

U.S. Plane Downed, North Koreans Boast



MISSING PLANE SEARCH AREA

TOKYO (AP) — The North Koreans, who captured the intelligence ship Pueblo, reported their air force shot down a large U.S. reconnaissance plane today. The U.S. Defense Department said a Navy reconnaissance plane with 31 aboard was missing in the Sea of Japan.

Japanese fishing boats joined U.S. planes in a search for survivors. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow asked the Foreign Ministry for the assistance of any Soviet ships in the area.

In Washington, the Defense Department said the Navy EC121 plane was flying "a routine reconnaissance track" that kept it at least 50 nautical miles from the North Korean coastline.

THE PENTAGON did not immediately confirm the North Koreans shot down the huge electronics-packed aircraft but said only that a broad search was launched for the plane and its crew of 31 in the Sea of Japan.

At the Capitol, however, Vice Adm. J. B. Colwell, deputy chief of naval operations, talked as though hostile action was involved.

He called the incident "a clear case of international piracy and a breach of international law." He talked briefly with newsmen before going into a closed session of the House Armed Services Committee. He declined to give further details in public.

AT THE PENTAGON, Daniel Z. Henkin, the Defense Department's chief spokesman, dodged all questions on what may have happened but said "the aircraft was in communication with its base during its mission."

The North Korean news agency, in a broadcast monitored in Tokyo, claimed the plane intruded deep into North Korean air space and was shot down at 1:50 p. m.,

Turn to Page 4, Column 6

NEW ORLEANS
STATES-ITEM

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 1969

VOL. 92—NO. 265

PRICE 10c

U.S. Plane Downed, Say Red Koreans

Continued from Front Page

12:50 p. m., CST, yesterday.

Henkin told newsmen the unarmed plane, jammed with six tons of electronic equipment including radar and gear to intercept radio messages, "was flying a routine reconnaissance track similar to hundreds of missions which have been flown over international waters in that area since 1950."

ABOARD THE PLANE, flying out of Atsugi, Japan, was a crew of 30 Navy men and one Marine enlisted man.

"We have no information at this time which confirms the sighting of any survivors," Henkin said.

The U.S. destroyers Tucker and Dale, based at Sasebo, Japan, were dispatched to the general area, within 200 miles of where the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo and its 83 crewmen were captured last year.

IN ADVANCE OF the two destroyers, the Navy sent a big HC130 Hercules rescue aircraft accompanied by a KC135 tanker and combat patrol cover.

Henkin estimated the two destroyers would reach the search and rescue area about 7 a. m., CST, tomorrow.

Seas in the area were described as moderate with waves of about four feet and winds of 10 to 16 knots. The air temperature was reported 10 to 16 degrees above freezing temperature, with the sea slightly warmer.

The broadcast gave no information on the fate of those aboard.

IT SAID ONLY that the North Korean air force shot the plane down at a high altitude "by showering fire of vengeance upon it."

At the White House, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said President Nixon was awakened "early this morning" to be told about the

missing plane.

Ziegler declined to say just when Nixon was awakened, but said the information was relayed to the President by telephone from Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, his special assistant for national security affairs.

PENTAGON RECORDS indicated this would be the first U.S. plane to be shot down by North Korea in 10 years.

In June 1959 a Navy P4 patrol plane was attacked by a MIG jet in the Sea of Japan about 85 miles east of Wonsan, North Korea. A tail gunner was seriously wounded in that incident but the damaged plane returned safely to a base in Japan.

The U.S. Defense Department said a four-engine Navy EC121 propeller reconnaissance plane based at Atsugi, Japan, has been missing since 2 p. m.

A spokesman said the flight began about 7 a. m. and the aircraft commander was under orders to approach no closer than 50 miles to the coast of North Korea.

THE EC121 IS heavily loaded with electronic gear, as was the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo, which was captured of the North Korean coast on Jan. 23, 1968. The U.S. claimed at the time the ship was in international waters about 25 miles off the North Korean coast.

Search operations today apparently were centered within 200 miles of where the Pueblo and its 83 crewmen were captured. The crew was released late last year.

The missing airplane is a converted Lockheed Super Constellation that has a big hump in the top of the fuselage to carry radar and other monitoring devices.

THE PENTAGON SAID an air search was being made approximately 95 miles southeast of Chongjin, North Korea.

SOUTH KOREAN diplomatic sources said their government was informed the airplane was attacked over the high seas more than 100 miles from the coastline.

The State Department de-

clined to comment on that report, referring questioners to the Defense Department.

Senate Republican leader Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois said congressional leaders were told at the White House this was the eighth reconnaissance flight the plane had made.

DIRKSEN AND Sen. Hugh Scott, R-Pa., the assistant GOP leader, told reporters they were informed the pro-

peller-driven plane was a "sitting duck" for any fighter attack.

They said it was unarmed and unaccompanied on what was described as an "elliptical" course 50 miles off the North Korean coastline.

Reaction in Congress was serious but it stopped short of demands for retaliation.

SEN. JOHN STENNIS, D-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the incident creates "a very grave situation." But he said it would be up to the President and his military advisers to decide on an appropriate response.

Sen. Peter H. Dominick, R-Colo., a committee member, said the United States "should issue a pretty strong

warning" to the North Koreans and should begin providing armed protection for its reconnaissance vehicles.

But he said he is not sure whether the United States should retaliate, saying, "I'd like to learn more of the details first."

SEN. HOWARD W. Cannon, D-Nev., said he would not go so far as to recommend retaliation at this time, but he added the American response "should be much more affirmative if this turns out to be a second Pueblo."

Sen. Stuart Symington, D-Mo., commented, "We can't go on indefinitely like this. Something has got to give. The question is whether or not we are already overextended in our commitments around the world."