

1950 spy-plane crash: Russ holding

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Navy patrol plane that vanished more than 25 years ago was on a top-secret intelligence mission off Soviet Baltic territory, the Pentagon has disclosed.

U.S. officials also say they have no reason to believe reports that 8 of the 10 crewmen were prisoners in Soviet camps.

After the plane and its crew disappeared on April 8, 1950, the U.S. government gave the impression they were on a training flight from Germany to Denmark.

But a Navy investigating board's report shows the four-engine Privateer was engaged in what was called a "special electronic search project mission," approved by the highest-ranking U.S. admiral in the Eastern Atlantic.

The report, recently declassified, lends no support to recent reports that some of the Navy crewmen may have survived and still be alive inside Russia.

Navy officials said there has been "no credible

evidence" from that day to this that any of the crew escaped the plane and ended up in Soviet prison camps.

The investigating board accepted Russia's official claim that a Soviet fighter shot down the Navy plane. But the Navy disputed the Soviet version on two key points:

- The Soviet government said the U.S. Navy plane opened fire on Soviet aircraft. But the board

survivors?

said the plane was unarmed, except for a small revolver.

• The Russians said the Navy plane was intercepted over Soviet land. However, Navy witnesses told the board the plane was under orders to stay at least 20 miles offshore from Soviet territory, and the board said "it is considered most probable" the U.S. aircraft was over the Baltic Sea when attacked. The investigators apparently based their opinion on the recovery of two life rafts and the

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Section A Page 27

S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle

plane's nose wheel from the sea.

Interest in the mystery was rekindled last week when John Noble, once a prisoner in a Russian labor camp, and private detective Theodore Grevers said they believed at least eight of the 10 Navy crewmen may still be alive. They cited no first-hand evidence, but quoted other former Soviet prisoners.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's plans to look into the case.