

# NEVADA'S VASTNESS

# SECRET SPY

## HOLDS SECRET

# PLANE LOST

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## One Man Aboard Big Jet

Mystery deepened yesterday around the disappearance over Southern Nevada Thursday of a top secret spy plane.

Missing with one man aboard is an experimental SR-71. It was flying a track between Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., and Tonopah.

Although the aircraft was presumed down on a fixed course, search planes and routine military training flights failed to spot any sign of wreckage.

The Air Force identified the test pilot as a civilian employe of Lockheed Aircraft Corp., designer and builder of the twin-engine craft.

Radio contact was lost at 4 p.m. Thursday as the SR-71 passed west of Las Vegas on test mission. The Air Force said the plane had only enough fuel remaining for another hour of flight.

The SR-71, designed for "world-wide strategic reconnaissance," flies higher than 16 miles at 2,500 miles per hour, or close to four times the speed of sound.

Its ultra-sensitive, infra-red heat cameras can photograph 60,000 square miles of terrain for every hour the plane is aloft, according to statistics released by President Johnson in 1964 when he announced development of the plane.

Production of the SR-71 soon made the famous U-2 obsolete. Lockheed also manufactured the earlier spy plane.

Only a limited number of SR-71 have been placed in operation. One squadron flies from Beale Air Force Base near Marysville in Northern California. The one ship based at Edwards AFB was used for further experimentation.

The same airplane last Nov. 21 caused earth-shaking sonic booms in Las Vegas when it passed on the same track from which it disappeared Thursday.

Air Force officials at Edwards had no comment on the super spy plane's disappearance other than that the search was continually in progress.

Although the SR-71 flies on the edge of space, Air Force officials said it was "unfeasible" that the craft could escape the pull of gravity and be placed in orbit around the earth.

They said the search would continue until the plane is found.

Exactly one year ago, another SR-71 from Edwards crashed on a rock plateau near Albert, N.M. One test pilot was killed and another bailed out safely.

LAS VEGAS SUN  
6 JAN 1967

# Secret Jet's Wreckage and Body of Pilot Found

## Canoga Park Civilian Is Victim in Crash of 2,000-M.P.H. Craft

The wreckage of an experimental triplesonic reconnaissance jet from Edwards Air Force Base was located near an abandoned town in Nevada, and the body of its civilian pilot was found 10 miles away, the Air Force reported Saturday.

The body of Walter L. Ray, 33, of 7900 Farralone St., Canoga Park, was sighted by a search aircraft in desolate country east of Leith Saturday.

It was four miles southeast of the former railroad section town that searchers Friday saw the wreckage of the javelin-shaped SR-71, fastest operational aircraft in the world. It had been missing since Thursday afternoon.

After discovery of the plane near Leith, 90 miles northeast of Las Vegas, an intensive air and ground search was begun for the pilot.

### Ground Team Reaches Scene

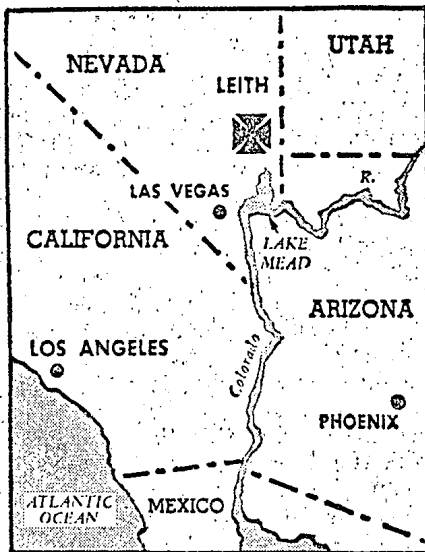
The body of Ray, a test pilot for Lockheed Aircraft Corp., which made the plane, was seen from the air late Saturday. A ground rescue team reached the scene shortly afterward.

The Air Force said the specific cause of death was not determined. It declined to say whether the pilot had ejected.

Ray leaves his wife, Diane Carole; his mother, Mrs. Thelma Amelia Ray, Havana, Ill.; a brother, Vernon O. Ray, Orange; and a sister, Elmore Cealka, Elkhart, Ind.

Spokesmen at Edwards declined to say why discovery of the wreckage was not revealed until Saturday.

An Air Force team of investigators has been dispatched to conduct an investigation into the cause of the crash.



**WRECKAGE SITE**—Map shows site near Leith, Nev., where wreckage of SR-71 experimental reconnaissance jet was found by Air Force.  
Times map

Lockheed crewmen ejected over New Mexico and the craft reportedly landed almost intact, hitting soft earth in virtually level flight. One test pilot was killed and the other survived.

The SR-71 incorporates a double-delta wing design. The slim forward triangle of the wing extends to the tip of the nose section to give the fuselage boat-like appearance from the front.

An Edwards spokesman said Ray had sufficient fuel for only 90 minutes of flight in the SR-71 after the plane was last reported Thursday.

The highly secret 2,000-m.p.h. plane, powered by two huge jet engines, was described by President Johnson in 1964 as the most advanced in the world, capable of speeds more than three times that of sound and altitudes of more than 80,000 feet.

Secrecy has surrounded the camera-carrying aircraft which is not allowed to be photographed at close range. The 100-foot-long, jet black plane is widely considered a super spy plane successor to the U-2 type reconnaissance plane in which American Francis Gary Powers was shot down over Russia in 1960.

One other SR-71 crashed but was not destroyed last February. Its two

# PILOT'S BODY RECOVERED

## No Clue As To Parachute

By COLIN MCKINLAY  
R-J Associate Editor

The body of the pilot of the super - secret Air Force photo - reconnaissance plane was located Saturday afternoon about three miles from the wreckage, 90 miles north-east of Las Vegas.

Officials at Edwards Air Force base said that the plane was an SR-71, capable of flying 2,000 miles per hour and an 80,000 ft. ceiling.

Air Force officials at Edwards identified the pilot as Walter L. Ray, 33, of Canoga Park, Calif. Search parties found his body about 3 p.m. It was not known if his parachute had opened.

The multi-million dollar plane crashed Friday near Leith, Nev., an abandoned section station of the Union Pacific Railroad. Air Force officials found the wreckage Friday, but withheld announcement until Saturday. The craft had been missing since Thursday.

RAY'S BODY was located about three miles west of the plane, which was four miles southwest of Leith. Searchers said that Ray ejected from the plane at 45,000 feet, and his parachute should have opened at 16,000 feet.

At the time the body was found, a 60-member search party from Las Vegas was about half-way to Caliente. In the group were military personnel, Clark County Sheriff's Deputies and members of the Sheriff's Jeep Posse.

The search party consisted of 16 vehicles and enough equipment for a sustained search of several days.

THE DEAD pilot was a civilian employed by the Lockheed Aircraft Corp.

An Air Force spokesman said that a helicopter crew examined the wreckage, and then military personnel placed a tight ring of security around it.

There were some reports that the plane was not an SR-71, but some other secret Air Force plane — but Col. James Smith, information officer at Edwards AFB, where the flight originated, denied this.

THE SR-71 is capable of worldwide reconnaissance, according to an announcement of the craft made July 24, 1964, by President Johnson.

## SPY PLANE MISHAP

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# Probe Crash Scene

By COLIN MCKINLAY

R-J Associate Editor

**CALIENTE** — More than a week has passed since the crash of a secret U.S. Air Force spy plane south of here, but the normally quiet Meadow Valley Wash is a hive of activity by the military.

**THEY'RE LOOKING** for a needle in a haystack — a foot-long camera which apparently popped off the wing of the 2,-

000 mile-an-hour reconnaissance plane when it crashed into the side of a mountain, four miles southwest of Leith, Jan. 5.

The camera may provide some key to the crash of the plane, which was fatal to its pilot, Walter L. Ray, 33, employed by the Lockheed Aircraft Corp. Or, it may be a part of the super-secret equipment the craft uses to spy on

the earth from altitudes of 80,000 ft.

This community is bulging with Air Force personnel. Every guest room in town is full. By day, they search, and by night, they rest.

**ARMED GUARDS** stop motorists in the Meadow Valley Wash and interview them. Southbound travelers get their first inkling that something is amiss when

they are stopped by military personnel near Elgin. Northbound motorists are stopped near Carp. Both locations are small section stations on the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad.

The Air Force has also brought in construction equipment to build five miles of dirt road from Kane Springs Wash. (See SEEK, Page 4)

CONTINUE →

## Reconnaissance Plane Missing Near Las Vegas

EDWARDS AFB, Calif. (UPI) — A sleek, black SR71 Aircraft a sophisticated and advanced type of strategic reconnaissance plane, was missing and presumed down in Nevada, the Air Force reported Friday.

THE SR71, more versatile than the U2 spy plane which was shot down over Russia, was believed down in a remote area east of Las Vegas.

An Air Force spokesman at this sprawling flight research center 100 miles north of Los Angeles said the craft was on a routine test flight from Edwards Thursday when it disappeared.

LAS VEGAS SUN

# Seek Trace of Missing Reconnaissance Camera

(Continued from Page 1)  
to the mountain where the plane crashed so the parts can be trucked out. Big "Low Boy" trucks, empty, stand in vacant lots here as reminders of the trucked in equipment.

"WE'RE GOING to get that plane out, no matter what it costs," one military man remarked.

A resident of this town said, "We've had a number of military airplane crashes around here, but we've never seen anything like the security for this crash."

Ranchers on horseback are even being employed by the Air Force to search the rugged mountains for the missing camera. The plane hit a mountain

with about a 45-degree slope, and this should give the road-building engineers of the Air Force some difficulties.

About 80 men are constantly moving in and out of the community. Few of them will say anything.

"It hasn't been like other crashes," said one resident. "Everything is hush, hush."

**RANCHERS GET \$5 a day** for the use of a horse.

The plane was identified by the Air Force as the SR-71. The SR stands for strategic reconnaissance. The plane is also known as the YF-12, when it is used for other purposes.

President Johnson announced the existence of the craft on July 24, 1964, but little is known of its capabilities. It is an exotic successor to the notorious U-2 spy plane shot down over Russia.

The inquisitive Air Force personnel in Meadow Valley Wash talk to all travelers. They are very polite, but want to know all about everyone's business and destination in the area.

"They even went out and interviewed one rancher who was working in his own pasture," one report stated.

**A HELICOPTER** has already removed the spy plane's canopy. The body of the pilot, who apparently ejected and was found several miles west of the crash scene, is believed to have been removed the same way.

There were even some indications that the plane may not have even been the one the Air Force said it was. There was some unofficial talk around town that the craft was one not previously acknowledged as being among the Air Force Arsenal, but this brought only blank stares from official sources.

**THEIR BEST** explanation was that some military men were using incorrect designations in their conversations.

A tragedy has resulted in an unseasonal economic boom in Caliente, and how long it will last may depend on the recovery of a foot-long camera.

CONTINUE →

**SCENE OF AIR FORCE SEARCH** — This map shows where Air Force teams are searching for a missing camera from the secret spy plane which crashed (arrow shows approximate location) about four miles southwest of Leith. Motorists are stopped from the north at Elgin and from the south at Carp. Air Force personnel are being housed at Caliente.

