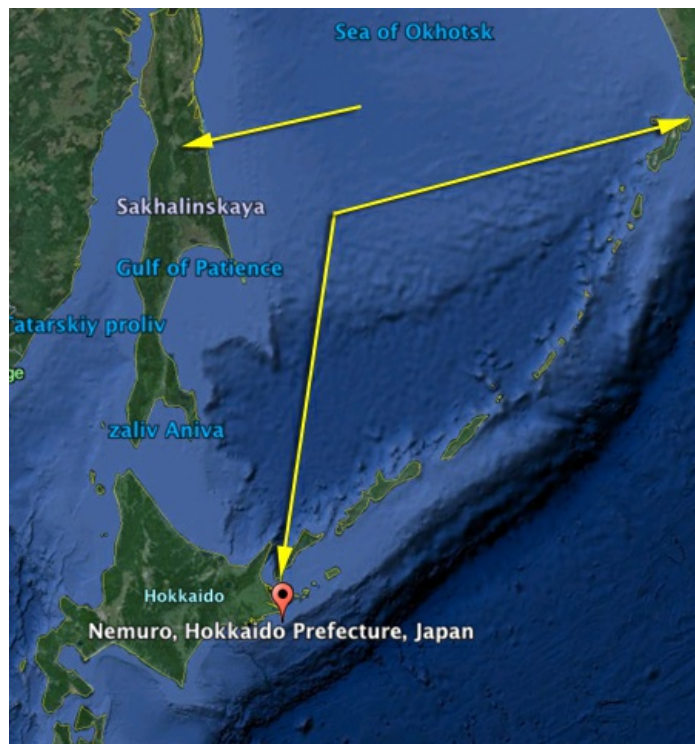
The Korean War Educator web site said the attacking aircraft were two Soviet La-11 fighters.

The US claimed that all or some of the crew successfully bailed out and charged that a Soviet patrol boat picked up the crew. Capt. Dunham was a point of contention for some time. He was a photographic navigator, the mission was said to be a photo mapping mission of Hokkaido, and that

corresponds to where Japanese-US radar tracked the aircraft. It had not been over water for very long before being shot down. In 1993, Vasili Saiko, a retired Russian Border Patrol sailor from Ust'donetsk, saw a television advertisement seeking information about American servicemen who might have fallen into Soviet hands. He told the United States-Russia Joint Commission on POW-MIA Affairs that his patrol boat searched the area after the plane was downed and that he pulled Captain Dunham's body from the Pacific. There was no sign of other crew members. Capt. John R. "Chute" Dunham's remains were returned in 1994. He had been buried in a coffin in a former Japanese cemetery in the Russian-controlled Kurile island, possibly Yuri Island. Former Soviet KGB Maritime Border Guards sailor Vasili Saiko came forward in 1993 and gave the US Naval Academy a ring that he took from Captain Dunham's body in 1952.

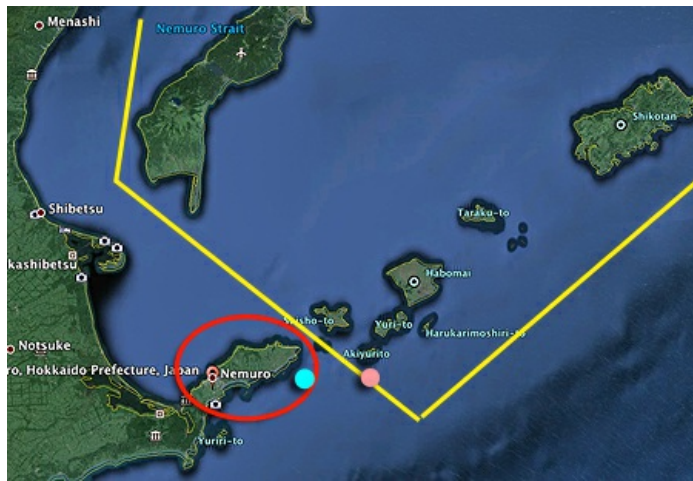


Dunham was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on August 1, 1995.



I would like to spend a few moments talking about the Kurile Islands and Japan following WWII. The Soviets claimed that the Yalta Agreement promised the Kurile Island chain to them. Japan indeed relinquished title over the Kurile Archipelago in the San Francisco Peace Treaty of September 8, 1951. This archipelago is roughly outlined by the two yellow arrows pointing to each end. Above that is the Kamchatka peninsula, off to the northeast. The top arrow points to Sakhalin Island, also claimed by the Soviets, and the mainland to the left is the Soviet landmass.

A problem was that the San Francisco treaty did not transfer the Kurile Islands to any other state. The Soviets did not sign this treaty. Two points must be made. It was generally understood that the islands were to be assigned to the Soviets, even though that was not delineated in the treaty. Second, there was no real definition of what constituted the Kurile Islands. In any event, the Soviets occupied them and that was that. The history here is a fascinating area of study should you wish to pursue it.



Set aside for the moment that the USAF maintains the RB-29 was over Japanese waters. The area in which this RB-29 was lost was one of close quarters between the Japanese Island of Hokkaido and the southernmost islands of the Kurile chain claimed by the Soviets. And worse yet, it was a contested area. My drawing here is crude. The yellow line is intended to show the southern sections of the Kuriles claimed by the Soviets. The red circle is the rough area in which the RB-59 was tracked by the Soviets for a good section of its flight before the shoot down. You can see Nemuro inside the red circle, to the left of center. The pink dot is the last Soviet track coordinate of the RB-29 --- so one might conclude the Soviets thought it was in their airspace, though "ownership" in this area was highly tentative. The bluish dot shows the last position of the RB-29 reported by the Nemuro radar.

#### USAF RB-50, Sea of Japan, July 29, 1953



Two Soviet MiG-15s shot down a USAF RB-50 (47154), crew of 17, over the Sea of Japan about 70 miles southeast of Vladivostok during the morning of July 29, 1953. The aircraft and presumably the crew were from the 343rd SRS at Forbes AFB, Kansas, temporarily attached to the 91st SRS, staging out of Yokota AB, Japan. This particular RB-50G was nicknamed "Little Red Ass." Legend has it "Little Red Ass" at the time was USAF jargon for "I don't want to be here."

The RB-50 was a version of the B-29 with updated Pratt & Whitney R-4360 radial engines, a stronger structure, a taller vertical stabilizer, and quite a bit of SIGINT intercept equipment on board. The photo shows a RB-50E on an operational mission on November 7, 1956. There were three different configurations produced, which were later redesignated RB-50E, RB-50F, and RB-50G respectively. The RB-50E was earmarked for photographic reconnaissance and observation missions; the RB-50F resembled the RB-50E but carried the SHORAN radar navigation system designed to conduct mapping, charting, and geodetic surveys; the mission of the RB-50G, which also had the SHORAN radar, was SIGINT

reconnaissance. The RB-50Gs operating from Yokota AB, Japan were COMINT birds. There some ELINT birds as well.

The RB-50G entered service with the Strategic Air Command (SAC) between June and October 1951. There were about 15 such versions.

Capt. Stanley K. O'Kelley was the pilot and aircraft commander. The rest of the crew included Major Francisco J. Tejada (ECM), Capt. James G. Keith (nose navigator), Capt. Robert E. Stalnaker (ECM), Capt. John C. Ward (ECM), Capt Lloyd C. Wiggins (radar navigator), Capt. Frank E. Beyer (ECM), Capt. Warren J. Sanderson (ECM), Capt. Edmund J Czyz (radar navigator), 1st Lt. (promoted to captain shortly thereafter) John Roche, SSgt. Donald W Gabree (central fire control specialists who remotely controlled five electronically controlled machine guns), A2C Earl W Radlein and SSgt. Donald G. Hill (both Russian linguists and intercept operators), A1C Roland E. Goulet (waist gunner), A2C Charles J Russell (waist gunner), A2C James E. Woods (gunner), MSgt. Francis L. Brown (flight engineer).



SSgt. Hill (left) and A2C Radlein (right) were from the 1st Radio Mobile Squadron, Johnson AB, Japan, a unit of the USAF Security Service (USAFSS) which conducted SIGINT operations for the USAF and others. Hill and Radlein were the first USAFSS people to be killed in the line of duty. They were both Russian linguists.



At least seven crew members are said to have bailed out. Lt. John Roche (shown here as a captain), whom I believe was the co-pilot, was the only one to be rescued. He has said he bailed out with the skipper, Capt. O'Reilly, and that O'Reilly died in Roche's presence in the frigid water awaiting rescue.



It appears he had been in the water for some 12 hours before an USAF Air Rescue Service SB-29 (such as shown here) dropped him a life raft. The SB-29 was known affectionately as the “Super Dumbo.” She had an air-droppable EDO A-3 lifeboat rigged underneath.



The US destroyer, USS *Picking* (DD 685), in company of the Australian destroyer, the *Tobruk*, picked Roche up. Capt. O'Reilley was also recovered by the *Picking* but died of injuries and exposure. A1C Goulet, I believe to be the engineer, floated onto the Japanese shoreline and his remains were returned. Thirteen others remain unaccounted for, and one definite KIA, body unrecovered, whom I believe was Capt. Keith, mortally wounded I believe aboard the aircraft. There is a view that the Soviets may have captured some or all of the remaining 13 but that has not been proven. This is because as the US rescue crews were forced to leave the scene, Soviet small surface craft were on their way to it. That said, Roche commented that he had not seen any Soviet ships in the area to indicate the Soviets rescued any of the crew. He would later say that it was possible for the Soviets to pick up some of the crew, offering that he believed the engineer, navigator and probably the tail and waist gunners parachuted out successfully. Roche had reported he could hear shouting in the distance while in the water.

The web site [spyflight.co.uk](http://spyflight.co.uk), reported this:

“A former Soviet intelligence officer, Gavril Korotkov, has stated that 6 crewmen from RB-50G 47154, were captured and interrogated by a KGB counter-espionage unit. When the crewmen refused to co-operate they were classed as spies and dispatched to the Gadhala prison camp in south-central Siberia where they eventually died.”

This jives with a report from an American rescue pilot who said he dropped a lifeboat to a group of four survivors, he saw the survivors swimming toward the lifeboat, and then spotted three more about a half mile from where he dropped the first lifeboat. However, he had to abort because of fog and darkness.



I have read reports saying the aircraft was shot down 26 miles off Cape Povortny and three bodies washed ashore.

Operational reports are sketchy. [The Aviation Safety Net](#) reported that she was shot down seven miles south of Askol Island, near Vladivostok. This report also said that she had violated Soviet airspace near Cape Gamov. Furthermore, it reported:

“What happened next is disputed, according to Soviet reports the fighter pilots instructed the aircraft to land but the gunners opened fire and hit the MiG flown by 1st Lt. Aleksandr D. Rybakov, who subsequently attacked the RB-50 together with his wingman 1st Lt. Yuri M. Yablonskiy and shot it down with cannon fire. US reports claim that the interceptors opened fire first, disabling the RB-50's #1 engine. The gunners then only returned fire in self-defense, but could not prevent another attack that set #4 engine on fire. The RB-50 went in a sharp dive, but parts of the damaged right wing and tail assembly tore off and the aircraft disintegrated and crashed into the sea about two minutes after being fired upon.”

The flight and demise of this RB-50 left some hard lessons learned for the US, ones that would develop over time to protect aircrews. Following this loss, a decision was made to put Russian linguists with some intercept gear aboard all bombers, tasking the operators to warn the pilots of approaching Soviet aircraft.

In this case, the Soviets said the aircraft violated their airspace. The US said the RB-50 was 40 miles off the coast when attacked. Roche insists they were 40 miles out, and said they were attacked without provocation or warning.



The Soviets said the RB-50 opened fire after being told to leave Soviet airspace, causing damage to one of the fighter's fuselage and wings. The Soviets also claimed their fighters were MiG-17s (shown here) rather than MiG-15s, and that they were on alert duty at Nikolaevka airfield. The Soviets said they were launched to protect Vladivostok. The Soviets kept referring to the RB-50 as a bomber.

SIGINT intercepts associated with this shoot down indicated the Soviets watched events for about 54 hours, starting 30 minutes prior to shoot down. Intercepting Soviet air-ground communications had been largely by intercepting HF communications, but Soviet fighters were acquiring VHF communications, which are line of sight. An intercept station in Japan reflected HF Soviet air defense facilities passing 14 positions on the aircraft, which showed the RB-50 as far north as 42 degrees 25 minutes north latitude, far above the planned course south of the 42nd parallel. While no one was sure the tracking was of the RB-50, the feeling was that that's what the Soviets were tracking, and they subsequently tracked rescue forces coming to the area. USAFSS analysts in the US determined the aircraft being tracked was indeed the RB-50 and concluded it was attacked by 9th Air Army fighters based at Korol' airfield north of Vladivostok. Later reports indicated the Soviets thought the RB-50 was about 12 nm southeast of Cape Gamov. I have seen a rough slide of the tracking and to me it does not look like the Soviet tracking placed the RB-50 in violation of anything.

As an aside, the SIGINT collection during the reconnaissance flights in this area was paying dividends. Several Soviet Air Force operational ciphers were broken quickly, including the headquarters in Moscow. US Army cryptanalysts were reading the encrypted radio traffic of the Soviet 9th Air Army and 10th Air Army in the Far East.

#### **USN P2V , Sea of Japan, September 4, 1954**



Two Soviet MiG-15s (have seen reports saying they were MiG-17s) from



Unashi intercepted and shot down a Navy VP-19 P2V (Neptune) on a reconnaissance mission over the Sea of Japan on September 4, 1954. Her home base was Atsugi Naval Airfield, Japan.



The aircraft was over international waters southeast of Cape Ostrovnoi, 33 miles from Soviet territory. She was at 8,000 ft., speed 180 knots, heading 067, to the northeast. The MiGs approached from the rear and opened with cannon fire. The P2V pilot went into an immediate sharp right turn away from the Soviet landmass and entered a steep dive of 2,000-3,000 ft. per minute as an evasion attempt. The skipper reached a cloud bank. The MiGs conducted three more firing passes. The MiGs headed back to but the Neptune had been hit on the third pass, with its port wing on fire. The fire quickly spread through the wing to the fuselage. The skipper ditched her, about 40 miles off the coast of Siberia. The attack and crash site notations on the map are approximations with some guess-work involved. But the underlying point is that this area was a favorite reconnaissance flight area and Soviet area to attack those flights. In short, a dangerous place to fly in those days.

The P2V had ten souls aboard. Ensign Robert Reid, shown here, drowned. He stayed aboard the aircraft trying to push life rafts out the door to the others. It is believed Reid went down with the aircraft when it sunk, which occurred fairly thereafter. The other nine of the ten aircrew were rescued by an USAF SA-16 amphibian aircraft the next day, on September 5. They were Cdr. John B. Wayne, aircraft commander, Ens.



John C. Fischer, Machinist's Mate William A. Bedard, Aviation Electronics Machinist's Mate 3rd Class Frank E. Petty, Aviation Electronics Technician Anthony P. Granera, Aviation Electronic Technician 3rd Class, Texas R. Stone, Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate Paul R. Mulhollem, Aviation Ordnanceman Ernest L. Pinkevich and Aviation Electronics technician 1st Class David A. Atwell.

The son of Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate Paul R. Mulhollem, Britt McKinley Mulhollem, has written this about Ensign Reid's bravery:

"Ensign Reid remained inside the plane to try to push the raft out to my dad (who was already in the water) but at some point must have realized that the plane was going under, and fast! My dad responded to the urging of Ensign Reid, and backed away from the plane, just in time to swim clear before the plane went down. He later said 'It went down in about 30-40 seconds, it went down like a Rock!' When they looked for Ensign Reid, he was gone. He obviously could have left the doomed plane, and swam

to safety of the little raft, but chose to stay and try to release the larger safer raft, giving them a better chance to survive. We feel he should be recognized and his family should know that he indeed was a hero to my dad, and I have no idea if the other crew members consider him to be the hero my dad did, but all you have to do is read the accounts, and you could only come to one conclusion! Ensign Reid died a hero! And I think his family should know it!"

The Soviets initially identified her as suspicious, and then hostile. It looks like the Neptune managed to get some shots off after being hit, as one MiG pilot reported being hit and four minutes after the attack, on his way back to his home field, he reported "oil (pressure in the engine) is 20, only 20." He managed to bring her in safely nonetheless.

The Neptune was a land-based aircraft, designed primarily for anti-submarine patrols. Some models had twin .50 caliber guns in the nose.

P2Vs had a history of conducting reconnaissance against Soviet Far East targets, especially in the Vladivostok and Kamchatka Peninsula areas. Soviet fighters shot one down on November 6, 1951 as reported above. In 1952 several had overflown the Kamchatka peninsula pinpointing targets for the higher flying RB-50s. They were escorted several times by Soviet MiGs without any hostile action.



The P2V under discussion is believed to have been a P2V-5. Some P2Vs had six 20 mm cannons in the nose, some twin 50 cal on the deck, and some twin 20 cal in the tail. If this aircraft was a P2V-5, it had twin 20 mm cannons in the Emerson nose turret (shown in this photo). The opening photo for this incident is a P2V-5.

The US took the case to the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice.

**USAF RB-29A , Sea of Japan, November 7, 1954**



On November 7, 1954, two Soviet MiG-15s from the 10th Air Army Regiment T5350D at Tofutsu, on the Soviet-controlled island of Kunashir in the “lesser Kuriles” attacked and shot down a 91st SRS Yokota, Japan-based RB-29A (42-94000) that was reportedly on a photographic mission over Hokkaido.

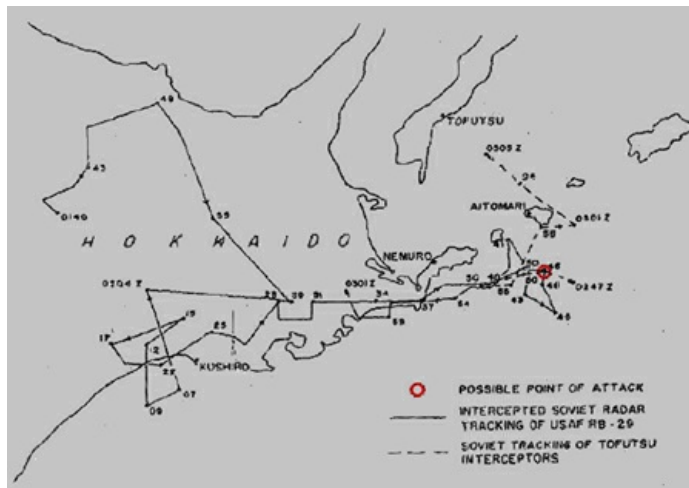


This map shows how close Kinashir, USSR was to Hokkaido, Japan. The Japanese claimed it, the Russians occupied and administered it.

The aircraft's nickname was “Tiger Lil,” and aircraft that had received considerable accolades during the Korean War. This photo shows her after her 25th mission in the Korean War. The aircraft had been stripped of its nickname, the indications of the number of its missions, and its nose art. It was modified to carry high resolution cameras for photo mapping and reconnaissance purposes. It also carried SIGINT intercept equipment.

The mission was to make three passes over Hokkaido for mapping purposes. Even prior to her arrival in the region, MiG aircraft were conducting patrols over the Kurile Islands.

The attack occurred about seven miles from the coast of Japan, 15 miles from the Kurile Island chain. There were eleven souls aboard. The pilot ordered the crew to bail out, and the navigator went out shortly thereafter. However, when the skipper saw the coast, he rescinded the bail-out order and crash landed the aircraft on Hokkaido soil, about ten miles east of the town of Kenebetsu. The remaining crew safely disembarked the aircraft after which it burned. The navigator, 2nd Lt. Sigfredo Angulo, apparently hit a coastal cliff on the way down and died in the ocean.



The Soviets tracked the RB-29 for over an hour before the attack, and scrambled the MiGs. MiGs were flying defensive patrols in the area for about two hours prior to the attack, and continued doing so for about 4.5 hours more after the attack. The Soviets had been tracking the aircraft as suspicious, but six minutes before the attack changed the designation to hostile. The Soviet ground controller vectored the MiGs toward the RB-29, and instructed the pilots, Kostin and Seberyakov, to acquire the target visually. Once they did that, the ground controller gave the order to attack, repeating the command three times over two minutes.

The MiGs closed rapidly from below 10,000 ft while the RB-29 was at 16,000 ft. One of the American gunners, A2C Walter Lentz (shown here), spotted the MiGs and called them out. The aircraft commander was Capt. Anthony F. Feit. He turned his aircraft directly toward Hokkaido, but told his co-pilot Lt. David Oliver he did not think the MiGs would shoot. He felt they were in Japanese airspace. The RB-29 crashed about eleven minutes later.



Lentz would later tell reporters the following:

“They (the MiGs) were pulling up in an inverted dive. They slid under the plane (RB-29) and came back. I saw the first yellow burst and then lost my head, screaming, ‘They’re firing!’”

Lentz then said he turned his twin 50 cal machine guns into firing position and waited for the order to fire, an order which never came.

The MiGs closed and opened fire, then passed below the RB-29 to make a split-S back down to evade return fire. Once clear, they returned for a second pass.

Capt. Feith (shown here) for some reason did not issue the order. He would say later that he wanted to fire back but was subsumed by completing his mission, saying, "...I thought we might be able to finish the mission." He has also been quoted saying, "Much as I would have liked to (shoot back), (I did not) for one reason: we did not get our mission accomplished and either myself or someone else was going back to get those pictures." He would also say, "Then we spotted the two fighters on our right. (Perhaps it was) just a premonition," but he ordered the RB-29 to head straight to the west away from Soviet territory. He added, "A member of the crew informed me that a pass was being made, and in almost the same breath that it was a firing pass and that we were hit. I decided for the safety of the few we should leave."



Feith would later say he saw no advantage in returning the Soviet fire. Lt. David Oliver, the co-pilot, said, "I don't like getting shot at. I was mad. But like the captain said, there was nothing to be gained by shooting at them."

Feith later acknowledged that there were 15 enemy bullet holes 15 inches above the tail gunner's head. His RB-29 was now well within Japanese airspace, only seven miles from the coast. Feith said he never approached closer than 15 miles from any Soviet airspace. He said, "I was approximately nine miles off Hokkaido ... When fired upon, we were even further way (than 15 miles) from Russian territory. We were headed toward land." Feith accused the Soviets of overflying Japan, saying in response to a question on that score, "Yes, I would say they were on their last pass."

Feith said after the crash he radioed for help and learned several US fighters were in the area. Feith told newsmen the MiGs attacked just after he finished the first of his three passes over Hokkaido. He said he was at 17,000 ft. He argued the Soviet fighters were clearly in Japanese airspace.

On the second pass, the MiGs struck the RB-29's wing tank. Flames spewed quickly from the damaged wing tank and engulfed the wing and the engine. Feith felt he could not make it to Hokkaido, so instructed the crew to bail out. All men cleared the aircraft but one drowned tangled in his parachute lines. USAF trucks picked up the crew, the crew was flown to Yokota for examination, all were fit, said to be in excellent condition, and returned to duty. Their aircraft crashed into an unoccupied house on Japanese soil destroying it.



This photo shows Colonel Albert Welsh (right), Commander of the 6007th Reconnaissance Group, and Lt. Col. Raymond E. Gandy (right, foreground), Commander of the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, conferring with the ten surviving crew members. from left to right they are: Sgt. Harold R. Taylor, A3C Wallace Whalen (partially hidden behind Taylor), A1C John Dalton II, 2nd Lt. Henry Sechler, A1C Robert Berry, 2nd Lt Harry Rolins, 1st Lt David Oliver, A2C Walter Lentz, A3C Early Weimer, and Capt. Anthony Feith.

Welsh would later say he would not criticize Feith's decision not to return fire, saying "there must be some misunderstanding in this case." However, he added attacking planes will get a "different reception in any future incidents of this kind." Some press reports said Feith was rebuked for his decision.

#### **USAF RB-47 , off-shore Kamchatka Peninsula, April 18, 1955**



Two Soviet MiG-15s shot down a SAC RB-47E photo reconnaissance aircraft over the Pacific Ocean east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on April 18, 1955. The aircraft was assigned to the 4th SRS, 26th Reconnaissance Wing, Eielson AFB, Alaska. This was a mysterious event. The US was not able to prove the aircraft was shot down, but could assert so based only on circumstantial evidence.



The aircraft flew its mission for about 7.5 hours. Its schedule flight route was to fly southwest along the Kamchatka Peninsula and Kurile Island chain to a point 100 miles northeast of Hokkaido, Japan, and then return. Eielson AFB reported her overdue 12.5 hours into the mission with 13 hours fuel. There were three souls aboard, all unaccounted for: the pilot, co-pilot and radar observer, all seated in tandem, one behind the other. The crew included Capt. Lacie C. Neighbors, aircraft commander; Capt. Robert N. Brooks, navigator, radar observer; and Capt. Richard E. Watkins, Jr., co-pilot.

The US confirmed she was shot down after Russian President Yeltsin's government provided the US-Russian Joint Commission on POW/MIAs with declassified documents revealing the details, in 1992.

The Soviets tracked her, identifying her as a high performance suspicious aircraft for about 41 minutes before the attack. The Soviets also tracked Soviet fighters in patrol for about an hour and 18 minutes before the attack and 30 minutes after. A problem was that US SIGINT sources could not confirm the aircraft had been attacked. No intercepts were made indicating the RB-47E was a border violator or a hostile. SIGINT intercepts also reflected the aircraft over international waters. SIGINT was able to identify fighters from the 10th Air Army Regiment T5302B at Petropavlovsk/Khutor airfield scrambling about 30 minutes prior to the incident. But there was no SIGINT to indicate talk of a shoot down.

Soviet documents showed they began tracking the RB-47E in the vicinity of Cape Lopatka at the southern end of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Soviets tracked her to a point about 43 miles southeast of Cape Vasilev. The Russians acknowledged it had not violated territorial waters, but the local air defense command center on Kamchatka scrambled two MiG-15s to intercept it. They did so about 32 miles east of Cape Kronitski at 39,000 ft. The Soviets claimed the RB-47 fired on the MiGs and the MiGs returned the fire. The Soviet MiG pilots were identified as Korotkov and Sazhin. Shortly thereafter, the RB-47E vanished from Soviet radars. Soviet fisherman in the area saw an explosion and black smoke 13 kms west of Nikol'skoe on the Soviet owned Bering island, which would have put her in Soviet territorial waters.

Incredibly, the Americans did not file a protest because they said they lacked hard evidence of a shoot down. The Soviets said they intercepted no radio transmissions from the RB-47E crew, the American search efforts were conducted in the wrong location, and American ships in the area did not see the shoot down. As a result, the Soviets concluded the Americans had no idea what happened to their aircraft and therefore they made no statement either.

The Soviets felt they had complete understanding of the American search effort, which reflected how good the Soviet SIGINT system was operating by now. The Soviets did find debris from the RB-47 that had washed ashore on Bering Island.

The B-47 was our first swept winged bomber, at the time a radical design that demand professional airmanship. She had six engines and flew something like a fighter. She experienced more than her share of accidents, usually attributable to pilot error. That said, the aircraft was not forgiving. The B-52 replaced her.

#### **USAF RB-50G , Sea of Japan, September 10, 1956**

This is a troublesome and, frankly, unsolved and mysterious incident. The RB-50 was involved in Typhoon Emma, but for sure it was not a typhoon hunter. This was a Strategic COMINT Reconnaissance mission. At the time of it going missing, an Air Force spokesman discounted the idea it was shot down. There is speculation that the aircraft was torn apart by the typhoon. However, the aircraft was in an area where previous incidents occurred. Furthermore, two days after the incident and for several days more Soviet IL-28 aircraft from the Soviet 50th Independent Reconnaissance Regiment at Novorossijskoe were scheduled for 5.5 hour missions in the search area. Days after the incident at least one Soviet submarine was also operating in search operations in this same area.

I have included this loss because there has been controversy surrounding whether it was shot down or lost in a typhoon or crashed for mechanical problems. The consensus seems to be it was lost because of the typhoon or perhaps a mechanical problem in or around the typhoon. What it was doing in the area of this typhoon is mind boggling.

Perhaps more significant, however, is that this was the first loss of a COMINT intelligence platform. In fact, this was its first operational COMINT mission. The RB-50G (47133) had just arrived at Yokota AB, Japan from Greenville, Texas where it had been configured for COMINT reconnaissance.

There were 16 souls aboard, all lost and unaccounted for.

NSA rated this as a "probable shoot down."

This mission was briefed as a top secret reconnaissance mission to be flown at 20,000 ft. over the Sea of Japan, on a top secret route. The crew was briefed on the weather. The crew reported "ops normal" about 20 minutes after takeoff but faded from Japanese defense radars about an hour after takeoff. Her last noted position was about 250 miles northwest of Niigata, Honshu, Japan and 375 miles southeast of Vladivostok, USSR. The mission was to remain on radio silence until about 100 miles from her home airfield on the return. She did not report in, and numerous efforts were made to contact her. Air Rescue missions were flown to no avail.

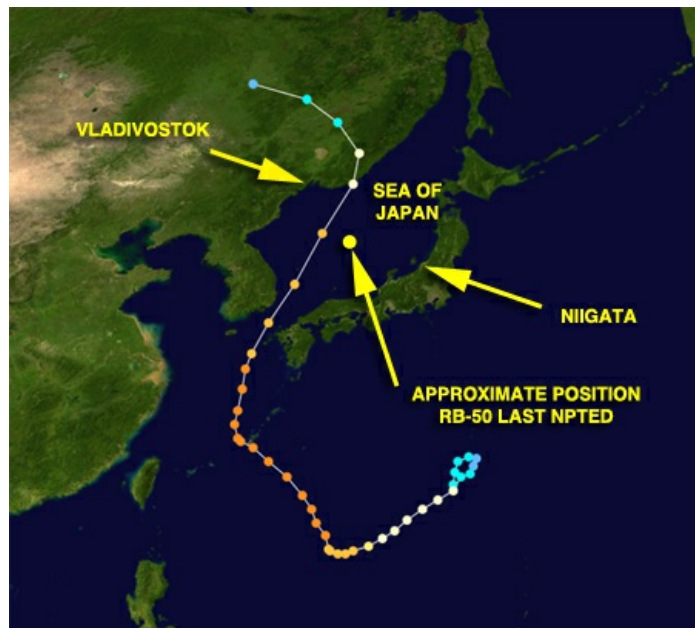
Nine flight crew from the 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron (pilot, co-pilot, three navigators, flight engineer, aircraft radio operator, and two gunners) were aboard along with seven USAFSS people, consisting of four Russian linguists, one manual Morse operator, one airborne technician, and Major Loren Disbrow, the commander of the USAFSS Det 1, 6924th Security



Squadron. The other USAFSS crew included SSgt Raymond D. Johnson, SSgt Theodorus J. Trias, SSgt Paul W. Swinehart, A1C William H. Ellis, A1C Harry S. Maxwell, and A1C Leo J. Sloan.

The 6091st crew consisted of Capt. Rodger Fees, Capt. William McLaughlin, Capt. Pat Taylor, 1st Lt Richard Kobayashi, 2nd Lt Peter Rahaniotes, TSgt Palmer Arrowood, A1C John Beisty, TSgt. Bobby Davis, and A1C Wayne Fair.

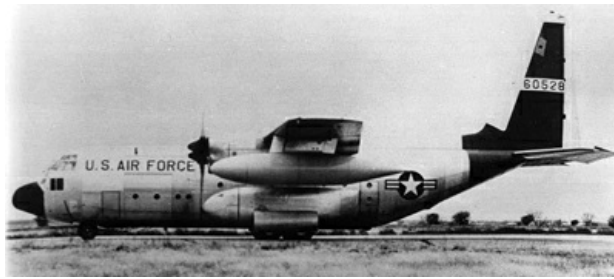
The Russians deny any involvement with this flight. The USAF summarized it, "USAF RB-50 'lost on typhoon,' possibly the result of Soviet fighter attack. COMINT reflected tracking data on Soviet fighters." The inference here is the typhoon may have caused the RB-50 to become a bit disoriented, in which case she was attacked, but she was certainly quite a distance from the Soviet landmass when last seen on Japanese radar.



There is no question but that there was an active typhoon that could have forced the mission off course. That said, the winds were reported at 70-80 knots during the period of the loss. The typhoon track is shown here. The typhoon formed on September 1 and dissipated on September 11, one day after the loss of the RB-50. She was a wild typhoon to be sure, with sustained winds of 155 mph, leaving over 77 people dead. I am guessing that the approximate location where the RB-50 went down is near the yellow dot, which is about 250 miles northwest of Niigata, Japan. So she certainly could have been caught in it. The typhoon was just east of southeastern South Korea on September 10, and crossing over into the mainland on September 11.

Bernie Barris of the Air Reconnaissance Weather Association said, "This aircraft was not lost in a typhoon penetration, nor was it shot down by the Soviets, as was often speculated. It was an RB-50G on a Strategic Reconnaissance mission. Everything I've read is that they were on the fringes of the typhoon, but more than likely the plane was lost due to mechanical problems, which plagued the B-50 in the 1950's. The typhoon did impact search efforts. The Soviets never released any records of tracking or attacking this flight; it is one of those true Cold War mysteries."

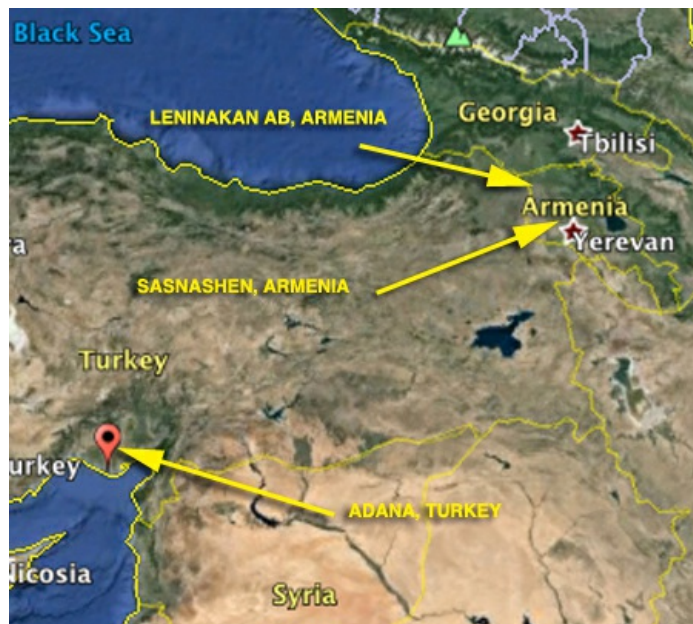
**USAF C-130A , Soviet Armenia, September 2, 1958**



By this time in the SIGINT reconnaissance evolution, the USAF and NSA had come to realize the importance of what they called the Airborne COMINT Reconnaissance Program, ACRP. In 1958, the USAF allocated eight C-130A transports to USAFSS to replace the RB-50s and improve overall effectiveness. The C-130s carried 10 intercept positions. It first arrived at Rhein Main AFB, Germany in July 1958. This is a photo of the aircraft lost on September 2, 1958, #60528.



Four Soviet MiG-17 fighters from the 11th Air Army from Leninakan AB attacked and shot down a C-130A (60528) after it had mistakenly crossed into the airspace of Soviet Armenia on September 2, 1958. The aircraft had a front end crew of six from the 7406th Support Squadron and The eleven USAFSS crew members included nine linguists (five Russian, two Romanian, one Bulgarian and one Serbo-Croatian) and two airborne maintenance technicians from Det 1, 6911th Radio Group Mobile. They staged out of Incirlik AB, Adana, Turkey. The photo shows the aircraft that was lost. There were 17 souls aboard, all lost.



The aircraft crashed on Soviet soil, near the village of Sasnashen, 35

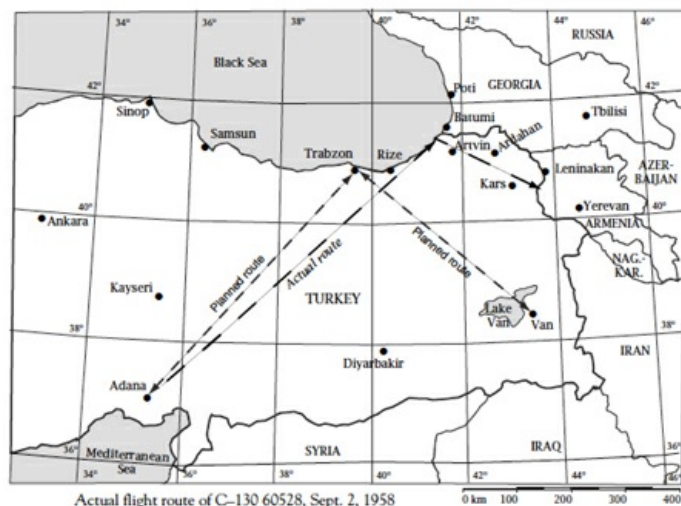
miles northwest of Yerevan, the Armenian capital. This area was in the Tbilisi Air Defense District. The C-130 definitely entered Soviet airspace. The MiG pilots reported clearly that they had shot the aircraft down and that it had crashed. Soviet air warning facilities broadcast a message saying, "target destroyed." NSA has recordings of the Soviet pilot conversations, so there is no doubt what they did. The US played the tapes to the Soviet ambassador who refused to listen.

The crew included the following: Capt. Paul Duncan, Capt. Rudy Swiestra, Capt Edward Jeruss, 1st Lt. John Simpson, Lt. Ricardo Villareal, MSgt. George Petrochilos, A1C Robert Oshinskie, SSgt Leroy Price, Tsgt Arthur mello, A2C Gerald Maggiacomo, A2C Clement Mankins, A2C Robert Moore, A2c Archie Bourg, Jr., A2C Harold Kamps, A2C Joel Fields, A2C James Ferguson, Jr., and A2C Gerald Medeiros.



The Soviets returned six sets of remains and denied having knowledge of the other 11. However, a US Army team went to the crash site in 1993 and recovered the rest of the remains, including more than 2,000 bone and tooth fragments, life support equipment, personal effects and the aircraft wreckage. The photo shows the casket containing the remains of the crew being escorted to the gravesite in Section 34 of Arlington National Cemetery by the US Air Force Honor Guard, September 2, 1998.

The MiG-17 was a sub-sonic (0.93 Mach) aircraft designed to intercept enemy bombers generally on straight and level flights. It was not meant to be a dog-fighter. Once the US developed a bomber that could accelerate to supersonic speeds, the MiG-17 lost much of its glamour and was replaced by the MiG-21 and MiG-23. Many air forces throughout the world bought into the MiG-17 program and it saw plenty of combat with the North Vietnamese Air Force. I have read accounts that suggest pilots much preferred the MiG-15 and that the MiG-15 was more of a threat. But against an unarmed C-130, there was no question who would win.



**Graphic from the book, *Price of Vigilance*, by Larry Tart. Please allow me this opportunity to thank Larry for the help he provided on producing this report.**

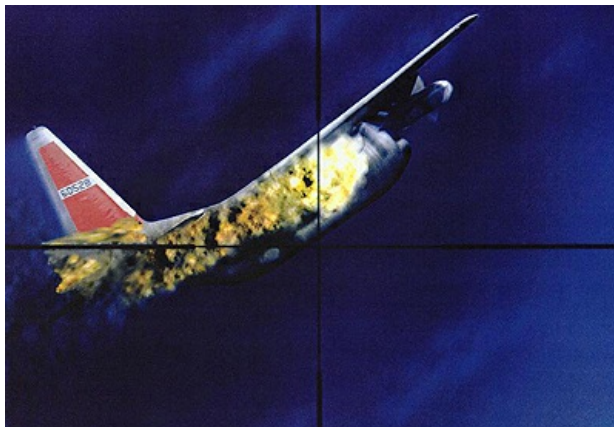
The mission plan was to fly from Adana to Trabzon, Turkey on the coast of the Black Sea, and turn right to Van, Turkey in southeast Turkey, and then fly a racetrack pattern between the two. The course would parallel Soviet territories. The crew checked in from Trabzon at 25,000 ft. and was never heard from again. The yellow approximates the planned flight route, the red arrow approximates the C-130 going off course and into Armenian airspace.

The weather was reported as good. There was no attempt by the Soviets to contact the C-130 or force her down.

The intercepts of the Soviet pilot and ground controller transmissions were very revealing. This is a brief summary:

The intercepts revealed three Soviet fighters, track numbers 582, 201, and 218. Track 581 was based at Yerevan while the other two were based at Leninakan. All three attacked the C-130. A fourth pilot, 577 was scrambled from Yerevan and patrolled the area after the attacks.

Pilot 582 reported he saw the target, a large one, altitude 10,000 meters. The fighters were already at that altitude. Pilot 201 said, "I see the target, attack!" 201 went on to say right away, "I am attacking the target." 582 acknowledged the attack was underway. There was a bit of chatter about attacking, but it is hard to tell if they had actually fired yet. What is clear is that several of the pilots were shouting "attack, attack, attack," and getting a response, "I am attacking." 201 then reported the target speed was 300, he was flying along with it, and it was turning toward the fence, a usual reference to the border, assuming he turned toward the Turkish border. Then, all of a sudden, 201 reported the target is burning. 582 exclaimed, "That's a hit." 201 said the target was burning and going toward the fence. 218 then said he was attacking. They reported the target burning and the tail falling off. One pilot said, "Look at him, he will not get away, he is already falling." They said they saw him falling, and one of the pilots said he would "finish him off, I will finish him off on the run." They talked about the target losing control and going down, then turning over. 582 was ordered to attack after the C-130 had already been hit and was burning. The Soviet pilots then coordinated for their return to home base. Throughout the engagement, there seemed to be a sense of excitement and almost disbelief that they actually shot the aircraft down. The pilots had gunsight imagery of the attack.



This photo is an enhanced photo taken from the gun camera of a Soviet MiG-17 after the C-130 was hit. This loss has been controversial because, frankly, it was a "turkey shoot" for the MiGs. This aircraft was a transport,

a slow mover, unarmed, and alone.

The Soviet paper *Sovietskaya Aviatsiya* reported what occurred inside the ground controller's area, all in glowing terms, describing how capable the team of controllers was, how on top of the situation they were, and how accurate the navigator's intercept calculations were. There was a dust storm at the area from which the fighters would launch, and some confusion about whether to take off or not. The controller was in no mood for this excuse, and ordered them to take off regardless. The mission was solely to intercept the "enemy" aircraft.

What is a bit mysterious about this event is that the C-130 was in Turkish airspace at the time the MiGs were scrambled to conduct defensive patrols. Soviet radar tracking confirmed this. Then, about 24 minutes after being detected and eight minutes before being attacked, the C-130 turned due east and crossed into Soviet Armenian airspace. Soviet ground controllers hopped on this immediately and vectored the fighters toward the C-130. The Soviets changed their identification of her from "hostile/unidentified" to "intruder."

It was routine procedure for the Soviet air defense system to scramble defensive fighter patrols when American reconnaissance aircraft approached their borders and this incident turned into a shoot down after the C-130 inadvertently violated Soviet air space. It was also routine for Soviet tracking stations to identify a non-Soviet track as "unidentified," then change it to "hostile" after identifying it as a foreign (US) aircraft and then as an "intruder" as it penetrated Soviet airspace.

Up until this event, the US had no systematic way of informing its ACRP crews that the Soviets had or might have cause to attack them. For example, the US might be intercepting Soviet tracking indicating the ACRP was off course and closing on or flying over Soviet territory, but could not get word to the aircraft crew. Following a C-130 ACRP grounding, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered development of an Advisory Warning Plan which evolved over the years to protect such reconnaissance flights.

When the villagers heard the crash, many rushed to the scene to try to help the airmen. Every year since the crash, the local villagers would go to the site and place flowers on a memorial erected by Armenia.



Then in 1993 the villagers built a formal monument with plaques that read:

"We must never forget that freedom is never really free. It is the most costly thing in the world. Freedom is never paid in a lump sum. Installments come due in every generation. All any of us can do is offer the generations that follow a chance for freedom."

#### **USAF RB-47H , Barents Sea, July 1, 1960**



A Soviet MiG-19 flown by Vasili Poliakov shot down a RB-47H (53-4281) electronic reconnaissance mission over the Barents Sea between the Kola Peninsula and the Soviet island of Novaya Zemlya on July 1, 1960. The aircraft and crew were from the 343rd SRS, 55th Reconnaissance Wing home-based at Forbes AFB, Kansas. They flew this mission out of RAF Brize Norton, United Kingdom. There were six souls aboard.

The plane was crewed by Maj. Willard Palm, aircraft commander; Capt. Freeman Bruce Olmstead, pilot; Capt. John McKone, navigator; and three reconnaissance officers (Ravens): Maj. Eugene Posa, Capt. Dean Phillips and Capt. Oscar Goforth (this was Capt. Goforth's first and only

operational mission). Each crewmember was advanced one rank after this incident as indicated above.



That a MiG-19 was employed came as a surprise to the US, who thought there were only MiG-17s in this area. The MiG-19 was the Soviets' first serial production supersonic jet fighter. She had 2 x Tumansky RD-9B afterburning turbojets; max speed was 909 mph, range 1,375 mi, service ceiling 57,400 ft., 3 x 30 mm cannons, unguided rockets, 4 Vypel K-15 air-to-air missiles and she could carry 550 lbs in bombs. The main combat seen by the Soviet MiG-19 was against US reconnaissance aircraft. Her design was to escort Soviet bombers. But she had many problems, mostly due to being rushed into service. The Soviets quickly replaced her with the MiG-21. Nonetheless, she was a formidable aircraft as we learned during the Indochina War. She saw extensive use during American Linebacker I bombing missions against North Vietnam in 1972.



Some reports say all bailed out successfully. However, other reports say only three bailed out, Palm, McKone and Olmstead. The three reconnaissance officers were unable to eject. Only two survived the frigid waters McKone and Olmstead. A Soviet fishing vessel picked them up after they had spent about six hours floating in a raft. They were both imprisoned at Moscow's Lubyanka prison in separate cells, accused of espionage for violating the Soviet frontier. They said they were interrogated every day, but managed to resist answering the revealing questions about their work. The Soviets released them seven months later. The Soviets returned Major Palm's remains to the US about a month after the shoot down.



Lubyanka was the headquarters of the KGB and was used by the Soviet secret police.



This is a photo of an interrogation room inside the prison taken in 1991 by Igor Gavrilov for Getty Images.





The RB-47 launched from RAF Brize Norton five hours prior to it being attacked. It flew north along the coast of Norway, and entered the Barents Sea turning southeast to follow a preplanned flightier route parallel to the Kola Peninsula, Kolguyev Island and Novaya Zemlya. The RB-47 passed Murmansk about 15 minutes before the attack.

Oleg Penkovskiy, a senior Soviet military intelligence officer who spied for the British and American intelligence in the early 1960s, said this:

“The US aircraft RB-47 shot down on Khrushchev’s order was not flying over Soviet territory; it was flying over neutral waters...When the true facts were reported to Khrushchev, he said: ‘Well done boys, keep them from even flying close.’ “

Vasili Poliakov, the MiG-19 pilot who shot down the RB-47, was from the 206th Air Division at Murmansk. He was sitting strip alert when scrambled. He flew at a distance parallel to the RB-47, then turned toward her on an intercept course, but about three miles behind her.

Capt. McKone, the pilot, was about to turn to the northeast when the MiG returned, and approached the RB-47 in close formation, at about 40 ft. off the right wing of the RB-47. He rocked his wings to tell the RB-47 crew to land, which the American crews were told not to do. The RB-47 gave no response, the ground controller gave the command to destroy the aircraft. The RB-47 was at 30,000 ft. and 425 knots, and turned to his left. The MiG-19 turned right toward the shoreline, then turned back toward the RB-47, and opened fire. He hit the left wing, two of his three starboard engines and fuselage on his first pass. Both engines were lost. That sent the RB-47 into a tail spin. The two pilots, Palm and Olmstead, were able to stabilize the aircraft and Olmstead opened fire with his tail guns, but was no match for the MiG-19. The MiG-19 made a second firing pass o finish her off. The pilots again tried to stabilize the aircraft but failed, and the skipper ordered a bail out. It is thought the three reconnaissance officers were trapped in what was a converted bomb bay for their seats and equipment and were unable to bail out.

There were considerable COMINT intercepts of the event. The Norwegians provided voice intercepts. An advisory warning under the new program was issued but if it reached the crew at all, it would have been too late.

Henry Cabot Lodge, the US ambassador to the UN, saw the COMINT intercepts of Soviet tracking of the RB-47. That tracking showed the aircraft “still in the air twenty minutes (after the attack), over the high seas, 200 miles from the point alleged by the Soviet Union and flying in a northeasterly direction.”

#### **USAF RB-66C , East Germany, March 10, 1964**



Three, possibly four Soviet fighters based at Wittstock and Zerbst attacked and shot down an USAF RB-66C (54-0451) on a photoreconnaissance mission scheduled along the West-East German border on March 10, 1964. The RB-66 mistakenly flew into East German airspace when it was shot down. It had three crew, all of whom bailed out and were repatriated days later. The RB-66 from the 19th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) staged out of Toul-Rosieres Air Base, France. The crew included Capt. David Holland, pilot; Capt Melvin Kessler, navigator instructor; and 1st Lt Harold Welch, listed as a navigator and electronics officer.

Now, while we are saying photoreconnaissance here, frankly I am not sure this is totally right either. I have seen reports that said she was on a training mission and was going to do high-low-high photo missions over Osnabruck, West Germany, well west of the East German border. While that might be true, she also could have been collecting electronic impulses from East Germany either to train for electronic countermeasures (ECM) missions or for other operational reasons.



I have seen reports that this was an RB-66A and others saying she was the "B" model. I am not comfortable with those reports. The RB-66A first flew in 1954, and to my knowledge only five were built for photoreconnaissance. She had a maximum speed of 585 mph, range of 1,800 miles, and ceiling of 43,000 ft. The RB-66A experienced many problems and the entire B-66 program was almost cancelled. She did not handle well, her landing gear doors did not function correctly, and vision from the cockpit was poor. Her handling issues included: aircraft flight control system proved to be unreliable, the aircraft's wings vibrated excessively, and the aircraft had the dangerous property of pitching up unexpectedly. Douglas Aircraft, the manufacturer, worked to correct these problems. I have seen a credible report that said none of the RB-66As were ever used operationally, and instead were used for testing.

As far as I can tell, the B-66B was modified into EC-66B electronic countermeasures (ECM) aircraft. Only 72 B-66B were built, of which 13 were modified to be EB-66Bs, many for the Indochina War where they provided ECM jamming escorts for aircraft flying missions over North Vietnam. These were followed by more advanced RB-66Cs/EB-66Cs which had distinctive wing-tip pods, which you can notice in the opening photo, and then the EB-66E.



Both Holland and Kessler bailed out over East Germany and were unhurt; Lt. Welch broke his arm and leg, and was treated in West Germany after release. The photo shows Capts. Holland (left) and Kessler (right) after their release.



This photo shows Lt. Welch being transferred to hospital from an USAF evacuation aircraft. Not in this photo is his broken right arm.

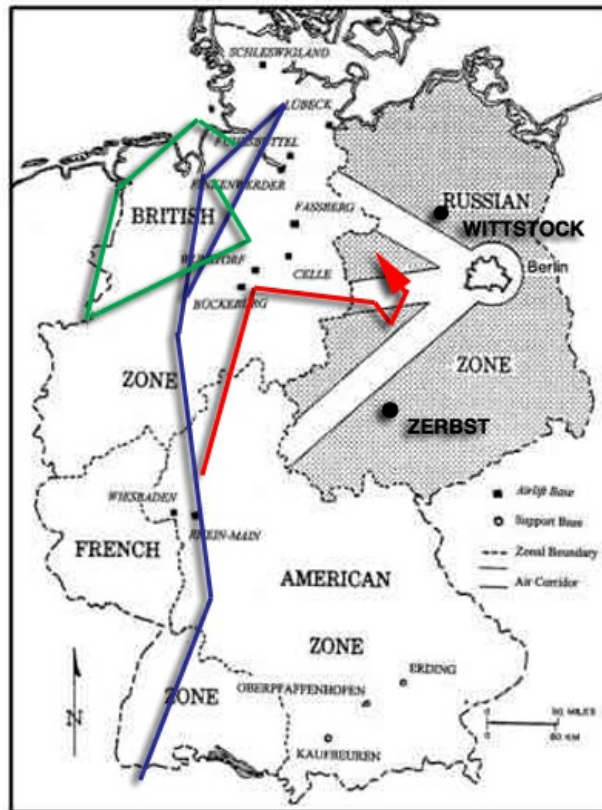
An USAF fact-finding board reported that “a gross navigation error result from the N1 compass system led the crew to believe they were on a correct magnetic course when actually they were not ... (There was also a) lack of complete crew coordination and failure to cross-check the plane’s position by other navigational means available.” US controllers in West Germany followed the RB-66 closely and tried to warn the crew to return, but received no acknowledgment.

Later on, Major Verne Gardina, a highly expected RB-66 navigator investigated the incident. The web site [spyflight.co.uk](http://spyflight.co.uk) reported that he determined the following:

“The cause of the navigation error was eventually narrowed down to the RB-66’s compass system. Maj Verne Gardina had experienced a similar error before, but luckily it happened over the USA and not East Germany. He proved that, if the RB-66 delta-wound N-1 Compass system mounted in the left wingtip malfunctioned, once the auto-pilot was engaged the aircraft would drift further and further to the right - exactly what had happened to Capt Holland’s aircraft. Maj Verne Gardina’s detailed investigation into this incident proved that the aircraft equipment, rather than the crew, was at fault and Capt Holland and his crew were cleared of all responsibility for the loss of the RB-66B. Capt Holland returned to flying

duties and in the Vietnam War is credited with 146 missions in the EW version of the RB-66, the EB-66.”

The aircraft was shot down near Magdeburg, East Germany, at a place called Gardelegen, west of Berlin. While four MiG-19s were scrambled from two bases, and all four attacked, it is believed that Capt. F. Zinoviev of the 35th Fighter Air Regiment actually was the one to make the kill.



The blue track shows the planned course for high level course, the green for the low level course. The red track is of Soviet tracking of the actual flight route into East German airspace. You will recall the fighters launched from Wittstock to the north and Zerbst to the south. For those perhaps too young to remember divided Germany, following WWII the country was divided into four sectors, each of the Allies getting one sector. The Soviets got all of what was called East Germany. Berlin was located in the heart of East Germany and each Ally claimed the right to fly in and out of Berlin. As a result, three air corridors were established which are shown. There were also highway corridors set up.

The Soviets tracked the RB-66 and about 14 minutes before being shot down, it made a sharp right turn off its northern flight route and proceeded due east, straight into East German airspace. The RB-66 then turned to the southeast, departed the Berlin corridor, and then turned sharp to the north. It then descended to 33,000 ft. The Soviets attacked when the RB-66 was somewhere between 21,000 and 14,000 ft.

Once the Soviets saw the RB-66 approaching the East German border, the Northern Fighter Corps (NFC), which already had one MiG-19 from Wittstock on a defensive patrol, scrambled another. Both headed toward the RB-66. The Southern Fighter Corps (SDFC) also scrambled two MiG-19s out of Zerbst about two minutes before the RB-66 entered East German airspace.

The Soviet pilots reported seeing the target. One said he was flying right with the RB-66 and would start his attack run. He reported overtaking the RB-66, he said he had readied two cannons, he reported the “intruder” turning to the left, said it was a swept wing jet, told the ground controller to

move another MiG-19 away from him so he did not shoot him, and then said he fired and hit the target. One of the pilots, perhaps that one, said he would attack again and reported the aircraft as a B-66. They said it was burning, going down, banking somewhat to the right, going then into a left turn with its bank getting steeper. The pilots reported seeing chutes open, first two, then three, and then reported the aircraft crashing and exploding on the ground.

Of course, this was not good. However, the SIGINT community gained a lot of knowledge from this attack. The Army Security Agency (ASA) and USAFSS had multiple ground stations either close to the East German border or in West Berlin, and they all picked up a good deal of VHF air ground voice, UHF multichannel clear voice, conventional tracking, tracking employing a special data system known as SWAMP, ELINT from one of the fighter's airborne intercept radars, known as Scan Odd, in the firing mode, and Berlin Corridor controller communications trying to alert the RB-66 to an impending attack.

Perhaps coincidentally, the Soviets right at this same time were preparing to conduct a series of simulated nuclear strikes on the area of Stendal, East Germany. The RB-66 with a tactical photoreconnaissance capability was flying directly toward Stendal making a descending pass.

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Perhaps the most curious point in my mind is why the US never retaliated with military force for any of these attacks. The only reason I can think of is that the US was deathly afraid of getting into a war that could go nuclear with the USSR. The Soviets did not seem to worry about that so this remains a mystery to me. Whatever the case, the US and most notably the British continued these kinds of flights throughout the Cold War. A major outcome of these shoot downs is that the US establish an Advisory Warning Program known as "White Wolf." This was not an easy program to implement, but once done, and once operating, there were no more shoot downs. Reconnaissance aircraft were warned they were off course and could adjust, and they warned of fighters in the air, and could adjust, and they warned of possible hostile intent by the Soviets and could abort and take evasive action if required. Many or most of the US reconnaissance missions carried linguists aboard who could listen to fighter-ground controller communications for any evidence of hostile intent.