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3 May 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted] DPD-DD/P

SUBJECT: Maximum Altitude Permissible for Target Recognition

1. To study the effect of altitude on target recognition and the maximum permissible altitude beyond which it is likely that targets cannot be spotted and recognized, SAM sites were used as a sample. Film positives, made from the original negative, were prepared at a reduced scale commensurate to what would be obtained at various altitudes up to 325 square miles.

2. On the same frame, one SAM site could still be recognized at a scale equivalent to an altitude of 325 miles while a second SAM site was barely recognizable at an altitude of 250 miles.

3. The experiment clearly demonstrated the effect of object contrast, sun angle, clouds, etc., on target spotting and recognition irrespective of altitude. These other factors are far more significant in limiting target recognition than scale determined by altitude.

4. Realizing that SAM sites are only one of many types of targets which vary widely in size and identifiable characteristics, as well as conditions under which they most readily show up in photography, it is most difficult to determine a maximum altitude permissible for target recognition.

5. With the current camera system, the maximum altitudes experienced to date approach the limit for target recognition under normal conditions.

[redacted]
Chief, TISO
National Photographic Interpretation Center

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