

Fighter air/ground communications related to the incident indicated that the weather in the area was good for flying ; the cloud cover was reported as "from two to three tenths." ¹ No attempt was made to warn the C-130 or to force it down intact.

On 12 September 1958, in reply to the State Department's note, the Soviet Foreign Ministry told the U. S., ~~that a missing U. S.~~ that a missing U. S. Air Force transport plane had crashed in Soviet Armenia, killing six of its crew. The State Department, announcing this, further stated that Moscow had provided ^{no} information on the eleven other members of the crew. It said that instructions¹ had been sent to the U. S. Embassy in Moscow to press the Soviet Government on an "urgent basis" to locate and return the eleven members of the crew on whom no report had been made.

Implicit in the State Department's statement was the charge that Soviet fighters shot the plane down, September 12. The statement said Soviet fighter^s planes had intercepted an aircraft identified as a C-130 in the area of the Turkish-Soviet border near the city of Kars.

The course of the C-130 was directed eastward under the control of Soviet aircraft, the State Department said. Following this a sound of an explosion was heard and a column of smoke was seen rising from behind a range of hills within Soviet territory. ²

The Soviet version of the incident as reported by the State Department, was that the plane had penetrated for a significant distance into Soviet airspace and had fallen within Soviet territory and had thus intentionally violated the Soviet border.

Following is the text of the State Department's statement, issued 12 September 1958, on the crash of a U. S. plane in Soviet Armenia:

On September 6, 1958, the U. S. Government in a note to the Soviet Government requested any available information concerning an unarmed United States Air Force C-130 transport plane, carrying a crew of seventeen men, which had disappeared September 2, 1958, during a flight within Turkey from Adana to Trabzond (Trebizond) to Van and back to Adana.

The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the American Embassy at Moscow today that the remnants of a destroyed and burned airplane had been found at a point fifty-five kilometers northwest of Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Socialist Republic, and that judging by remains discovered there it may be assumed that six of the members of the crew perished. 1

The Charge d' Affaires of the U. S., at Moscow, Richard H. Davis, pressed the Ministry for information about the eleven men unaccounted for. The Ministry did not provide further information on this point. The Charge requested that a further search for the missing men be made, that an Embassy officer or other United States official be allowed to visit the site of the crash and that arrangements be made to transfer to the United States authorities the remains of the six crew members.

The investigation conducted by the Air Force in Europe elicited information to the effect that an aircraft identified as a C-130 was intercepted at about 2:55 P. M., on September 2, by fighter planes in the area of the Turkish-Soviet border near Kars. The course of the C-130 was then directed eastward under the control of the Soviet aircraft. Following this, the sound of an explosion was heard and a column of smoke was seen rising from behind a range of hills within the Soviet territory.

The investigation conducted by the U. S. Air Force in Europe elicited information that an aircraft identified as a C-130 was intercepted about 2:50 P. M., on 2 September by fighter aircraft in the Turkish-Soviet border near Kars. The course of the C-130 was then diverted eastward under control of the Soviet aircraft. Following this, the sound of an explosion was heard, and a column of smoke was seen rising from behind a range of hills within Soviet territory.

Instructions were sent to the American Embassy at Moscow to press the Soviet Government on an "urgent basis" to locate and return the eleven members of the crew not accounted for.¹

In a second note to Washington, September 18, the Soviet Government repeated its earlier report that it found six crew members dead aboard the plane. Responding to a U. S. demand for information about the eleven other men on the plane, the note insisted that the Soviet Government knew nothing about them. The note said that the bodies of the six would be returned to the U. S. But did not say when and did not identify any of the dead. The State Department had no comment on the note and would not publish the text.

The Soviet Government acknowledged finding the wreckage and the six bodies -- ten days after the crash.

After the first incident, the Moscow Government charged -- as it did this time -- that the plane was a deliberate intruder.

On Sunday, September 21, the U. S. Government appealed to the Soviet Government on humanitarian grounds for some information about

¹

New York Times, 13 Sep 1958.

the eleven flyers missing since September 2. The Russians also denied
the plane was flying ~~west~~^{last} in the custody of Soviet interceptors and held to the
contention that it "fell" about 35 miles northwest of ~~Yerevan~~ Erevan. The
U. S. message was reported to have appealed to the Soviet authorities on
behalf of the families of the seventeen flyers involved. It explained that
for nearly three weeks they had been without a clue to the ~~whereabouts~~ where-
abouts of the flyers and even without information as to which six men
perished.¹

Last Saturday, the United States asked the Soviet Union and Iran to help in the search for the plane.

Last night Washington disclosed that its own investigation had turned up witnesses who said that they saw the plane being escorted eastward from the Soviet-Turkish frontier near Kars by Soviet fighters at about 2:00 P. M., September 2. The witnesses heard an explosion and saw a column of smoke from behind a range of hills in Soviet territory.

Presumably these details also were ~~included~~ contained in today's note. Moscow placed the crash scene at about thirty-five miles northwest of Erevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia. This imprecise location could be close to the frontier.

The Soviet Government, in its first note, avoided all mention of the other crew members and finally denied knowing anything about them:

Throughout the correspondence, Moscow maintained that the plane had deliberately violated Soviet air space and that therefore the U. S. bore full responsibility for consequences of the incident. The Soviet Union also rejected as "provocatory" a State Department suggestion that the fighters had shot the plane down.

In its latest note, delivered to ambassador Lewellyn E. Thompson, Jr., 1950, Moscow said even more strongly that it felt no responsibility for the fate of the plane or of its crew, and ended by saying, "We recommend asking those who gave the order to the U. S. plane to violate the border of the Soviet Union and to invade its airspace".¹

At the President's (Eisenhower's) press conference, November 5, 1958, Mr. Warren W. Unna, Washington Post, asked the question, "about a month ago one of our planes went down in Soviet Armenia. The Russians have returned six bodies, eleven are still unaccounted for. What are we doing to clear up this picture?" The President answered, "Well, all you can do with a government such as the Soviet's. You protest, you request more information. So far, it has not been forthcoming."

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Speculation ~~has~~ as to the fate of the missing airmen ranged wide. One view was that the men were taken prisoner^s by local authorities. Another was that they may have been harmed by local citizens and the Soviet Union did not want to acknowledge this.

A near-lynching of crew members involved in a similar incident was recalled. Another theory, not widely held, was that the eleven had managed to escape Soviet authorities and would make their way out of the country. The plane crashed about twenty miles from the Turkish border. Few persons believed that the Moscow Government had imprisoned the men.

In their ceaseless vigil against possible attack, military aircraft have flown "awfully close" to the Soviet Union's territorial waters in the Pacific and elsewhere, official sources conceded.

1 Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jan 1 - Dec 31, 1958. Published by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Services Administration (U. S. Printing Office, 1959).

2 The New York Times.

3 Id.

It is seldom that NSA shows its hand to the extent that it did in releasing the translation of the Soviet fighter's conversations, proving beyond doubt that the C-130 (Hercules) was shot down. It is a classic example of how SIGINT played a role in decision making at the highest level:

A day or so after the shoot down, the National Security Council and the President were informed of the fact that the voices of the pilots had been intercepted and recorded and that there was evidence of meaconing to decoy the Hercules across the Turkish-Armenian border. The President called a meeting of the Security Council to listen to the tapes of the pilots' conversation. The recorded traffic was so incriminating against the Soviets that the President decided the situation warranted their release to the State Department for further action. The Secretary of State called in the U. N. Ambassador to hear the recording of the voices and to be briefed on what to say and what not to say when presenting the recordings as evidence before the U. N. The Ambassador returned to New York with the tapes. The Soviet delegates at the U. N. were caught 'flat-footed', but the Moscow Government never acknowledged the their pilots shot the plane down.

As for the meaconing process, that remained unproven.