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60528's Last Flight

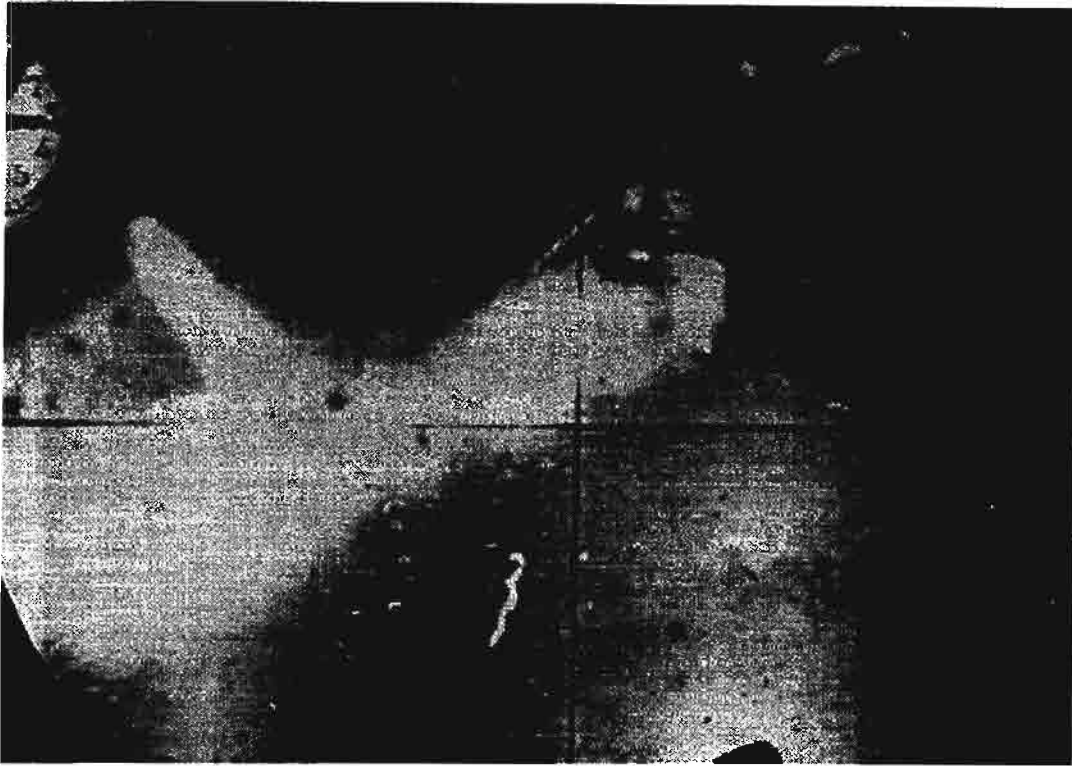
They died honorably while engaged in the *Silent War - AIRBORNE RECONNAISSANCE*. Now we are creating a memorial honoring them. While on a routine mission along the Turkish-Armenian border on September 2, 1958, a U.S. Air Force C-130 crew inadvertently entered denied airspace over Armenia. Four Soviet MiG-17 pilots intercepted the C-130 - tail number 60528 - and shot it down, killing the seventeen Americans aboard. The crew consisted of six flight crew members and eleven United States Air Force Security Service reconnaissance crew members.

Our efforts to honor those seventeen lost airmen have paid off with authorization to create a memorial at the National Security Agency, Fort Meade, MD. The memorial will consist of a C-130 aircraft, bearing tail #60528, on display in an air park setting and a memorial display in the co-located National Cryptologic Museum. The C-130's exterior is being refinished in 60528's original C-130A-II fit and form so that it will look identical to 60528 on the date that it was shot down. The display in the Museum will contain related artifacts.

So, what do we know about the shoot down? Of all Cold War air incidents involving the Soviets, the shoot down of 60528 is the most controversial. Four Soviet MiG pilots took turns firing on the unarmed transport. Unlike other incidents where American aircraft were lost over water, 60528 crashed on Soviet soil. Not willing to admit that 60528 was on a spy mission, the U.S. Government did not confront the Soviets until September 6, when the Soviets denied all knowledge of the incident. They stated on September 12 that they had found a destroyed airplane, and based on discovered remains, "it may be assumed that six crewmen perished." In response to a U.S. demand for information about eleven missing crew members, the Soviets stated on 19 September that "no other information on crew members is at the disposal of the Soviet side." A status quo ensued and the Soviets provided no additional info on the eleven missing airmen. Finally in 1991, Russian President Yeltsin began releasing 'available' information on the shoot down.

The main source of new data is a joint American/Russian commission on MIA/POW issues formed in 1992. Through that commission the Russians have released from Soviet Air Defense Command (PVO) archives, several declassified reports on the 60528 shoot down. In a detailed investigative report dated Sept. 4, 1958 from Armenia to the Kremlin, the Soviet commanding general in Armenia told the Soviet leadership how MiGs intercepted and shot down the C-130. The Soviet report identified the crashed aircraft as a C-130, tail number 60528. A plate on the aircraft indicated that it was assigned to the 7406th Support Squadron.

The field report described the air engagement and named the four participating MiG pilots. The report also included MiG gun-camera activated photos showing 60528 in the MiGs' gunsights, with smoke streaming from its engines immediately before the crash. A forensic report verified the number of human remains (six) and noted that other remains may have been present but that intensity of the ensuing fire prevented identification of additional remains. No one was seen parachuting from the C-130. The report concludes that wreckage photos suggest that no one on board could have survived. I recently interviewed an Armenian witness who reached the same conclusion. In 1993, he and local villagers created an Armenian memorial at the crash site honoring the seventeen Americans who perished in the crash.



Gun Camera Footage from Soviet MiG-17 jet fighter aircraft on 2 Sept 1958

The Soviets recovered a set of TDY orders for the 7406th flight crew, a .45 caliber pistol, some ID cards, ID tags and money (German, Dutch, Turkish and American currencies). In 1993, a U. S. Army graves excavation team recovered at the crash site an ID 'dog' tag that belonged to A2C Archie Bourg, an USAFSS airborne maintenance technician aboard 60528 when it crashed. Research on the shoot down continues. We'll see you at our memorial dedication at Fort Meade, MD on Sep 2, 1997.

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