Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

12 April 2017

Mr. John Greenewald
[redacted]

Reference: F-2016-02411 / DIA Case #0206-2009

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

In the course of processing your 18 March 2009 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for documents pertaining to Operation Morning Light, the Defense Intelligence Agency located one document and referred it to us on 11 August 2016 for review and direct response to you.

We have reviewed the document which we determined can be released to you in its entirety. A copy of the document is enclosed.

If you have questions regarding our response, you may seek assistance from CIA's FOIA Public Liaison. You may reach the FOIA Public Liaison at:

703-613-01287 (FOIA Hotline)

Sincerely,

Allison Fong
Information and Privacy Coordinator

Enclosure

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/******** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE ********/
BODY
COUNTRY: RUSSIA
SUBJ: TAKE 1 OF 2--History of Russian Photo-Reconnaissance Satellites Outlined
SOURCE: Moscow Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye in Russian 16 Jul 04
TEXT:

[Article by Konstantin Chuprin: "The Abnormal Landing At Shirokiy Buyerak"]

[FBIS Translated Text]

Our country's first space photo-reconnaissance system was fielded in 1964.

The establishment and development of our country's cosmonautics is closely connected with Saratov Oblast. Satatov defense enterprises worked on space; the Saratov land gave a ticket to the skies to Yuriy Gagarin, who studied at the aero club here; and it happily received him in the person of the residents of Ternovskiy Rayon after his return from his historic flight. Balakovskiy and Volskiy Rayons also did not stand aside from the great space era. They also once had to meet a guest from space -- true, an inanimate guest.

The guest was a piece of a colossal part of a Soviet space iceberg -- a military object which until recently was completely unknown to the general public.

Here we are talking about a case well-known in the city of Balakovo concerning the "fall of a satellite" into the Volga between the village of Shirokiy Buyerak in Volskiy Rayon and the current dam of the Balakovskiy Nuclear-Power Plant's cooling pond. This happened in the spring of 1968 (there was no nuclear-power plant there at that time). During the dawn of the unprecedented

glasnost at the end of the 1980s-beginning of the 1990s, journalists decided to investigate the given incident -- first from the magazine Ogonek and then Balakovo journalists. Witnesses from river-transport workers were found, who told about a sphere descending to the water on a parachute and which quickly sank and about how Caspian-Sea sailors soon arrived at the Volga and started to search for the mysterious object. However, even chance witnesses had no doubt about the object's space origin. However, the journalists were unable to obtain any information about the object's name or its purpose.

The sailors were not searching for the entire satellite in the Volga, but for its descent module with its exposed photo film. It was in this way that capsules from the satellite returned to Earth on satellites after completing their espionage missions in orbit.

In the Soviet Union the development of reconnaissance satellites was carried out simultaneously with the preparations for human flight in space. As a result, Gagarin's ship Vostok and our first spy satellite, the Zenit, were outwardly nearly indistinguishable. Only instead of a cosmonaut, photo cameras SA-20 and SA-10 and the Kust-12M electronics intelligence unit were installed in the Zenit descent module. The Zenit was able to photograph 5.4 million square meters of the Earth's surface during its mission. There was an attempt to also equip these satellites with the Baykal television surveillance device, but it turned out to be ineffective.

The Zenit-4 Unmanned Spaceship

The launching of Zenits with the help of the Vostok booster rocket began at the Baykonur Cosmodrome in the first half of the 1960s, and in 1964 the Zenit-2 photo-reconnaissance space system (with satellites 11F61) was officially accepted in the inventory of the Soviet Army. Starting in 1967, these satellites were put into orbit by Soyuz rockets from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome. A total of 81 satellites of the given system were launched (the last was in May 1970), some of which were lost as a result of various technical incidents.

(Attachment not included)

Thus, the flight of one of the Zenit-2 series which received the pseudonym of Kosmos-216 ended unsuccessfully. Kosmos-16 with a weight of 4,720 kg was launched on 20 April 1968 into an orbit with the following parameters: altitude in perigee 199 km; 277 km in apogee; inclination 51.8 degrees. Upon its return to Earth eight days later, the descent module descended abnormally to the Volga and sank in 42 minutes. A search-service helicopter accompanied the

descent module until the moment of its loss.

That was the very same "Balakovo" satellite. Several witnesses assert that an explosion sounded in the region where the device sank. This may be the truth, since Zenit descent modules were equipped with the APO automatic destruction device, which destroyed the capsule to avoid its being seized by the enemy in case of an abnormal landing. It is wholly possible that Kosmos-216's electronic brain gave the command to self-destruct. There is information cited in Western sources that as a result of the Kosmos-216 incident, 85 percent of the information collected by the satellite was lost, which means it was possible to save 15 percent? If so, the Navy's search-and-rescue party working in the region where the descent module fell raised something up from the bottom of the river.

At one time rumors were going around that the "fall of the satellite" led to the radioactive contamination of the Volga. This, however, was only local speculation. But a "space Chernobyl" did take place once.

The space era for the Russian nuclear industry began in the beginning of the 1960s with the appearance of the Romashka onboard nuclear reactor/electric generator -- the electric power source for spacecraft. Later such work was connected with the naval space-reconnaissance and target-indication satellite system MKRTs

/****** BEGINNING OF SECTION 2 ******

REF: 1. CEP20040716000352 Moscow Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye in Russian 16 Jul 04 ///satellite system MKRTs

SOURCE: Moscow Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye in Russian 16 Jul 04

TEXT:

Legenda, which was intended to detect the ships of a probably enemy and provide data for our fleet to use cruise missiles against them; in particular, the Granit PKR [anti-ship missiles] of Project 949 and 949A nuclear-powered submarines. Along with US-P (17F17) electronics-intelligence satellites, the Legenda included US-A (17F16) orbital radar posts, which were capable of "sniffing out" American aircraft carriers in the ocean at any time of day and in any weather. A nuclear power plant served as the onboard power source of the US-A radars; this power source was created by the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building's NPO [Scientific-Production Association] Krasnaya Zvezda.

US-A radar reconnaissance satellites were launched from the

Baykonur Cosmodrome with Tsiklon-2 booster rockets to an orbit of about 280 km altitude. The most favorable operating conditions were created at such an altitude for two-sided lateral survey radar satellites, however the duration of the satellite's active existence was not great. To avoid the nuclear reactor falling to the Earth after the satellite completed its mission, the nuclear power plant was separated from it and was thrown into a so-called burial orbit of 1,000 km altitude.

However, there was one sad and dangerous incident in the history of the largely successful operation of the Legenda system when a 4,300-kg satellite of the US-A series (pseudonym Kosmos-954; orbit parameters were 259 km perigee, 277 km apogee, 65 degrees inclination) launched on 18 September 1977 went out of control and fell to Earth (to be more correct, its fragments fell). This occurred on 24 January 1978; moreover, Soviet radioactive space trash ended up scattered over northwestern Canada in an area of several thousand square kilometers. An international scandal broke out, and the payment to Canada of $3 million as compensation for its expenses in conducting **operation "Morning Light"** to collect the fragments and decontaminate the area can be added to the USSR's costs for the arms race and for maintaining greedy, "progressive" regimes throughout the world.

Later the USSR had several more incidents with the Navy's nuclear satellites, but was able to prevent serious consequences analogous to those which took place in the case of Kosmos-954. However, historical primacy in space nuclear accidents does not belong to us, but to the United States -- in 1964 an American navigation satellite with a reactor onboard was unable to make it into orbit, but the reactor broke up into pieces in the atmosphere along with the satellite.

[Description of Source: Moscow Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye in Russian -- Weekly independent military newspaper published by the Boris Berezovskiy-financed Nezavisimaya Gazeta.]

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