

~~SECRET~~

13 January 1967

APPROVED FOR RELEASE   
DATE: 03-21-2011

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Security OSA

FROM : Chief, Security Station D

SUBJECT : Aircraft Accident on 5 January 1967 Involving  
Cygnus 125

1. Cygnus Aircraft Number 125 with pilot Walter L. Ray at the controls departed Station D (homeplate) at 1259 hours local on 5 January 1967 to fly a Shade Tree E route (see attachment A).

2. Ray successfully completed the first circle of the route and was on the last circle when he encountered fuel problems. At approximately 1530 hours local, Ray reported to homeplate that fuel consumption was increasing rapidly beyond programmed consumption curves. Part of the excessive consumption could be attributed to head winds of approximately 120 knots, while the other appeared to be an unexplained loss of fuel.

3. Ray changed altitude for more favorable winds, however fuel consumption (loss) continued until the pilot reported a critical flight profile. Homeplate rendered guidance toward the only alternate field available to him. Delamar Dry Lake, used by the X-15 for emergency landings, lay directly ahead approximately 25 miles. Ray stated that he did not think he could make Delamar. At 1602 hours, approximate time Ray reported his engines had stopped. He ejected at approximately 1603 hours. His last transmission to homeplate was of his intention to eject.

4. The crash alarm was sounded immediately. All key personnel reported to the Command Post.

5. At 1615 hours several charts were affixed with the estimated longitude/latitude coordinates for both the impact area and ejection point. Winds were plotted for the accident area from ground level to flight altitude for estimation on impact point and pilot touchdown. A F-101 chase plane from homeplate was on an intercept course to Cygnus 125 and had him in sight for a brief moment at the time that Ray ejected. Cloud layers and falling snow obscured any further visual contact between the F-101 and Cygnus 125. Homeplate had a helicopter in the area at the same time which was aiding a Nellis AFB ground rescue team in searching for a F-4C which had gone down in the same area approximately three hours earlier. Both the F-101 and helicopter searched for #125 until

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Fuel reserves dictated return to homeplate. Other homeplate aircraft were dispatched and searched until darkness.

6. The Base Commander ordered [redacted] and a ground rescue team to the crash scene at 1700 hours. The ground rescue team was equipped with survival gear and both UHF and VHF radios for maintaining contact with the aircraft aloft (CAPCOM) and radio equipment to monitor the guard channel where it hopefully expected a signal would come from the pilot's emergency radio carried in his seat kit.

7. The ground rescue team arrived in Caliente, Nevada at 1930 hours where in a meeting with the Nellis rescue team it was learned that a rancher may have heard a crash about 1600 hours. Since no telephones exist in the area between Caliente and Moapa, Nevada (approximately 100 miles) the Chief of Police of Caliente was requested to join the rescue team as guide into the rugged mountains. He consented. The group started toward the house of the rancher who allegedly heard the crash. The team arrived at the ranchers home and under questioning it was learned that he had not heard a crash but had heard a sonic boom. The time in question was not 1600 hours but 1200 hours.

8. The search patterns were predicated on plots and fixes established earlier by homeplate Command Post. The ground teams were split at Elgin, Nevada 20 miles south of Caliente. One unit turned west at Elgin proceeded to search the area to the west and south of Elgin. Other units searched due south of Elgin to Moapa. Others proceeded east and searched in the Mormon mountains. Ground units continued to search all night in these areas hoping to hear a signal on ground or see a strob light from the pilot. Homeplate maintained a CAPCOM (aircraft at flight level 22,000 for communications and search all night). Communications among ground units was poor since ground units were working in canyons. Communications between ground units and CAPCOM was, in most instances, excellent.

9. At daybreak homeplate incorporated into the search all available aircraft and helicopters (2 from homeplate - 1 UHIF #657963 from Indian Springs AFB). A Nellis fighter pilot who allegedly saw #125 impact was brought to the scene and was flown over it in a helicopter. Ironically, the helicopter had flown practically over the impact area and didn't see the wreckage, as had other aircraft. The reason that a sighting of the wreckage was not made immediately was attributed to; the lack of a large fire usually associated with a crash showing scorched earth; the impact point on the down slope of a ridge had the markings of other gouged areas and did not stand out per se; the lack of trees to give tell-tale evidence by having a swath cut through them; the fact the entire plane was broken up into incredibly small pieces and finally the fact the debris was scattered through three canyons. In addition

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

to several aircraft joining the search, homeplate had dispatched other ground units to [redacted]

10. [redacted] was instructed to establish a base camp. He selected Leith, Nevada (an abandoned railroad siding) since it was the center of the ejection/impact area. The ground party was fed, base camp ground communication was established. Homeplate provided a communications technician on hand to maintain the communication gear. Further search sectors were given each ground unit and the search continued.

11. Searching continued until a helicopter flown by Capt Charles Trapp reported at 1525 hours on 6 January 1967 that the wreckage had been located at coordinates  $37^{\circ} 13' N$  and  $114^{\circ} 28\frac{1}{2}' W$  approximately  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles due west of Leith, Nevada. Personnel were dropped off at the wreckage site.

12. A search was made of the impact area to ascertain whether the pilot was in the wreckage. He was not found. DCM and LAC representatives continued to probe the wreckage for flight data recording equipment. [redacted] searched the wreckage area for the large aircraft cameras or any other components considered more sensitive. The wreckage was broken up so badly that nothing was larger than a basketball. Three tapes were found and sent back to homeplate by helicopter.

13. The DCS arrived with road grading equipment needed to cut a road into the impact area. He surveyed the area and determined the best route to take from an accessible point through a canyon to the wreckage. He instructed his blade operators to begin cutting a road. The blade operators reported to base camp at 2200 hours on the 7th that the road had been cut through the canyon. The distance to travel from the new base camp (mentioned later in this report) to the wreckage was approximately 4 miles. It was the shortest route that could be taken by road.

14. A new plot was computed for the estimated touchdown point for the downed pilot for both ground and air rescue units. Searching continued all through the day and night of the 6th. 1200 hours of the 7th, permission was requested to rent horses for the ground parties to be used to reach the highest ground in the search area. With permission horses and two ranchers were added to the ground team. At this point the Chief of Police, Caliente asked to be relieved to tend to police duties.

15. At 1455 hours on the 7th one of homeplates C-47's reported spotting what appeared to be a parachute panel. The C-47 flew as low as possible over the area and confirmed that it was a parachute but they could not see the pilot.

16. Boxer CAPCOM directed the nearest helicopter to the scene.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

The helicopter reported at 1505 hours that they had located the pilot. CAPCOM directed a doctor and paramedics be dropped to give an immediate reading on the condition of the pilot. At 1515 hours the helicopter reported the pilot to be dead. By prior instructions, it was agreed to fly the body to Nellis, if the pilot were dead.

17. CAPCOM directed a larger UHIF helicopter to pick-up the body of the pilot and proceed with it to Nellis AFB Hospital. Homeplate flew Dr. Dake, Chief Flight Surgeon at Station D, to Nellis to meet the helicopter. [redacted] Deputy Chief, Security Staff contacted [redacted] security representative in Las Vegas to meet the helicopter. The facts concerning efforts at the Nellis hospital and at the Palm Mortuary in Las Vegas shall be covered in [redacted] report (attached).

18. Orders were issued by homeplate to continue search for the canopy and specifically, the instrumentation cameras attached to the canopy. The scene, where the body was found, was protected to permit prima facie investigation by members of the Norton team, Personal Equipment Experts and the engineer for the pilots seat.

19. Twenty persons were directed to the scene to begin a systematic search for the cameras. Searching continued until dark at which time all personnel were brought down from the mountains and sent to Caliente for a nights rest.

20. Ground teams at base camp were directed to remain at base camp. The only activity during the night of the 7th was retrieving two disabled vehicles with ground searchers aboard. A C-130 overhead directed rescue vehicles from base camp to the disabled vehicles. A mechanic effected sufficient repairs to move them. This operation was completed at 0100 hours on the 8th. At this time, the C-130 returned to homeplate. All personnel were accounted for and were either at homeplate, in motels in Caliente or at base camp.

21. Orders arrived from homeplate at 0800 hours on the 8th to break base camp at Leith, Nevada and move it to the wreckage site. At 0900 hours, all fires were extinguished, all equipment loaded and the helicopter landing pole removed. The convoy left the old base camp for the new camp.

22. Homeplate simultaneously was dropping 30 searchers from helicopters at the canopy area. Searchers proceeded on foot and continued until dark on the 8th without finding the cameras. They did however find sundry items associated with the seat, seat kit and suit.

23. At approximately 1000 hours on the 8th ground searchers made contact at the impact area with Mobile 7 commanded by Col James Anderson. Col Anderson had arrived from home plate with a large task force to begin retrieving the wreckage. Retrieval of wreckage began prior to completion of the base camp. The base camp was completed at 1630 hours on the 8th with the construction

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

of tents, vehicle repair, garbage dump, vehicle parking, vehicle refueling, base communication areas and a heliport.

24. Col Anderson departed for homeplate on the last helicopter on the 8th at 1700 hours instructing [ ] to take charge of all ground operations. He further stated that one ground operations were secured for the day for Zubon to return to homeplate. [ ] Security Officer who had arrived from homeplate with a bus and power wagon was left at base camp with three guards and instructions for the night.

25. Mr. Glenn Fulkerson, LAC in charge of retrieval had 25 members of the aircraft ground crew along with 20 Air Force personnel as a force. His procedure consisted of loading the pieces on trucks, hauling it out of the narrow canyons to base camp where it was placed in bins aboard flat beds for transportation back to homeplate. The crews were either flown back by helicopter or bussed back to homeplate. Canopy ground searchers were sent to Caliente for the night. Fulkerson and crew worked until darkness on the 8th.

26. The canopy search parties were led to Caliente and quartered in motels. They were given instructions for the next morning. [ ] then proceeded back to homeplate arriving there at 2200 hours where he and the Base Commander had a meeting in the Commander's quarters at 2230 hours.

27. Homeplate Command Post called at 1400 hours on the 9th wishing assistance to rent 5 horses and 4 riders in the Caliente/Elgin area. The horses and riders were made available and in position by the railroad station at Elgin. A helicopter dropped one AF personnel off at Elgin at which time he and the riders departed for the mountains to search for the canopy and cameras. The searching continued through the 10th and 11th without results. Twenty foot searchers were on scene in addition to 5 riders.

28. On the 12th fresh horses and riders were brought to the scene. Twenty foot searchers continued. This pattern is expected until Friday night 13 January at which time the search will be discontinued until Monday morning 16 January to allow crews rest for the ground searchers. Security will maintain personnel on the scene throughout the weekend.

29. The ground crew picking up wreckage continued until darkness on the 11th, at which time all discernable pieces had been retrieved. Base camp was disassembled and all parties and equipment returned to homeplate. One last group will go to the impact area on the 13th and make a final sweep for debris.

30. The Norton Investigation Board continues to meet at homeplate hopefully expecting to complete their report by 17 January 1967. As of this writing the board has not established the

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

cause of aircraft failure. Probability rests with total depletion of fuel and resulting engine failure. The cause of failure of the pilots seat may never be established. Probability as mentioned by some experts may rest with a recent seat modification made predicated on death of one man in an SR-71 over Tucumcarri, New Mexico. Another probability involves malfunctioning of the lap belt (see attachment B). The information contained in this report on probability is not to be construed as absolute. The findings will be forthcoming in the official report to be completed by the Norton Accident Investigation Board.

31. The sabotage sector has been broached tentatively by Area Security. Initial reaction to this sector tends to negat the possibility of sabotage based upon probabilities as rendered unofficially as of this writing by an au fait members of the DCM, DCO and Investigation Board.

32. A constant evaluation of the security of Station D has been taking place since the accident. Through sources in Las Vegas (OSI) and other areas in Nevada it has been determined that the cover story concerning Cygnus 125 has been accepted as gospel. There have been no indication to the contrary.

33.  report has been attached to detail activity at Station D during the accident (see attachment C).

34. See attachment D for location of the impact area and area which pilots body was found.

Chief, Security Staff

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Shade Tree E Route
- B. Seat
- C.  Report
- D. Impact Area

~~SECRET~~