

Americans Told in Advance

Soviet Plane Flew Over U.S. Base

By George C. Wilson
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The Russians recently flew right over an American Air Force station in the Aleutians and even radioed ahead that they were going to do it.

This penetration of American airspace met with no resistance, such as sending up fighters, according to informed military officials.

Russian Badger bombers have flown off Alaska's northwest coast in the past. But this recent overflight—which Pentagon officials are still keeping secret—is a rare occurrence.

The overflight is another example of the electronic intelligence (ELINT) game of cat-and-mouse the United States and Russia continue to play.

But, now that both the superpowers have spy satellites as well as elaborate ELINT planes and ships, the game is not as rough as it used to be.

This is not true when the spying extends to a reckless little country like North Korea. It does not have modern reconnaissance equipment—as witness North Korea's seizure of the Pueblo spy ship and the downing of the EC-121 reconnaissance plane.

Some international law specialists contend such desperate acts are to be expected from a little nation that has no counterspy apparatus of its own. Consequently, the argument goes, the Navy should not rely on the international law of the sea and of the air to protect its reconnaissance missions.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, yesterday gave a

House Armed Services subcommittee figures that show the lessening violence in the black art of electronic intelligence.

He said that between 1949 and 1961, there were 33 incidents that resembled the Pueblo and EC-121 disasters. Between 1961 and the present, the general said, there were eight such incidents.

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"All I will say (in open session is that we had seven times as many aircraft destroyed in 1949-61 as from 1961 to this date. Some of the stuff is somewhat sensitive." He added that the planes/losses were "as a result of enemy action."

While he gave no official chronology of the incidents, many are already spread on the public record.

By 1949, the American government had made the fundamental decision to obtain information on Soviet radar defenses. At that time there was widespread concern about Soviet missile development, with varying estimates on how far it had progressed.

Gets Top Priority

In 1950, the Air Force and Navy had given top priority to ELINT aircraft missions to obtain a profile of Russia's radar defense and pick up clues about missile testing. Intercepted radio communications were recorded on tape for

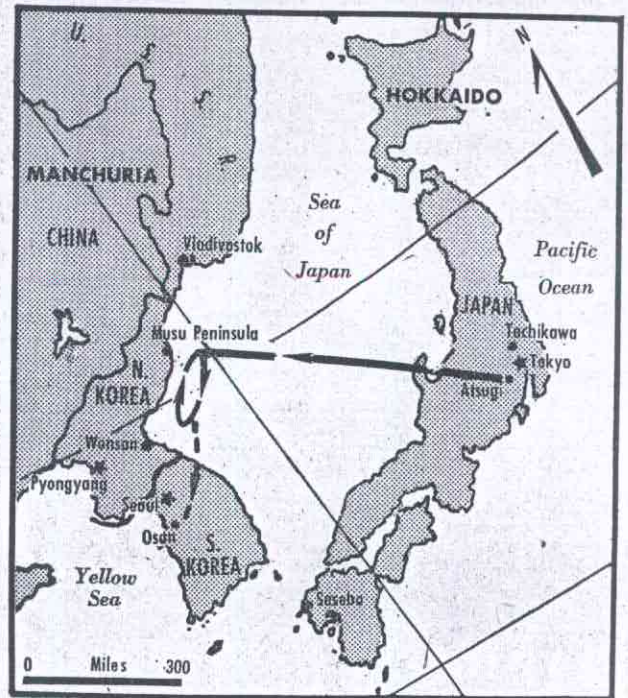
analysis back on the ground—still standard practice.

An ELINT bomber—packed with black boxes instead of bombs—would make a feint at the Soviet border, prompting the defenders to put their radar into action. Then the American plane plotted locations of the radar stations, with the help of direction finders, and recorded the pulse rate and frequency of the warning radar itself. This told how it could be jammed in wartime.

The aerial brinkmanship often continued even after the target country had started firing at the intruding ELINT plane. The crew under fire noted how long it took the gunners to react, what kind of radar control the guns had.

The B-24 bomber was one of the early ferrets. Occasionally, reconnaissance versions of the B-29 and B-50 were used as well. Fancier planes, tailored for the ferret mission, came later. The U-2 and SR-71 are two of these.

But before the high flying



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Flight of the EC-121 is indicated by solid lines. The plane took off from Japan and circled off North Korea. Dotted line represents return flight it was to make.

U-2 came along—thought too high for the Soviet guns or rockets to reach—many of the makeshift reconnaissance planes were shot down.

According to one unofficial estimate, 108 American airmen were killed or captured by the Soviets and its satellite nations while flying ELINT missions between January, 1950, and May, 1964.

In that period there were 38 reported incidents of American reconnaissance aircraft being fired upon by Communist planes, anti-aircraft guns or missiles. An estimated 26 planes were either shot down or forced to land on Communist territory.

An early reported incident of the Cold War ELINT contest came on April 8, 1950, when a Navy PB-4Y2 patrol bomber was shot down. The Russians described it as a B-29 bomber that had been sighted over Leyaya, 13 miles inside Soviet Latvia. Its mission was believed to be studying Soviet missile bases along the Baltic Coast. A life raft from the missing plane was found in the Baltic Sea.

There was also action in those days in the Sea of Japan. Two Russian Migs on Nov. 7, 1954, shot down an American Air Force reconnaissance B-29 about 10 miles off the Russian-held Habomai Islands. On June 15, 1959, a Navy P-4 patrol plane was shot up — but not down — by what was believed to have been two North Korean Migs. The incident occurred 85 miles east of Wonsan, North Korea — the area of the Pueblo's mission.

Downing of Powers

Russia's downing of Francis Gary Powers in his U-2 came on May 1, 1960, and the Soviet Union on July 11, 1960, announced it had shot down an Air Force RB-47 that allegedly had penetrated Russian airspace over the Barents Sea. Two of the six man crew were released by Russia on Jan. 25, 1961.

Thanks to the open society in the United States, Russia does not have to rely as heavily as we do on mechanical espionage. There are no reports of the U.S. shooting down a Russian reconnaissance plane over American territory.