

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

4/24/69

MEMO FOR

Col. Al Haig

Attached is the unclassified
statement General Wheeler plans to
make to the Pike Subcommittee
tomorrow.

Bob Pendley

*Statement by USNINCECER**to Pike Subcommittee**4/25/89*

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

EC-121 FACT SHEET

In response to a request from the House Armed Services Committee, the following is an unclassified account of the background and facts surrounding the shootdown by North Korean aircraft of our unarmed U.S. Navy EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft in international air-space over the Sea of Japan just before midnight EST on April 14, 1969.

Reconnaissance designed to collect information that can be evaluated for intelligence purposes related to our national security is conducted by a wide variety of means. One important part of our over-all intelligence effort is the collection and evaluation of electronic intelligence.

Certain types of electronic emissions and transmissions can be monitored best by airborne equipment. Other types can be gathered more effectively by ships that can operate on station for more extended periods.

If we ever have to operate against hostile defenses, the lives of many of our men and the success of our operations could depend on our knowledge of such information as the location of enemy troop dispositions, ship and aircraft movements, and radars. This is a task for both surface ships and aircraft. Aerial surveillance missions are flown by all of the Armed Forces.

As the President has noted, we have been conducting reconnaissance missions in the Far East and specifically in the Sea of Japan area since 1950. In 1969 there were approximately

2

190 such missions in the Sea of Japan through March -- all without incident, without threat and without any warning.

All such reconnaissance missions are coordinated, evaluated and approved by appropriate senior civilian and military authorities of the Government.

As to the specifics of the April 14 reconnaissance mission over the Sea of Japan: An unarmed EC-121 of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One, carrying a crew of 30 Navy men and one Marine and some six tons of equipment, took off from Atsugi Air Base, Japan, at approximately 5:00 p.m. EST on 14 April. The aircraft was directed to fly a track from Atsugi to a point off the Musu peninsula on the North Korean coast, make a number of orbits on an ellipse about 120 miles long running from the Northeast to the Southwest and land at Osan Air Base in ROK. The route of the aircraft was over international waters at all times.

During this period one voice transmission was sent from the EC-121 at 6:17 p.m. EST, 14 April and one radio-teletype transmission was sent at 11:00 p.m. EST, 14 April. Both of these messages were routine activity reports.

At a distance some 90 miles Southeast of Chongjin, North Korea, at 11:50 p.m. EST the EC-121 disappeared from radar screens. At 12:04 a.m. EST on 15 April, 14 minutes later, fighters were scrambled from Osan AB toward the intercept area. These aircraft were subsequently relieved by other fighter aircraft.

3

The timing of events, as now constructed, is this:
(all EST)

14 April 1969

About 5:00 p.m. - EC-121 takes off from Atsugi.

6:17 p.m. - EC-121 transmits routine voice message.

11:00 p.m. - EC-121 transmits routine radio tele-type message.

11:50 p.m. - EC-121 disappears from radar screens.

15 April 1969

12:04 a.m. - First fighters scramble to the Sea of Japan.

12:53 a.m. - Fighters take off to relieve fighters launched at 12:04.

1:42 a.m. - First search and rescue aircraft takes off from Tachikawa AB, Japan.

3:40 a.m. - First search and rescue aircraft arrives in search area.

Within less than 15 minutes after on-the-scene evaluation of available information, a high priority message was dispatched and was received in Washington. This high priority message overtook earlier lower precedence messages dispatched on the basis of preliminary information.

The composition of the search and rescue force at various times subsequent to the loss of the EC-121 has been described in briefings and news releases.

Two Soviet destroyers had joined in the search. They were the destroyer No. 429 and the large guided-missile destroyer No. 580. Later the destroyer No. 427 was observed in the area. These three destroyers are the only Soviet ships known to have participated in the search.

Our search aircraft established contact with the Soviet ships. In order to improve communications, a U.S. Air Force radio was dropped to one of the Soviet destroyers. A U.S. Army sergeant who is a Russian linguist was put aboard one of the aircraft dispatched to the search scene.

Our search aircraft located some debris and dropped a smoke signal to mark the spot. One of the Soviet destroyers was guided to the marker, where it put small boats in the water and recovered some of the debris. One of our search aircraft flew low over the Soviet vessel to observe and photograph the debris on the aft deck of the destroyer.

This debris and other debris picked up by our ships and the Soviet destroyer were from the EC-121. Some of the debris had what was reported as shrapnel holes. The debris has been returned to the EC-121's parent squadron at Atsugi for analysis. At this time, there is no definite finding as to whether any of the holes resulted from missile, cannon or machine gun fire.

Debris in the area was not all in the same location. Initially, debris was sighted at 41° 14 N, 131° 50 E and subsequently debris was picked up at various locations as it drifted northward.

5

Debris from some of the locations tended to drift under the influence of a 1 to 2 knot current generally toward the area of the border between North Korea and the Soviet Union. It is possible that some of that debris has washed ashore.

A parachute for each crew member is a part of the EC-121 equipment. There is no way to tell whether any or all of the crew members were wearing their parachute packs and whether the situation at the time of attack and immediately thereafter provided crew members any opportunity to exit the aircraft.

Two bodies were recovered. No survivors have been found.

Surveillance flights in the Sea of Japan area were halted immediately after the EC-121 loss. On April 18 the President ordered that the reconnaissance missions be resumed and that these flights be protected. The President's orders are being carried out.