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1 November 1958

SUBJECT: American C-118 Aircraft Downed in Soviet
Azerbaijan 27 June 1958 by Soviet MIG-17's

On 27 June 1958, a C-118 cargo plane, assigned to the U. S. Air Force in Wiesbaden, was fired on and forced down near Gendarkh, Soviet Azerbaijan. The plane was carrying nine U. S. airmen, (three of whom²⁴ are assigned to this Agency) They are (Colonel Dale D. Brannon, Major^{03,03,03} Robert E. Crans and Major Bennie A. Shupe), (The other six men were²⁴ regular Air Force members) assigned to Wiesbaden, Germany. The nine men were en route from Wiesbaden to Teheran and Pakistan on a flight carrying cargo for CIA. (Col. Brannon and Major Crans were planning to get off²⁴ the plane in Teheran had the plane remained on course.)

The plane, while en route to Teheran from Nicosia and as a result of bad weather and navigation error, went off its plotted course and crossed into Soviet Armenia. There it was intercepted and fired on by three MIG-17's and caught fire in the left wing. Five of the crew bailed out and the other four rode the aircraft down to a safe landing on a small airstrip at Gendarkh in Soviet Azerbaijan. The crew members who had remained on the plane to its landing got out safely and the plane was burning fiercely when the crew last saw it. The part of the crew that parachuted was surrounded by Soviet peasants, some of whom beat and struck at the crew members. One of the men, (Major Bennie Shupe, CIA⁰³ employee) was taken by the mob to a telephone pole and narrowly escaped hanging before being rescued by the Soviet military.

⁰³ (Major Shupe) and the remainder of the crew were turned over to the Soviet military, and after an overnight stay in a Soviet military garrison near Stepanakert were taken to a city believed to be Yevlakh, and then flown to Baku, Russia. There they underwent interrogation by Soviet intelligence officers, at least one of whom had served in the United States, as a Soviet Purchasing Commission employee 1943-45, and later in Canada in 1949-55 as First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy. This RIS officer, Vladimir Bourdine, later served in 1955 as a personal interpreter for Khrushchev in a meeting with Prime Minister Nehru of India. Bourdine interrogated Colonel Brannon of CIA at considerable length during the period 30 June - 3 July 1958, while the crew was imprisoned in the MVD Headquarters building in Baku. Following their individual interrogations, the crew members were required to appear separately before a Commission of Soviet officials at the Baku MVD Headquarters who questioned them about the border violation by the C-118 aircraft, and requested them to sign statements attesting that they had been well-treated and received adequate medical care by the

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Soviets. The inquiry by the Commission was perfunctory and did not involve an interrogation in the intelligence sense. The crew was then transported to Astara on the Soviet-Iranian border on 7 July 1958 and turned over to the American Air Attache.

On 2 July 1958 this Agency received information indicating that the Soviets might be considering releasing the nine fliers. Since no date or place of release was indicated, cables were sent to the various peripheral CIA stations around the Soviet border indicating the possibility of impending release. The Air Force agreed to alert its Air Attaches in the same areas of the possibility of impending release. At the same time a team of Agency personnel, including a medical officer, an Air Maritime officer, and two representatives of the Security Office were dispatched to Wiesbaden from Headquarters in anticipation of the release of the fliers. Three hours after the team arrived in Germany, the place of release was learned from the Soviets to be Astara on the Soviet-Iranian border, and a USAFE plane was dispatched that night from Wiesbaden with the Air Maritime team member aboard destined for Teheran to await the turnover of the American fliers at Astara. The fliers were turned over on 7 July 1958, were immediately flown to Wiesbaden, Germany where an initial joint CIA-AF debriefing of them was begun, and where initial press interviews were held, following careful briefing of the crew as to the text and limitations to be observed. Two days later, two members of the crew, one of whom was 03 (Major Shupe, a CIA employee,) were permitted to give an interview to the Paris representative of Time-Life. Members of the CIA team were present during these press interviews, under appropriate cover arrangements, to furnish guidance (to the CIA personnel)

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Following the initial debriefing, the entire crew was flown to Washington, D. C. on 18 July 1958, for a more extended debriefing. These debriefings were completed on 6 August 1958 and covered the various aspects of possible compromise of the security of CIA personnel, operational and cover units activities,) as well as various positive intelligence and counter-intelligence matters.

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(The three CIA) men aboard the plane were extremely knowledgeable of highly sensitive Agency operational activities and of the identities of numerous CIA personnel. (Colonel Brannon, as Commander of the CIA 03, 24 Air Support Operations in Europe) was knowledgeable of CIA operational activities on a world-wide basis, with many of these projects being extremely sensitive. 03, 03 (Colonel Brannon and Major Robert Crans) each carried briefcases containing classified material, and (Brannon) carried an address book containing several names, addresses and telephone numbers of CIA personnel and cover units. The two briefcases are believed to have been destroyed by the fire in the aircraft after landing. The address book of (Brannon) was taken from him by the Soviet

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peasants on landing and was later turned back to him by the Soviet Commission members at Baku. Neither he nor other members of the crew were questioned about either of the briefcases, their contents, nor about the address book and its contents. We assume that the Soviets have or will process the names in the address book through their Moscow files. Some of the other crew members carried personal notations in their wallets relating to a few other CIA personnel.

We have received no indications that (Colonel Brannon⁰³) or the other⁰³ crewmen were drugged or otherwise tampered with by the Soviets. (Brannon) and some of the others did receive shots the first night and second day from the Soviet military for their wounds and burns; however, these shots are believed to have been for legitimate medical reasons.

The substance of the questioning, treatment and techniques of interrogation has been exhaustively explored with all the crew members in the course of the debriefings. In summation, the interrogations of the crew members were superficial and do not appear to have been backed up by close coordination and communication with Moscow for intelligence research purposes. It is possible that the quick acknowledgment by the Soviet Foreign Office of the landing of the C-118 in Soviet territory precluded the MVD from fully exploiting the crew members.^{03,03} (Colonel Brannon and Captain Kane) were separated from the group and given preferred treatment, apparently with the intention of developing them for information purposes. We are convinced that both men handled themselves extremely well and did not disclose any information concerning the Agency or its activities.

To date we have no indication that the Soviets knew at the time they interrogated the crew men, that the flight of the C-118 was connected with CIA in any way, nor that they knew (three of the men aboard)²⁴ were CIA personnel. We do believe that in time the Soviets, through⁰³ (Brannon's) address book, which lists the open Agency telephone number EX 3-6115 below his name on the first page, will connect him and possibly others in the address book with CIA. Since the Soviets questioned him about the 7170th Support Group and the 7405th Support Squadron in Wiesbaden, it is therefore presumed that they will associate those units with this Agency.

In addition to this report, debriefings of the crewmen were taped and typed, which will total some 7,000 - 9,000 pages when completed, are being distributed to the CI Staff and

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other interested components of this Agency as they are completed. Questions were solicited by this Office of all interested components, in order to cover all matters in the debriefings of interest to the Agency. Careful arrangements have been made with the Air Force in order that Agency interests will be adequately protected and proper security will be maintained in the handling of information and reports derived from the debriefings, and so that no compromise of the Agency interest in the flight of the C-118 will be made to the press.

CONCLUSIONS:

- A. It is our opinion that the possible compromises arising out of this incident are relatively minor in nature and that no major compromises occurred.
- B. That the Soviets "missed" on the true nature of the flight and personnel of the C-118.
- C. That the reasons the crew members were given an early release were as follows:
 1. Primarily, the Soviet interrogators failed to use all of the leads at their command, particularly (Brannon's) ⁰³ address book, and failed to break the crewmen through interrogation.
 2. The crew did not inadvertently disclose through interrogations, the purpose of their flight, its relation to the Agency and that of (three) ²⁴ of its crew to CIA.
 3. The Soviets apparently ⁰³ failed to check out the names and other data in (Brannon's) ²⁴ address book through their files prior to release of the crew.
 4. No incriminating information or material was immediately recovered from the burned aircraft.
 5. Several of the crew destroyed incriminating building passes and notations in their wallets while on their way down in their parachutes, or immediately after landing in their chutes.
 6. There were either no leaks or insufficient leaks of incriminating information through any room conversations at Baku among the crew, which may have been monitored by the Soviets, or such conversations as there may have been were not properly interpreted, or interpreted soon enough to tip the Soviets that there was something unusual about the flight or the crew.

7. The crew members were all in uniform and not in mixed civilian and Air Force clothing, which properly established their cover.
 8. Sufficient pressures were exercised by Agency, State, Air Force, and Executive action upon the Soviets to effect the release of the crew as soon as possible.
 9. A factor that probably had an important bearing was the early acknowledgment by the Soviet Foreign Office of the downing of the aircraft and the attempts by the Soviets in the early stages to make this appear as a deliberate violation of the Soviet air frontier. This tended to take the "play" away from the MVD and military intelligence. In addition, this Government was stepping up the pressure for the release of the nine Army personnel who landed in East Germany in a helicopter, and the Soviets probably had no desire to create a duplicate of this incident.
 10. Safeguards taken by the Agency and the Air Force were such that there was no leak to the press, during the crew's internment, of the fact that there was an intelligence connection of the flight and crew of the C-118.
- D. That it is not believed, based on the evidence at hand, that the crew was drugged or otherwise tampered with medically.
- E. That there are valuable points of guidance from a cover, operations, policy and code of conduct standpoint which can be gathered from experiences of these crewmen in the hands of the Soviets and can aid the Agency and its personnel in any future situation of a similar nature in which the Soviet military and RIS interrogators are encountered.

ACTION TAKEN TO SAFEGUARD AGENCY INTEREST IN THIS MATTER:

- A. All possible steps were taken during the period immediately preceding and immediately after the release of the crew to effect the minimum of publicity and to safeguard and limit such publicity as was given out, in order to avoid disclosing the CIA connection of the flight and some of its crew.
- B. Throughout the entire debriefing process in Germany and in the U. S., the maximum care has been taken to safeguard the information taken by transcript and classify it so that there would be access to the information therein on a need-to-know basis and by only properly cleared persons.

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- C. Steps were taken immediately by the (German Station) after the downing of the C-118 to change the combinations of the safes and locks in the buildings to which the crew had access.
- D. The three men from this Agency who were aboard the flight, 03.03.03 (Brannon, Crans and Shupe,) and the aircraft commander, (Lyles) 06 are being removed from the German area, being returned to the U. S. (The three CIA crewmen are being returned to duty ≥ 4 with the Air Force from the Agency.)
- E. Steps are continuing to be taken to properly safeguard Agency interests and personnel in regard to names of Agency personnel who appeared in (Brannon's) address book or in other notations appearing in any papers carried by other members of the crew.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. Continue to take all possible steps to prevent any disclosure to any unauthorized persons, particularly the press, about the CIA personnel aboard the C-118, or the true nature of the flight.
- B. Continue to take all possible steps to ³change the cover designation of the units appearing in (Brannon's) address book to prevent any further compromise of these units.
- C. Permit no further publicity about the flight itself, in order to minimize the possibility of the press learning of the CIA interest in the flight of the C-118.
- D. Carefully follow all matters relating to the International Court of Justice interest in this flight, in order to prevent any compromise of Agency interests.