

~~TOP SECRET~~

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USCIB: 13.5/103

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29 April 1955

~~TOP SECRET~~MEMORANDUM FOR THE MEMBERS OF USCIB:

Subject: Possible Compromise of COMINT Information.

1. FACTS.

a. On 17 January 1955 U.S. Navy R7V aircraft BUNO 131639 outbound from Ernest Harmon Air Force Base, Newfoundland to U.S. Naval Air Station, Patuxent, Maryland crashed in Cabot Straits about fifteen (15) miles from Cape Anguille, Newfoundland. Apparently the aircraft was broken up on impact. Its main portion is now under 250 fathoms of water. The depth and temperature of the water and the ruggedness of the ocean floor at the point of crash makes salvage operations infeasible.

b. This aircraft was carrying thirteen (13) pieces of officer courier material, nine (9) of which are known to have contained COMINT. The location of this material within the aircraft is not definitely known. It can be assumed, however, that the majority of the material was located in the belly compartment which is accessible only from the outside of the aircraft.

c. Currents from the crash site flow in a southerly direction into the Newfoundland fishing areas. French fishing vessels were sighted on 16 March in the general area of the crash. In addition to French and Newfoundland fishermen; Spanish, Portuguese and Russians are expected to fish in the area during the summer. The fishing season commences in early spring and lasts through July or August.

d. Search and rescue operations were carried out from 17-21 January utilizing both air and surface craft. The vicinity of the crash and areas of possible drift were covered. On 21 January these operations were discontinued except for incidental search by surface vessels and aircraft in normal transit through the area. The Flying Safety Officer, Harmon AFB, personally reconnoitered the Newfoundland coast line by air on 4, 7 and 17 February. Royal Canadian Mounted Police headquarters in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia have been alerted to be on lookout for mail bags which may wash ashore or be recovered by natives. The RCMP have been asked to continue this surveillance at least until the end of the fishing season.

e. During the time of the crash and for several days thereafter numerous storms passed through the crash area. Marginal weather existed in the area during the entire search and rescue operations. The best

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weather conditions occurred on 21 January with a ceiling of 1500 feet; visibility 10 miles. Even so nothing was sighted although under more adverse conditions on the first day of search debris sightings were made.

f. Five officer courier pieces (pouches) were recovered intact on the day of the crash within a six mile radius of the crash site. These pouches (the heaviest of which weighed 68 pounds) were found floating on the surface of the water. COMINT material was included in two (2) of these pouches and was not subject to compromise before it was picked up. (The material was watersoaked, but readable.) No significant debris has been recovered since the day of the crash.

g. There are eight (8) officer courier pieces presumed to be still at the scene of the crash. Six (6) of these pieces are cardboard boxes from Port Lyautey addressed to the National Security Agency. These boxes contain raw traffic and other COMINT including TOP SECRET codeword material are fully packed and weigh an average of 32 pounds. The other two (2) pieces are courier pouches addressed to the Department of State. At least one of these pouches contains COMINT (including TOP SECRET codeword) from the 34th RSM in Turkey. One of these pouches weighs 46 pounds; the other 28 pounds. These pouches are of the same construction as those recovered.

2. CONCLUSIONS.

a. The six (6) cardboard boxes containing COMINT, if thrown free of the aircraft at the time of the crash, would, due to the density of the contents, probably float only for a few hours. If these boxes did, in fact, initially float free, they would probably have sunk shortly. Where they might be rolled by currents is a matter of conjecture. However, it seems likely they would disintegrate in a few days. If the boxes are still in the aircraft it can be presumed that they will not now float free.

b. The two (2) pouches, if thrown free of the aircraft at the time of the crash would float judging from the pouches recovered. If these pouches did, in fact, initially float free there is no telling what may have happened to them. If the pouches are still in the aircraft it seems likely that they will not now float free.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS.

a. That the COMINT from Port Lyautey contained in the six (6) cardboard boxes be considered as not compromised.

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b. That the COMINT from the 34th RSM, Turkey contained in the Department of State courier pouches be considered compromised within the meaning of the definition contained in USCIB Directive No. 9.

c. That NSA determine exactly what COMINT was included in the two pouches and that foreign COMINT authorities be notified.

d. That NSA maintain surveillance of the type of traffic involved with a view toward determining what effect, if any, this compromise may have had on COMINT sources, furnishing a report to USCIB only if positive results are obtained.

e. That the results of this investigation be considered by the Security Committee during their forthcoming discussion on air transport of COMINT.

4. The above report is a summary of facts acquired from the National Security Agency, Navy Air Force and the Armed Forces Courier Service. The majority of the information was obtained by Captain Laddie Marin, Air Force Special Security Officer, Pepperrell AFB, Newfoundland. Captain Marin was sent to the scene of the crash on 10 February at the suggestion of the Executive Secretary and the Air Force member of USCIBEC. Three spot reports and a detailed report of investigation have been received from Captain Marin to date. His reports have been invaluable in determining the nature and extent of this compromise. It should be noted that, as in the Keflavik incident, a report of investigation from official sources has not yet been received. The complete files on this investigation are too voluminous to warrant reproduction and circulation to the members. They are therefore being kept in the Office of the Executive Secretary, USCIB, available to any member who wishes to examine them.

5. The above facts and recommendations are submitted in accordance with Section V, CIBD #9, dated 4 February 1954.


RUFUS L. TAYLOR
Captain, U. S. Navy
Executive Secretary, USCIB

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