

USCIB: 13.5/43

~~APPENDED DOCUMENT CONTAINS
CODEWORD MATERIAL~~

19 March 1954

~~TOP SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE MEMBERS OF USCIB:

Subject: Possible Compromise of COMINT Material.

Reference: USCIB 13.5/18 of 26 October 1953.

1. On 22 August 1953 a MATS aircraft carrying cargo and mail (including COMINT material) crashed and burned at Keflavik Airport, Iceland.
2. Due to the presence of cryptographic material aboard the aircraft NSA received a report of the crash immediately. A report listing officer courier pouches involved was received 2 - 3 days later by USCIB agencies having such material aboard the aircraft. Initial reports indicated that all courier material was completely destroyed. Subsequent reports received by NSA stated that courier material had not been completely burned but indicated no possibility of compromise.
3. On 18 September NSA received fifteen (15) boxes of damaged material, one (1) of which contained classified documents. This material was searched for COMINT but none was found.
4. During a routine investigation, the Department of State was contacted by NSA and on 29 October furnished NSA a report from their Legation in Iceland, which stated that security coverage of the crash site was not taken until five (5) hours after the crash, that an Icelandic fireman had been seen with classified papers in hand and that classified material remained adrift in the crash area for at least three (3) days.
5. On 22 December NSA received another box of damaged classified documents. (It had been assumed that all classified material salvaged had been included in the original shipment). This material was searched for COMINT but again none was found.
6. On 11 January 1954 NSA received a report from Iceland, which stated that all classified material had been removed from the aircraft and had been placed in the Courier Transfer Officer's security room. (The latter statement was obviously erroneous since NSA had received a box of classified material which had been held by the CIC Detachment). The report stated further that no possibility of a compromise existed.

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7. By this time it had become clear that the only way in which the conflicting reports available could be reconciled would be to investigate them at their source. Accordingly, the Executive Secretary directed Major Culmer, his assistant for security matters, to proceed to Keflavik on 15 January 1954 to determine the true circumstances as best he could and to subsequently recommend ways and means of achieving better tracer and casualty control of COMINT in transit by courier.

8. Results of Major Culmer's investigation and recommendations, in which I concur, follow:

A. FACTS

- (1) The initial report of the crash was received on the day of the crash only because cryptographic material was involved. (It is estimated that cryptographic material is included in about 90% of the flights carrying officer courier material).
- (2) Had no cryptographic material been aboard the aircraft, the detailed report listing officer courier pouches involved (received 2 - 3 days later) would have constituted the first indication that a crash had occurred.
- (3) Approximately twenty (20) pounds of COMINT material was involved and was located in Section JJ of the Lower Aft Cargo Compartment of the aircraft (a C-97).
- (4) Pictures of the crash show that material contained in Section JJ was, due to the location of the floor, held about three (3) feet above the ground permitting a considerable draft underneath the material and lending credence to a report that the courier material was in the hottest portion of the fire (estimated 2000-2500 degrees).
- (5) No courier material was thrown clear of the aircraft during the crash and no explosion occurred.
- (6) A helicopter appeared above the crash scene during the time that personnel were searching the debris for classified material. The down draft caused by this

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aircraft scattered documents over an area of at least fifty (50) feet around the wreckage.

- (7) A security (Air Police) guard arrived at the scene shortly after the crash. However, due to an apparent misunderstanding, this guard was relieved while classified material was still adrift and for an undetermined length of time this material was fully accessible to any personnel who happened to be in the area.
- (8) Air Police and firemen (14 of the firemen on the force are Icelandics - the remainder Americans) were observed searching through rubble which included classified material.
- (9) Salvage personnel began operations to clear away the wreckage while classified material was still adrift in the area.
- (10) Attempts to gather up all material adrift, to burn this material and subsequently to bury the remains under several feet of dirt were not entirely successful. Unclassified material untouched by fire was observed in the area as late as 19 January.

B.. CONCLUSIONS

- (1) Even though a good possibility exists that all COMINT material was destroyed during the fire occurring at the time of the crash, there is no definite proof.
- (2) If COMINT material survived the fire there were many chances for this material to fall into unauthorized hands.
- (3) Early appearance of a properly accredited COMINT security authority at the crash scene would have minimized to a considerable degree the chances for a compromise of this material.

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G. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That all COMINT material aboard this aircraft be considered compromised within the meaning of the definition contained in USCIB Directive No. 9. (A partial list is attached as Enclosure 1. A complete list will be furnished as soon as available).
- (2) That foreign COMINT authorities be notified accordingly.
- (3) That NSA examine the type of traffic involved with a view toward determining what effect, if any, this compromise may have had on COMINT sources, furnishing a report to USCIB only if positive results are obtained.
- (4) That this investigation be continued by the Office of the Executive Secretary with a view to recommending ways and means for providing more efficient tracer and casualty control procedures regarding COMINT material transported by air, and for the prompt dispatch of a COMINT security authority to the scene of any aircraft accident involving COMINT material.

9. The complete files on this investigation are too voluminous to warrant reproduction and circulation to the members. They are therefore being kept in the Office of the Executive Secretary, USCIB, available to any member who wishes to examine them.

10. This matter will be placed on the agenda for consideration at the next regular meeting of USCIBEG.


RUFUS L. TAYLOR
Captain, U. S. Navy
Executive Secretary, USCIB

Enclosure
a/s.

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