

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
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a. Presidential File

Saturday, August 26, 1967, 11:30 A. M.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

During the meeting Thursday evening, you asked for a more complete account of what happened on Monday when two U. S. aircraft were shot down over Communist China.

Attached are two reports on the incident: one prepared here in the Situation Room containing all of our classified information; the other prepared at the request of Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze which is unclassified and can be used with the press if you desire.

Bromley Smith

Attachments

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Four A-6A Navy attack aircraft took off from the aircraft carrier CONSTELLATION August 21 on a mission against the Duc Noi Railroad yard, six miles north of Hanoi (the target is more than 75 miles from the Chinese border).

This mission was an element of the coordinated strikes in the Hanoi area which included an attack on the Hanoi Thermal power plant. One of the four was downed by a direct SAM hit while on his bomb run. Another was hit by anti-aircraft fire prior to his bomb run, but completed his attack. More than 20 surface-to-air missiles were fired against the damaged plane and the two others as they began their egress from the target on an easterly heading.

All three employed evasive maneuvers in reaction to the SAMs and heavy anti-aircraft fire. Severe thunderstorms were also encountered during the egress.

During one evasive maneuver, one of the three A-6As (the surviving aircraft) lost sight of the other two. Then he saw them join formation about 10 miles east of Kep Airfield. The third plane remained several miles south of the first two. ((Preliminary reports indicating that the third plane had seen MIGs over NVN were not substantiated by the later debriefing of the surviving pilot.))

It is believed that the surviving plane also slightly penetrated into

China, although the Defense Department has not suggested this publicly.

Three border warnings were issued to the aircraft by the USS CONSTELLATION prior to the violation and another two warnings were issued by an E-2A aircraft. These warnings were not heard by the surviving pilot and it is assumed they were not received by the two missing pilots.

After the surviving pilot reached the border he heard the radio warning from the others: "MIGs, MIGs, FARMERS, FARMERS, FARMERS." (A MIG-19 is a Farmer.)

It is presumed that the two missing aircraft were attacked by MIGs and were shot down or crashed during evasive maneuvers in the mountainous terrain. The third A-6 returned safely to the carrier.

Reasons for the border violation include a combination of navigational errors, weather conditions, evasive maneuvering, possible malfunctioning radar in the lead aircraft and possibly damaged flight controls in the second one. Poor radio reception probably also contributed inasmuch as border warnings apparently were not heard.