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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.



23 March 1970

THE NRO STAFF

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTOR, NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

SUBJECT: SR-71 Accident History

In response to a query from the House Armed Service Committee, I accompanied Mr. Frank Fishburne (AFABF) and Lt Col Tom Jones (AFSDCP), on 21 March 1970 to Congressman George H. Mahon's office to handcarry and discuss the SR-71 accident history. Query and resultant discussion was the result of an article which appeared on 20 March in the Washington Post. Article was based on SAFOI prepared release in response to questions by Ted Sell, Los Angeles Times.

We were greeted by Mr. George Preston. He reviewed the attached documents and indicated that he was satisfied that accidents did not have any established pattern or trend.

Mr. Preston was advised that the release prepared by SAFOI included reports on two accidents that are not reflected in the Air Force SR-71 inventory since these two aircraft were YF-12/SR-71 prototypes that were in actuality "black aircraft". He stated that he understood.

The two YF-12/SR-71 prototypes/test bed referred to in attachment 3 were actually A-12's. No reference or discussion was made to CIA, OXCARTS, A-12's or the NRO.

- 4 Attachments
1. Answer to Query
  2. Wash Post Article
  3. Wrk Cy SR-71 Type A/C  
Accident Summary
  4. AF SR71 A/C Program

CC: OSA Security

  
BERNARD L. BANLEY, COL, USAF  
Director of Operations  
Program D

003-23-002

By IA

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AND DECLASSIFICATION

12295-7

DATE: 17 Feb 70 TIME: 1630 ACTION OFFICER:

FROM: Ted Sell, L.A. Times

- QUERY:
1. When did the 9th Strategic Recon Wing go operational?
  2. What were the dates and locations of the announced SR-71 losses?
  3. Was the SR-71 ever grounded as the result of losses?
  4. If so when and for how long?
  5. What were the reasons turned up by the investigators for the cause of the losses?
  6. Were there problems in the aircraft which contributed to the losses?
  7. If so what were the problems?
  8. Which losses involved aircrew deaths and how many?

SOURCE OF ANSWER: OFC SYMB: PHONE:

- REPLY:
1. 22 December 1967.
  2. See attachment.
  3. Some temporary flight restrictions have been placed on aircraft and subsequently removed but no extensive groundings have been made.
  4. }
  5. } Cause of crashes and status of the operational fleet will not be
  6. } discussed by the Air Force.
  7. }
  8. (3) See attachment.

INQUIRY NOTIFIED:

PAPER DESK NOTIFIED:

REPLY

A. Following are the dates and locations of announced SR-71 losses:

- (1). 18DEC69, Shoshone, California area.
- (2). 10OCT68, Beale AFB, California area.
- (3). 11JAN68, Marysville, California area.
- (4). 25OCT67, Lovelock, Nevada area.
- (5). 13APR67, Las Vegas, Nevada area.
- (6). 10JAN67, Edwards AFB, California area.
- (7). 5JAN67, Leith, Nevada area (Pilot fatality).
- (8). 25JAN66, Northwest New Mexico area (Pilot fatality).

B. In addition to the above, the following accidents have been announced:

- (1) 11APR69, Edwards AFB, California area-SR-71 accident occurred-vehicle had reparable damage-This was not a vehicle loss.
- (2) 4JUN68, Pacific area, between Okinawa/Manila-The aircraft was a YF-12/SR-71 TEST BED TYPE AIRCRAFT-This was an aircraft loss, (Pilot fatality).

# 9 Super-Secret U.S. Spy Planes Lost in Crashes

By Ted Sall  
Los Angeles Times

At least nine aircraft from the Air Force's tiny fleet of super-secret SR-71 spy planes have been lost in crashes, it was learned yesterday.

Four crashed in California, three in Nevada, one in New Mexico, and one in the Pacific area on what the Air Force

said was a flight between Okinawa and Manila. Three of the crashes resulted in crew deaths. The dollar loss was placed at \$211.4 million.

In reply to questions, officials left open the possibility that still others might have been lost on missions over foreign countries.

Existence of the aircraft, de-

veloped in secret by Lockheed, was announced early in 1964 by former President Johnson. Then called the A-11, it was developed as a high-altitude successor to the U-2 spy plane, one of which was shot down over Russia on May 1, 1960.

The Air Force refused yesterday to say how many SR-71 it operates. However, there is only one SR-71 unit, the 9th Strategic Reconnaissance

Wing composed of two squadrons, at Beale Air Force Base, Calif.

A Strategic Air Command squadron normally consists of 18 airplanes.

The Air Force also refused to disclose what caused the plane to crash.

The SR-71 can fly above 100,000 feet high and at speeds above 2,000 m.p.h. It carries complex electronic spying

systems. Both Air Force military men and Central Intelligence Agency civilian employees have been used to man the craft.

Although all SR-71 are home-based at Beale, individual aircraft operate routinely on temporary duty from bases elsewhere in the world. They have been reported as operating from bases on Okinawa and in Thailand, for example.

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**SUBJECT: SR-71 Type Aircraft Accidents**

1. Reference our previous paper listing seven each SR-71 aircraft accidents resulting in total losses and one incident. The aircraft involved in the incident is reparable.

2. There were a total of nine losses, seven SR-71's and two additional YF/SR-71 type aircraft losses. The two additional losses were proto-type aircraft. The proto-type aircraft losses are as follows.

5 Jan 67, Loith, Nevada area (pilot fatality)

4 Jun 68, Pacific area, between Okinawa/Manila  
(pilot fatality)

3. News releases indicate a total of nine losses (seven SR-71s, plus two YF/SR-71 type aircraft) and do not include the one SR-71 that was involved in a ground incident. The aircraft involved in the incident is reparable and was not a total loss.

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In addition to the above, the aircraft was damaged in the crash.

2. Following are the details of the crashes:

a. 25 Jan 67 - Capt. [Name] was flying at an altitude of 10,000 feet. At 13:35, the aircraft encountered a severe turbulence which the pilot was unable to control. The aircraft rolled over and the pilot was ejected successfully. The cause of the crash was attributed to pilot error.

b. 10 Jan 67 - Capt. [Name] was flying at an altitude of 8,000 feet. The aircraft experienced a severe engine failure which caused the aircraft to lose altitude. The pilot was unable to recover and the aircraft crashed. The cause of the crash was attributed to engine failure.

c. 11 Jan 67 - Capt. [Name] was flying at an altitude of 12,000 feet. The aircraft experienced a severe engine failure which caused the aircraft to lose altitude. The pilot was unable to recover and the aircraft crashed. The cause of the crash was attributed to engine failure.

d. 29 Oct 68 - SAC Operations, Smith Field, VA

last leg and while decelerating  
disoriented and disoriented  
to the flight instructor  
the aircraft, and ejected

e. 11 Jan 69 - SAC

of climb and flight to speed  
instructor elected to return  
later, the second engine failed  
to Eagle, both engines failed  
ejected successfully.

f. 10 Oct 68 - SAC

from Eagle AFS, pilot heard loud bang and alarm  
takeoff. The aircraft arresting barrier failed  
The aircraft traversed the overrun and came to rest on runway  
surface and was destroyed by fire and severe structural damage. The  
aircrew ejection seat ejected the aircraft successfully and  
crew member ejected successfully after barrier

g. 18 Nov 69 - AFSC

and normal inflight refueling, a series of abnormal high engine  
engine stalls were experienced. A rapid degradation of altitude  
experienced after second engine stall. Corrective action  
pilot failed to correct aircraft conditions. Crew member  
could no longer control the aircraft. Ejection

and crew suffered no major injuries. Aircraft was completely destroyed.

**Damaged:**

(D) On 11 Apr 67, an SR-71 on an AFSC system test flight was damaged in a ground accident and is repairable. The sequence of events was as follows: On takeoff at rotation speed, the pilot felt a jar and mid vibration on the left side and assumed tire failure. Abort procedures were initiated, and the aircraft stopped on the runway. Fire had initiated from tire and wheel group, and debris had punctured wing fuel tanks. Fire was extinguished after successful crew ejection. This aircraft is repairable.

3. There is no established pattern which caused the above listed SR-71 losses.

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RAR-A-7

# CIA May Have Been In Some Lost SR71s

By Howard Silber

The Department of Defense acknowledged Friday that the Air Force has lost nine of its SR71 reconnaissance planes in crashes in the last four years.

Four of the aircraft were assigned to the Strategic Air Command's 8th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing.

The others, the Pentagon said, were "research and development planes."

The Pentagon refused to expand on its "research and development" statement.

### Clerical Error

Thursday night, SAC, which has all of the operational SR71s in its 8th Wing, said it had lost only three of them. A SAC spokesman explained Friday that the information office had made a clerical error and that the number it had lost actually was four.

The silence by the Pentagon about the "research and development" planes heightened speculation that some of the SR71s are being flown by the Central Intelligence Agency.

This was the case with the U2, predecessor of the SR71. The U2 also was assigned to SAC. However, the U2 which was downed over the Soviet Union in 1960 was piloted by Francis Gary Powers, a CIA employe.

The SR71 is capable of moving at 2,000 miles an hour and climbing to about 100,000 feet altitude.

### Number a Secret

It is known to be crammed with highly sophisticated electronic equipment.

The Air Force has refused to say how many SR71s it has. Nor have newsmen been permitted to visit the area of Basle Air Force Base, Calif., in which SR71 operations are conducted.

The Pentagon said eight of the nine losses occurred in the United States. The ninth plane was reported to have gone down in June 1968 between Okinawa and Manila. It was described as a "research and development" plane.

SAC said all four of the planes it lost crashed in the United States.