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A68 yxxyyr Rescue 510

By PHIL BROWN

Associated Press Writer

TACHIKAWA, Japan AP - "We're coming down, please don't fear," a Russian-speaking American pilot radioed to a Soviet destroyer.

Then followed what the pilot called a "cordial" conversation with the Russians, who were helping U.S. forces search for remnants of an American Navy spy plane shot down in the Sea of Japan last Tuesday by the North Koreans.

The unusual story came out today at a news conference with members of the search teams. They said the wreckage they saw within four hours of the crash was too far from the North Korean coast to back up Communist claims that the plane was intruding in North Korean air space.

The plane was reported missing at 2 p.m. Tuesday.

"At 5:25 the horn blew and at 3:41 we were airborne," said Air Force Maj. George W. Hillyer, 34, Tyler, Tex.

On Wednesday, Capt. Thomas R. Van Winkle, 25, Blum, Tex., came across two Soviet destroyers in the search area and tried to establish contact to ask about possible survivors.

"It never occurred to me that these people would be anything but friendly," he said. "They were obviously trying to help us in this catastrophe."

But the Soviets couldn't understand his flashing light signals, so Van Winkle dropped a small radio that the HC130 Air Force rescue planes use to communicate with pararescue men working the ocean.

The Russian who picked up the radio spoke hardly any English, but Van Winkle remembered that Hillyer's copilot on another HC130 at Osan, South Korea, spoke Russian. He was 1st. Lt. Roy B. Petit, 25, Wenatchee, Wash. Van Winkle radioed Hillyer and Petit to fly out immediately.

When his plane arrived, Petit asked the Russians if the destroyer had picked up any survivors or aircraft parts. The ship replied it had seen no sign of survivors but had some debris on the rear deck. Petit replied the Americans would like to take a look.

"Please don't fear," he told the Russians at the HC130 began descending.

The Russians said "come ahead," Petit said, and the Americans saw a wheel, a ladder and some other aircraft parts displayed.

Then Hillyer headed for the other Soviet destroyer. His crew dropped a radio for which Petit had written instructions in Russian, and another conversation began.

Both ships asked the Americans to direct them to the rescue if they sighted survivors. But Petit said the Russians broke off the conversation when asked about ships Hillyer had seen the previous night in the area.

On Thursday Soviet ship No. 429 broadcast in English: "This is Soviet destroyer 429. Red Banner Pacific Fleet sends condolences on the loss of your aircraft." There was no explanation of "Red Banner."

This broadcast was reported by Lt. Ronald Adinolfi, Hershey, Pa., who said No. 429 went on to ask for a rendezvous with an American ship to hand over the debris it had picked up.

There were some nervous responses at first, apparently because the Russians thought U.S. Navy men planned to come aboard, said Adinolfi. But the Americans finally got the Russians to understand the transfer could be made between small boats from No. 429 and the American destroyer Tucker.

The Russians even returned the little radio, he said.

The last reported position of the missing EC121 plane was about 95 nautical miles from the North Korean coast. Hillyer said the wreckage he saw was perhaps another 45 nautical miles east of that position.

Petit said he was pleased at the chance to use his Russian. His last formal training in the language was in 1966, he said, and he had to strain a bit at first to switch his thinking to Russian after several months of studying Japanese.

Petit majored in Russian studies at Principia College and attended a six-week summer course in Russian at Middlebury Vt. college. He entered the Air Force in September 1966.

Eds: Petit's address 908, Washington St., Wenatchee
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