

ELEVEN DAYS OF HEROISM

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01 April – 11 July 2001



Stories told 'round the world about the Navy EP-3 crew in China







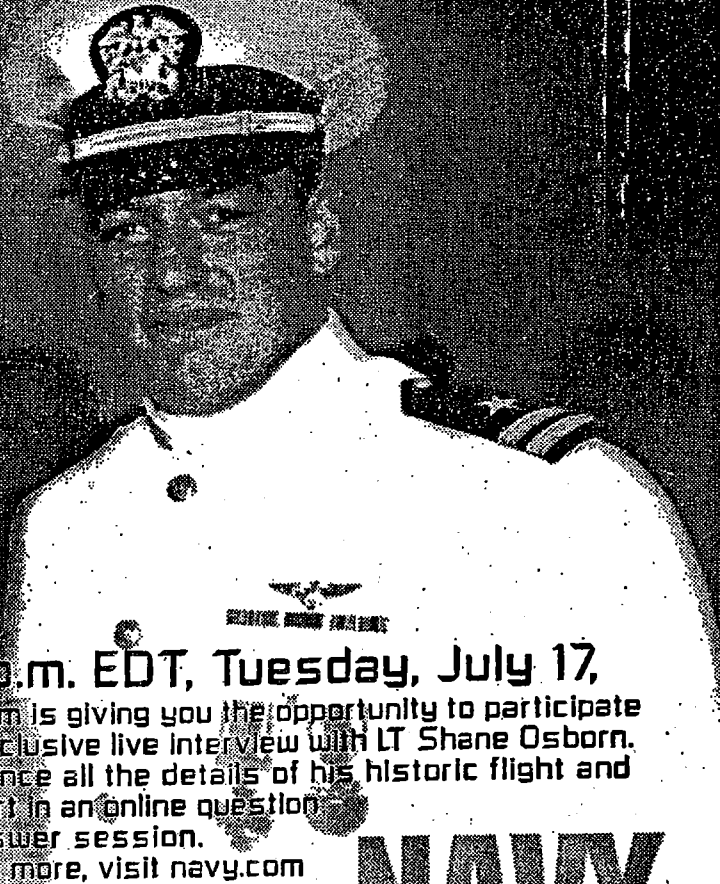
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Tuesday, July 10, 2001

USA TODAY 11 JUL 01

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navy.com is giving you the opportunity to participate
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Pentagon Expects EP-3E Arrival In Georgia As Soon As Today

By Hunter Keeter

The Pentagon expects the arrival of the EP-3E surveillance plane from Chinese territory at an air force base near Atlanta as early as today and supports the Navy's plans to repair it, according to a DoD spokesman.

Lockheed Martin [LMT] built the P-3 maritime patrol aircraft series.

The EP-3E was grounded on China's Hainan Island after colliding with one of two Chinese F-8 fighters that intercepted it in April (*Defense Daily*, April 13). The Chinese refused to allow the plane to be removed under its own power, forcing DoD to dismantle the aircraft for shipping.

The pieces of the disassembled EP-3E are transported aboard a Ukrainian Antonov An-124 cargo plane. That plane is expected at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga., Thursday or Friday, according to Rear Adm. Craig Quigley, a Pentagon spokesman.

In the Pentagon's FY '02 budget request, the Navy was directed to add \$45 million to its request of \$78 million for the P-3 (*Defense Daily*, July 3). The additional funding would cover the cost of converting one current P-3 to the EP-3E configuration.

Quigley described that money as an "insurance policy" and a "planning wedge"

against the discovery by Lockheed Martin engineers that the EP-3E could not be returned to service.

The Pentagon has given the Navy some discretion in how it chooses to spend the \$45 million. Those funds could be used to convert a standard P-3 to the EP-3E configuration; or the monies could be used to support the refurbishment of the Hainan Island aircraft, Quigley said.

"Unless we have a very unpleasant surprise, our intention is to repair the airplane and return it to service," he noted.

Lockheed Martin is currently working under a "not-to-exceed" \$5.8 million contract for the effort to disassemble and ship the aircraft. A follow-on contract for the actual repair work is expected this week or next, according to a company spokesman. After being repaired, the aircraft would be turned over to Raytheon [RTN] for work on the internal mission systems.

The Pentagon has noted that some intelligence capability was compromised in the incident with China. It is unclear to what extent that will affect the repair or replacement of the mission systems on the Hainan Island EP-3E or other such planes in the fleet.

Pilot of U.S. spy plane celebrates Independence Day



Lt. Shane Osborn appearing on CNN on Wednesday

It was a near-tragedy that quickly escalated into a diplomatic standoff: A U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane made an emergency landing on a Chinese island after a collision with a Chinese fighter jet. China detained the American crew members for 11 days, before releasing them to freedom and a heroes' welcome back in the United States.

Receiving much of the praise and a Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism and leadership was Navy pilot Lt. Shane Osborn. He commanded the mission and successfully landed the damaged plane, which carried 24 crew members.

Osborn visited CNN headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, on Wednesday and spoke with CNN anchor Daryn Kagan.

KAGAN: This is a Fourth of July you won't forget, for many reasons.

OSBORN: Yes, sure.

KAGAN: Where were you last Fourth of July?

OSBORN: I was in Bahrain in the Middle East. I spent the last couple Fourth of Julys in the Middle East. It's good to be back in the United States, at home, to celebrate. We celebrated over there in our own way with the crew and whoever we were over there with. It's good to be back in the United States.

KAGAN: You could never know a year ago what was waiting for you about six or seven months later.

OSBORN: No, never imagined this would happen. It's been a great time.

KAGAN: You're here in Atlanta. Part of what has happened to your life after returning from China is celebrity has hit. You will be the grand marshal of the Fourth of July parade here in Atlanta.

KAGAN: It's a pretty big honor to come down here. I love coming to Atlanta. I used to come here all the time when I was stationed in the South, in flight school. Once they asked, I said, sure, I will come down. It's a good time.

KAGAN: We're running some video. I think this is the return after you guys got back from China. Is this a blur, looking at this moment, coming back?

OSBORN: I was pretty tired. I was getting about 1 1/2, 2 hours of sleep a night while I was over there. Then we debriefed for two days straight, with some long days. I hadn't had much sleep. I remember it, but not too much of it, not specifics -- but it was a great welcome home. Turn around and there's thousands of people standing there. I didn't know where to go.

KAGAN: A little overwhelming.

OSBORN: You can see there -- I'm, like, where am I at?

KAGAN: Did you have any idea -- you were going through such an incredibly stressful situation, given how you had to bring the plane down and what was happening in China -- the kind of coverage it was getting back here in the States?

KAGAN: No, General Sealock, who is the representative that would visit us, told us, about day four, that we were in the news, because we didn't know if the public would know about this or not. He said we were in the news quite a bit. That made us feel good. We knew the American people would be behind us, and we'd just have to sit this out and wait until the diplomatic chain worked and got us home.

MORE

and we got home quicker than I thought. So it was great.

KAGAN: The other news today is not just that you and the crew are back, but a big piece of the plane is making its way from Hawaii.

OSBORN: What's left of it. It took awhile to get it out of there, but I'm glad to see we got it back, whether they put it back together or not. The 24 people getting home alive is the important part. So we will see what happened.

KAGAN: The people were more important than the parts.

OSBORN: I think so.

KAGAN: That big chunk of plane is making its way from Hawaii to not too far from here, in Atlanta, to Dobbins Air Force Base. Will you be there tomorrow when that part arrives?

OSBORN: I will not. I'll be doing other things here in Atlanta. Hopefully, they'll get it back up flying, and if they decide not to, that's OK also.

KAGAN: If and when they do put it together, it's not going to be the same plane. They're going to put some more modern parts...

OSBORN: Yes, we're constantly upgrading the gear we have in the back end of the aircraft. Yes, they have to do quite a bit to get it ready to go, put it all back together, and then the whole back end needs to be reinstalled, with new equipment -- so quite awhile.

KAGAN: So could it go into your career plans that you do fly that plane again?

OSBORN: I think I would probably be out of VQ-1. Maybe in the future quite a ways. VQ-1's my squadron, the World Watchers. I'm there until sometime next spring or summer. That's when I'm due to rotate out to another squadron. So if I come

back, and they're flying it, then I will get a chance to. I'll still get to do the missions and go out there deployed overseas. I'm looking forward to it later this fall.

KAGAN: So you're going back?

OSBORN: Oh, yes.

KAGAN: And looking forward to that?

OSBORN: I would have liked to have gone out there sooner, but there's other engagements that have been taking up a lot of my time. I'm still getting to fly.

KAGAN: What has the Navy done with you since you've returned? Have you been doing this kind of publicity tour?

OSBORN: We've been laid off for awhile. The first couple of weeks were really busy, the first month. Then we got to meet the president, the vice president, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- and the awards ceremony and go to the White House. That was a pretty big honor.

After that, they've kind of just tried to let us get back to normal life. We flew the aircraft out to that Andrews Air Force Base air show, the 24 of us. I'm going through the instructor syllabus at my squadron, to be an instructor pilot. It's kind of getting back to normal.

KAGAN: Before it does, I know you have the parade today and a book coming out in the fall. Actually, two books.

OSBORN: Two books: "Born to Fly" is the name of it. Just a story about a boy from Nebraska growing up.

KAGAN: Just a little story.

OSBORN: Then the children's book will be out, I think in the spring.

U.S. Takes Home Surveillance Plane, Three Months After China Accident

By CHARLES HUTZLER
Staff Reporter

BEIJING -- A cargo plane hauled away the last pieces of a disassembled U.S. surveillance plane that crash-landed in China, removing the vestiges of a troubling incident just as both governments work to improve their unsteady relations.

The chartered Russian-made Antonov-124 flew out part of the EP-3 reconnaissance plane from a southern Chinese airbase on Monday, and, after unloading at Kadena Air Base in Japan, it returned and took away the bulky fuselage and the remaining parts Tuesday, the U.S. military's Pacific Command in Hawaii said.

The Russian plane carrying pieces of the disassembled U.S. spy plane arrived in Hawaii on Tuesday, about three months after the aircraft's collision with a Chinese fighter jet.

"Things went extremely smoothly," Navy Cmdr. John Fleming of the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii said of the departure from China. "It was a very well-orchestrated operation." He said civilian technicians were able to finish well before the 25-day target date of July 11 because of ideal weather conditions, lack of mechanical problems and Chinese cooperation.

The EP-3E is expected to be transported Wednesday to a Lockheed Martin facility in Marietta, Ga. Other parts of the aircraft were flown to Kadena Air Base on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

A Pentagon spokesman, Rear Adm. Craig Quigley, said the Navy expects to repair the plane and return it to service. But if that turns out to be too expensive, the Navy has plans to replace it. The Pentagon on Tuesday left open the possibility of junking the plane.

The plane's removal comes three months after it collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea and landed at the Lingshui airbase, setting up a diplomatic standoff that

colored relations in the first months of the Bush administration. Both sides blamed the other for the April 1 collision, which sent the Chinese pilot to his death. Tortuous negotiations were needed to win release of the EP-3's 24 crew members, who had been held for 11 days, and the removal of the EP-3. The incident and the mutual suspicion it generated also served to aggravate routine trouble-spots in relations, particularly President George W. Bush's decision to sell Beijing's rival, Taiwan, a broad array of weapons.

Now, with the plane and issues like the Taiwan weapons sales behind them, Beijing and Washington are trying to focus on the positive. U.S. and Chinese trade negotiators reached agreement last month on China's subsidies for its hard-pressed agricultural sector, clearing a major obstacle to Beijing's entry to the World Trade Organization. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell is expected in China late this month, partly to smooth the way for a Beijing summit between Mr. Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin in October.

Ahead of those meetings, Mr. Powell's policy-planning aide, Richard Haas, quietly slipped into Beijing this week for two days of wide-ranging talks with Cui Tiankai, a senior Foreign Ministry strategic planner. Diplomats familiar with the talks said the two ran the gamut from global problems where agreement is easier, like fighting drug trafficking, to persistently nettlesome bilateral disputes over Taiwan and weapons proliferation. They tried to draw some lessons from the EP-3 incident, talking about crisis management and agreeing to meet again on China's disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea, the diplomats said.

More important, one of the diplomats said, Messrs. Haas and Cui hoped to set a broad agenda for regular meetings "so that relations don't fall off" track in the months following the expected presidential summit.

President praises EP-3E crew's 'class'

Personnel honored with medals

By David Brown
TIMES STAFF WRITER

After 20 minutes of terror, 11 days of captivity and one month of parades, the 24 crew members of a downed Navy surveillance plane capped off their experience shaking hands with the president in the Oval Office May 18.

Hours later, the 23 EP-3E Aries II crew members received the Air Medal for heroism, and the pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

"We appreciate your mission and appreciate your character," President Bush told the crew members during the brief meeting at the White House.

Each crew member, including one Air Force member and one Marine, filed into the Oval Office one-by-one to shake the president's and vice president's hands. As photographers clicked off shots, Bush thanked the crew members for their service and for maintaining "class and dignity" in China.

"There's the good man," Bush said to Osborn as he walked into the room. "Good to see you again."

With reporters standing by, Bush took the opportunity to comment on the situation in the Middle East, following the news that a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to a shopping mall north of Tel Aviv, killing five people and wounding more than 70.

"Violence in the Middle East took on a new level of intensity today," Bush said. "We must break the cycle of violence before there can be political settlement."

The EP-3 crew landed on China's Hainan Island April 1, after a Chinese fighter collided with the larger surveillance plane during a routine mission over in-

ternational waters.

A harrowing few minutes followed as the damaged plane dove and Osborn struggled to keep it aloft, muscling the 140,000-pound craft toward a safe landing on the island. The crew was detained for 11 days, sparking the first international crisis for the Bush administration. The crew was released after the U.S. expressed regret for the incident.

A team of U.S. aviation experts examined the plane, which remains on Hainan. U.S. and Chinese officials discuss the aircraft's future.

"We're working to get the plane home. We're making progress," Bush told reporters. "Today, we're celebrating the fact that the crew is home, and that's the most important thing."

During the awards ceremony two hours later at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Army Gen. Henry Shelton, chairman of the joint chiefs, presented the Distinguished Flying Cross to Osborn and the Air Medal to the other crew members. In addition, Osborn and Senior Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate Nicholas Mellos received the Meritorious Service Medal.

As for the plane, possibilities for its return include repairing and flying the plane out, cutting off the wings for surface or air transport, or taking the plane apart.



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Cheney: U.S. spy plane unlikely to fly out of China

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — The damaged U.S. spy plane that made an emergency landing in China last month will probably not be able to fly home and will have to be shipped out in crates, Vice President Dick Cheney said Sunday.

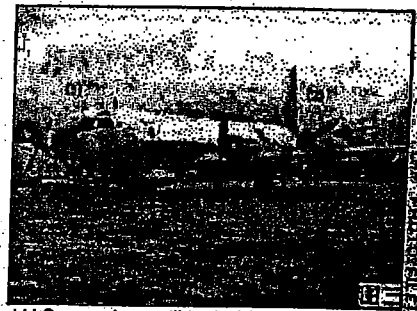
"The airplane will be returned, there have been negotiations under way," Cheney said on NBC's "Meet the Press" television program. "My guess is it may well have to be crated out, partly because it's in bad shape."

China has said it will refuse to allow the plane - stranded on China's Hainan island since an April 1 mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter -- to fly home.

The United States, meanwhile, has said the plane may be able to be repaired so it can be flown home, a more efficient way of transporting the aircraft.

Cheney said the United States was negotiating the terms of the plane's removal with China. When asked if it would be a humiliation to the United States if the plane left in crates, he replied, "No."

The \$80 million aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing at a Chinese military base after the collision in international air space off China. The pilot of the Chinese fighter was killed and China



The damaged U.S. spy plane will probably be shipped from China to the U.S. in crates

detained the spy plane's 24 crew members for 11 days as it insisted Washington apologize for the collision and end its spy flights off the Chinese coast.

The United States refused to accept responsibility for the accident, but the standoff ended when Washington said it was "very sorry" the Chinese pilot died and the EP-3 landed on Hainan without prior authorization.

Spy plane crew awarded heroism medals

Pilot receives Distinguished Flying Cross

By Eun-kyung Kim
The Associated Press

ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, Md. — The 24-member Navy spy plane crew at the center of last month's standoff with China received medals today for their heroism and a personal thank-you from their commander in chief.

In a ceremony at a joint services open house at this suburban Air Force base, the crew's pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for regaining control and safely landing his crippled plane on China's Hainan island after a collision with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea.

The other 23 crew members received the Air Medal for exceptional achievement. The Meritorious Service Medal, awarded for leadership during the crew's 11 days in Chinese detention, went to Osborn and the crew's senior enlisted member, Senior Chief Petty Officer Nicholas Mellos, of Ypsilanti, Mich.

Osborn and his crew flew into the base near Washington in an EP-3E intelligence-gathering similar to theirs, which remains in China. The EP-3E that brought them was displayed in the background for the ceremony.

Army Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saluted each crew member after pinning on the medal in a ceremony held beneath gray skies that threatened rain. Beside Shelton stood Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

"We thank each one of you for your service to our country," Rumsfeld said during a ceremony framed by colorful flags and a row of F-16 fighter jets.

Afterward, Osborn posed for pictures with Rumsfeld, former senator and presidential candidate Bob Dole, a World War II Army veteran, military spectators and members of the public.

"It's been a great day," said Osborn, of Norfolk, Neb. "To have our crew honored by the president,

Secretary Rumsfeld and all of the services is extraordinary."

By his side, his mother, Diana Osborn, beamed at the attention being lavished on her son.

"I'm just thankful to God that they all got back safe so they could be here today," she said quietly, fighting back tears.

Friday's ceremony capped weeks of celebratory appearances since the crew returned home from Hainan.

Members have been hailed as heroes and starred in hometown parades. One even threw out the first pitch for a Wrigley Field doubleheader.

Osborn and other crew members said Friday they were ready to get out of the spotlight and back to work.

"It was really exciting to come out here and be part of this, but I don't think any of the crew considers ourselves heroes," said Lt. j.g. Rick Payne of Pampa, Texas. "We were trained to do this mission ... and it just so happened on this one occasion we had to use that training in an extreme circumstance."

The crew began the morning with a visit to the White House and an Oval Office tour by President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. Bush saluted the crew's "class and dignity" throughout their ordeal in China.

"The vice president and I are thrilled to be able to look you in the eye and say thanks for your service to the country," he said.

The president told the crew the United States was "making progress" toward getting the damaged plane off Hainan.

The aircraft was badly damaged in the April 1 collision that killed the Chinese fighter pilot. China blames the U.S. plane for the accident, but U.S. officials say the jet caused the crash by flying too close.

Washington Post
May 19, 2001
Pg. B3

At Andrews Show, A Different Crew Gets Taste Of Glory

Fliers of Surveillance Plane Honored

By Steve Vogel, Washington Post Staff Writer

The pilots of the sleek high-performance military jets that rip and roll through the sky normally draw most of the attention at air shows, but yesterday at Andrews Air Force Base, it was the crew of a lumbering prop plane parked on the tarmac that stole the show.

It was no ordinary crew. The 24 men and women who were aboard the Navy EP-3 surveillance plane that survived a collision with a Chinese fighter last month have come to Washington to be honored and put on display at the annual Andrews air show.

The pilot who safely landed the crippled plane, Navy Lt. Shane Osborn, yesterday was presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross, the nation's highest flying award, and the Meritorious Service Medal.

All 24 crew members, in dress uniforms and standing at attention on the Andrews tarmac with an EP-3 as a backdrop, were saluted by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld as an "extraordinary group of men and women." After Osborn received his medals, the other crew members were awarded the Air Medal, and Senior Chief Petty Officer Nicholas Mellos also received the Meritorious Service Medal.

Earlier in the day, the crew had breakfast at the White House and met with President Bush, who praised their performance under duress and gave them a tour of the Oval Office.

The Navy, capitalizing on the warm public reception the crew has received since being released by China after 11 days of detention, brought the entire crew to Andrews for the annual Joint Services Open House, as the air show is officially known.

The air show, which is free and open to the public today and tomorrow, includes more than 70 aircraft on display and demonstrations by the Air Force Thunderbirds, the Army's Golden Knights parachute team and the Navy's newest fighter, the Super Hornet.

Osborn and the crew flew an EP-3 from their home station at Whidbey Island in Washington state, landing at Andrews on Thursday evening. "We weren't as rusty as I thought," Osborn said.

The EP-3 crew members will be stationed beside the parked plane today and tomorrow and will be available to the public.

The heavily damaged aircraft laden with sensitive surveillance equipment that was involved in the April 1 incident remains in China, and negotiations for its return continue between the United States and China.

"I don't know if it would have been in shape for an air show," Osborn said. "The rest of the country will see when we get that plane back what kind of damage we had."

The subject of the plane came up briefly in the crew's conversation with Bush, crew members said. "We talked about maybe getting it back," Osborn said.

Bush spoke and posed for photographs with each of the crew members and then left them alone in the Oval Office to look around and sit in the chair at his desk.

"It was an honor," Mellos said. "An honor as a taxpayer, an honor as a member of the armed forces."

At yesterday's opening ceremony and preview show at Andrews, which included an audience of military families, dignitaries and groups of disabled children, crew members posed for photographs, chatted with onlookers and signed autographs.

"They supported us," said one of the crew members, Petty Officer Joe Edmunds. "It's a way of paying them back."

Woody Mack, a Pentagon employee and Navy veteran, came with his wife, Renee, to greet the crew and collect autographs. "I wanted them to know how appreciative we are of their service," said Mack, a District resident. "Being a Vietnam veteran, I understand the pressures that can build from that type of situation."

Crew members held forth on the adventure for visitors, describing their fright as the plane plummeted in the moments after the collision, the scramble to destroy sensitive equipment after the pilot stabilized the aircraft, the unease after they landed safely on Hainan Island, and the fish heads they were served in their food.

"Anytime you put a reconnaissance aircraft down in a communist country, you're going to be very concerned," Osborn said.

Crowds totaling 1 million people are expected at Andrews over the course of three days, depending on the weather, said Air Force Brig. Gen. James Hawkins, the base commander.

Last year, the Thunderbirds created a sensation departing Andrews the day after the show ended.

Taking off in a thick cloud cover, four of the F-16s veered off course, straying into busy air space and forcing several civilian aircraft to divert.

The incident drew national attention and complaints from the Federal Aviation Administration.

"I don't foresee any kind of problems this year," Hawkins said.

An Air Force investigation concluded that the Thunderbird takeoff procedures were not at fault but that more training should be conducted for radar-assisted departures.

"We went back and trained harder, and hopefully, we won't have any problems," Maj. Douglas Larson, a Thunderbird pilot, said yesterday.

Spy plane crew honored

ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, Md. (AP) — Capping weeks of celebratory appearances since returning home, the 24-member crew of the Navy surveillance plane that made a harrowing landing on a Chinese island was honored Friday with medals for extraordinary performance and courage. Under gray skies, Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saluted and pinned the medals on each of the 24. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld looked on and spoke briefly with each.

"You come from a distinguished squadron," Rumsfeld said later in remarks lauding the crew for their service. "We honor you today and celebrate the fact that you returned home safely to your families and to your country."

The pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, is credited with heroically regaining control of the EP-3E Aries II aircraft after it collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea and landing it safely.

For his efforts Osborn was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. "Lt. Osborn's dedicated efforts ultimately ensured the survival of 24 crewmembers and preserved a vital operational asset," his award citation read. The others received the Air Medal for exceptional achievement.

As the senior officer, Osborn and the senior enlisted member of the crew, Senior Chief Nicholas Mellos, also received the Meritorious Service Medal for their leadership roles during the 11 days they were detained in China. Earlier Friday the crew visited the White House.

"There's the good man," President Bush said as he greeted pilot Osborn. The president and Vice President Dick Cheney gave Osborn and his crew - all in their dress whites, some toting cameras - a tour of the Oval Office.

"The vice president and I are thrilled to be able to look you in the eye and say thanks for your service to the country," Bush said, saluting the crew's "class and dignity" throughout their 11-day ordeal in Chinese custody.

On the day of their release, Bush said the American people "are proud of our crew, and we look forward to welcoming them home."

And welcomed they were, as heroes at every stop. "We're just servicemen doing a job," crewman Jeremy Crandall said during an appearance at North Boone High School in Poplar Grove, Ill. "We went through an ordeal and survived it, and now we're

home. You guys might call us heroes; we call it doing our jobs."

Crandall's welcome back to Illinois also included an April 18 appearance at Wrigley Field to throw out the first pitch and sing "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" during the Chicago Cubs' seventh inning stretch.

The Cubbies rewarded him with a doubleheader sweep of the Philadelphia Phillies, 4-3 and 5-3. Among Navy medals, the Distinguished Flying Cross ranks among the most prestigious, ahead of the Bronze Star and just below the Legion of Merit.

It is awarded for an act of heroism or achievement in flight "so exceptional and outstanding as to clearly set the individual apart" from his comrades, according to military records.

The commander of Pacific Fleet, Adm. Thomas Fargo, recommended Osborn for the award. The United States is negotiating with China for the return of the crippled EP-3E surveillance plane that remains on Hainan island. "We're working to get the plane home. We're making progress about getting the plane home," Bush said on Friday.

"But today, we get to celebrate the fact that the crew is home and that's the most important thing." The Chinese fighter pilot died after his jet tumbled into the South China Sea following the collision with the Navy plane, which had been on a routine mission.

China blamed the U.S. plane for the accident, while U.S. officials said it was the jet that caused the crash by flying too close.

Osborn is credited with saving his crew by bringing the four-engine propeller plane out of an uncontrolled dive for an emergency landing.

At Andrews, the military has brought in a similar EP-3E Aries surveillance plane to stand in for the crew's aircraft.

The backdrop for the medal ceremony is the opening ceremony of the annual Joint Service Open House at Andrews, in the Maryland suburbs just outside Washington.

Expect the usual array of tanks, fighter jets and transports at the Pentagon's air extravaganza.

The Thunderbirds also get to perform their crowd-pleasing aerobatics, and an Army reservist will show why she became a world skydiving champ.



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Thursday, May 17, 2001

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Navy spy plane crew to receive awards

WASHINGTON (AP) — The crew of the Navy spy plane that collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea will receive the Air Medal for heroism, and the pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, is expected to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross, senior defense officials said Wednesday.

Also, Osborn and the senior enlisted man on the flight, Senior Chief Nicholas Mellos, will receive the Meritorious Service Medal for their exemplary conduct during the emergency landing and the 11 days afterward in which all 24 crew members were held by the Chinese military on Hainan Island. The two were singled out because Osborn was the senior officer and Mellos the senior enlisted person.

The presentations are to be made Friday by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld in a ceremony at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., outside Washington, as part of the annual Joint Service Open House. An EP-3E Aries II surveillance plane like the one still held in China is expected to be on display.

The Air Medal has been approved for presentation to the 23 crew members, but it was not clear Wednesday whether Navy Secretary Robert Pirie had formally approved the Distinguished Flying Cross for Osborn. The commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, Adm. Thomas Fargo, recommended Osborn for the highly prestigious flying award, the defense officials said, speaking on condition they not be identified.

Among Navy medals, the Distinguished Flying Cross ranks among the most prestigious, ahead of the Bronze Star and just below the Legion of Merit. It is awarded for an act of heroism or achievement in flight "so exceptional

and outstanding as to clearly set the individual apart" from his comrades, according to military records.

Osborn, of Norfolk, Neb., is credited with saving the crew by bringing the four-engine prop plane out of an uncontrolled dive and making an emergency landing on Hainan island following the collision with a Chinese fighter jet on April 1.

"Mayhem," is how Mellos, of Ypsilanti, Mich., described the frantic moments after impact with the fighter.

The spy plane's outside left propellor tomahawked the Chinese plane in half. The smaller plane's shattered tail punched a hole in the U.S. plane's fuselage and the fighter's front section whacked off the spy plane's nose cone.

The plane went into a free fall, and Osborn told his crew to put on parachutes. He shut down the damaged engine but couldn't hold steady at 15,000 feet. Finally, at 10,000 feet, Osborn regained control.

The EP-3E remains on Hainan, and China so far has refused U.S. requests for permission to repair it there and fly it home. Defense Department officials said Wednesday that talks are continuing through diplomatic channels.

If China refuses to allow the plane to be flown off the island it may have to be partially disassembled and shipped home by air or sea.

Meanwhile, defense officials said U.S. surveillance flights off China's coast have resumed. Details were not available but one official speaking on condition of anonymity said an EP-3E flight was conducted recently without incident and at least two Air Force RC-135 surveillance flights have been conducted.

U.S. makes plans for spy plane return

LONDON, England (CNN) -- The United States government has contacted Heavylift Cargo Airlines about using a giant Antonov freighter plane to bring its damaged EP-3 spy plane home from China, an official of the airline said Wednesday.

Vince Seeger of Heavylift Cargo Airlines said an inquiry had come from representatives of the U.S. government but that no further action had been taken.

According to Seeger, U.S. officials are interested in having Antonov Airlines -- a joint venture between Heavylift and Air Foyle -- provide an An-124 transport plane capable of carrying 132 tons to do the job. That plane is the largest air freighter now in commercial use.

If Heavylift agrees to bring the U.S. plane out, Seeger said it will still have to be

disassembled and put in crates before being loaded onto one of the airline's seven Antonov aircraft.

The U.S. spy plane landed on Hainan Island after colliding with a Chinese fighter on April 1. The 24-member crew was allowed to return to the United States on April 11.

However, the damaged plane remains at a Chinese military base where it landed.

A Pentagon official said the preferred method to return the plane would be to make enough repairs to make the aircraft airworthy. Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. Craig Quigley said Tuesday that the United States is still negotiating with Chinese authorities.

"Our goal is to get it back with as little time, minimum level of effort that we can and at the lowest cost that we can," Quigley said.

★ BUSH'S BIG TEST

SAVING FACE

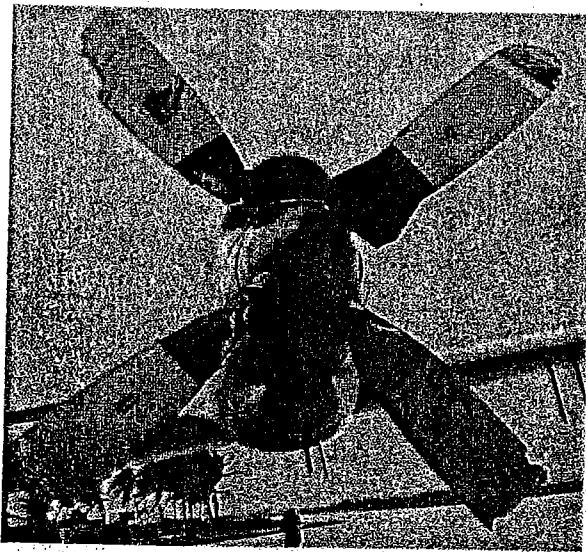


Two planes collide, two Presidents bark and threaten back at the same time. Some lessons about brinkmanship, Wang's role, and his return to the White House.

By NANCY GIBBS and MICHAEL DUFFY

EVERYONE HAD A JOB TO DO ONBOARD THE DYING NAVY RECONNAISSANCE plane when it began to fall out of the sky. The two pilots up front were trying to save the aircraft, while the other 22 crew members in back were trying to destroy what was inside it. Two Chinese F-8 fighters had been tracking the plane closely, too closely, for 10 minutes. The U.S. flyers even recognized one of the pilots, Wang Wei, a notorious hot-dogger who one time flew so close to an American plane that he could be seen holding up his e-mail address on a piece of paper. It was Wang's plane that clipped the EP-3E's left wing, slashed one of its four propellers into pieces and smashed off the plane's nose before spiraling into the South China Sea. Rocked by the collision, the vibrating turboprop plunged 8,000 ft. before pilot Shane Osborn regained control. "Mayday! Mayday!" a flyer called into the radio, as the pilots shut down the most damaged engine, and the plane bucked and shuddered in indignation. There was no chance of making it 1,300 miles back to Okinawa or even to the Philippines. The closest airstrip was on the resort

★ BUSH'S BIG TEST



KINNOVA-REUTERS



island of Hainan, known in Chinese legend as the "end of the world," where the sky and sea meet to form a perfect haven. It is also home to many Chinese military bases, the kind of place where honeymooners sit on the beach and watch the submarines surface offshore, the fighter jets buzz overhead. You couldn't pick a worse place to land one of the most highly classified planes the U.S. has ever built, full of secrets about how we gather secrets—if the pilots could manage to land at all.

While they wrestled the crippled plane, the crew had a familiar drill to follow: the "classified destruction plan," which assigns each crew member a sensitive part of the plane to demolish. Some of the steps—erasing computer hard drives that recorded the day's mission—were manageable even if the plane's violent rocking kept the crew strapped into their seats. But the most sophisticated eavesdropping gear was supposed to be destroyed in order to be saved, smashed with hammers and hatchets or stuffed into weighted bags and dumped

FLYING PIG The EP-3E is old and slow, but its electronic guts are state of the art, regularly replaced with better, faster, sneakier gear

out of the plane's cargo doors. Once the plane managed to land safely, there could be one last chance to cram secret papers into special containers and then detonate grenades inside them.

By the time news of the harrowing collision became public, a similar drill was being repeated in Washington and Beijing. Some on the front lines of the U.S.-China relationship were trying to save it, while others in the back seemed intent on blowing it up. Neither country was able to manage a clear response for days. In both, there are hardliners, who seem to miss the days of cold war chest thumping, arrayed against accommodationists, who value, among other peace dividends, the \$116 billion in annual trade. It was in the interest of both to let the other side know there were divisions within their ranks. That's the nature of the game, played this round by George W. Bush, a blunt-spoken Westerner whose father was once a special envoy to China, and President Jiang Zemin, an aging autocrat who staked his

authority on building a better relationship with the West, only to come under fire at home for going too far. In a test of pride and power, two Presidents fought to control the weapons of diplomacy, the tiny spaces between a concern, a regret and an apology.

BUSH WAS AT CAMP DAVID THAT SATURDAY night with a group that included National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice when he got word of the incident. Twenty-four American servicemen and -women were being held at the Lingshui air base on Hainan.

"How serious is it?" he asked Rice.

"I don't know," she said, and started working the phones back to Washington, talking with Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense chief Donald Rumsfeld and relaying information to the President. Bush remained publicly silent all through Sunday as U.S. diplomats looked for a discreet way out of the impasse. Bush knew that whatever signals he sent went not only to the Chinese but also to the rest of the world, which was waiting to see how an inexperienced new President would handle his first foreign policy test, how his instinct

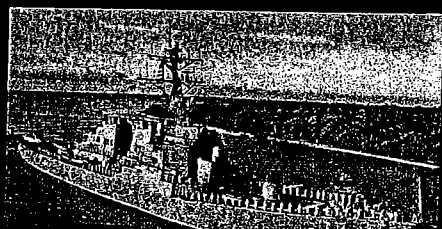
FLASH POINTS

THE ROADS TO CONFRONTATION

U.S.-China ties have immense implications for global stability and prosperity; and Washington and Beijing walk a fine line between mutual exploitation and deep mistrust. Serious differences on crucial issues threaten to ignite tensions between the powers.

TAIWAN

Bush will decide this month whether to sell advanced destroyers with Aegis radar systems to the rich island Beijing calls a renegade province. China vociferously opposes the deal. Bush could thumb his nose at Beijing or offer less-well-equipped ships.

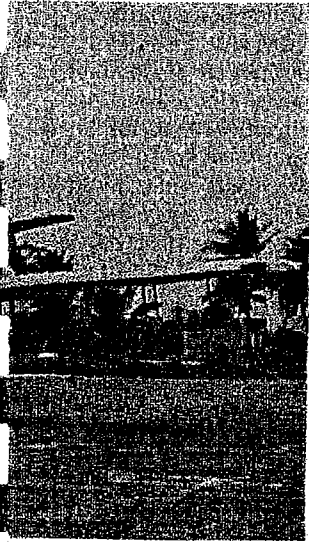


PUSHING BORDERS

As China's armed forces modernize, they continue to test their Pacific boundaries—and the U.S. keeps beefing up surveillance. China patrols ever farther afield, routinely laying claim to virtually all of the South China Sea, causing conflict with neighbors like Vietnam and the Philippines, which also claim the tiny islets there (and the oil fields beneath).

GABRIEL FAVILA-AP

“All the crew members were in fine shape. They are in good health. They are in high spirits. Their morale is great.” —COLIN POWELL



for caution would play against his equally instinctive impatience.

It would have to be China, of course, that first crossed the new President: this was, after all, a rival and maybe a threat, a vast market and a nimble supplier. And yet Bush had made it clear all through his campaign that he rejected what he considered Bill Clinton's tolerance of every Chinese outrage—the spy scandals, the weapons sales, the human rights abuses—so long as nothing got in the way of our growing trade. Bush clearly sided with those who favored a tougher line when he took to calling China a “strategic competitor,” not a partner. That shift pleased a whole range of constituencies, evangelical Christians worried about religious persecution, union protectionists, unthawed cold warriors, human rights activists. But the business lobby had other agendas, and they were all going to be watching closely.

The Administration's initial response was to stay cool, keep quiet, give the Chinese room to move. “The message to the Chinese,” says a White House official, “was, ‘Guys, this is a very unfortunate incident.

THE DETAINEES were said to be faring well, but the few visits with them allowed by the Chinese were tightly controlled

We'd like to get it wrapped up as quickly as possible, because if we can get it wrapped up soon, it won't become a crisis.” But even Powell had trouble getting through for a private talk with anyone who mattered in Beijing, and the public tone was not encouraging. Chinese officials claimed that the U.S. plane had veered suddenly into the F-8 fighter, even though the EP-3E is about half as fast as and far less nimble than the Chinese jet. The collision had occurred about 70 miles off China's coast; China considers its sovereign airspace to extend 200 miles offshore, even though international agreements recognize only 12 miles. Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao declared that the plane had violated Chinese airspace, landed without permission and thus lost its sovereign immunity—so the Chinese government would be perfectly within its rights to go aboard to try to figure out the reason for the intrusion.

When satellite photographs showed the plane partly covered in tarps—the better to

hide the work of prying Chinese engineers—it confirmed the Administration's fears. While the EP-3E is an old plane, a model that began flying in 1969, its electronic guts are up-to-the-minute. No EP-3E has ever been shot down or captured, even though the “flying pig,” as it is called, is a long-range, slow-flying unarmed aircraft. “The most important thing to the Chinese on that airplane was the data we had collected earlier that day,” says Norman Polmar, an independent Navy expert. “That would tell them which of their systems is vulnerable to interception—Are we able to intercept telephone conversations from Chinese naval headquarters to ships? Are we able to intercept radar transmissions at certain frequencies?—that's what the Chinese want to know.”

It was bad enough that the Chinese were holding the crew and autopsying the plane; then Jiang stepped forward to charge that the U.S. was fully responsible for the crash and owed China an apology. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer flatly ruled out any such thing, and not just because being a superpower means never having to say you're sorry. The U.S. was

SCHOLARS OR SPIES

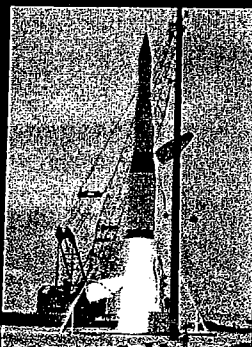
Chinese authorities have detained two American-based academics this year. University researcher Gao Zhan, 41, a permanent U.S. resident whose son and husband are citizens, was arrested for espionage last week after being held for more than a month. Li Shaomin, a U.S. citizen and Hong Kong professor, was taken into custody while visiting the mainland last month.



PAUL J. RICHARDS—AFP

NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE

China angrily opposes Bush's proposed missile-defense system, which could render its long-range arsenal useless. China also fears the U.S. will use a theater missile defense to shield Taiwan from its short-range missiles. Beijing has warned Bush that he risks a new arms race.



REUTERS

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Paranoia over controlling its populace has led Beijing to oppress religious and labor groups. U.S. and U.N. observers have condemned the crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement. China hates criticism but must spruce up its image as it bids for the 2008 Olympics.

—By Mitch Frank



ANDREW YOUNG—REUTERS

more than willing to apologize for accidentally bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade two years ago. But in the case of this collision, the near instant consensus among U.S. military pilots was that if anyone was at fault, it was the Chinese.

“It’s like a speedboat and a sailboat,” said a Navy pilot. “The smaller, more powerful guy has the responsibility to avoid the bigger, slower one.” Yet recently, as the U.S. stepped up surveillance flights in response to China’s buildup in the area, the Chinese pilots had become more aggressive. “Sometimes they’re so close you can see their faces,” David Cecka, Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class onboard the downed plane, had told his mother. It got so bad that U.S. officials complained. “We went to the Chinese and said, ‘Your aircraft are not intercepting in a professional manner. There is a safety issue here,’” recalls Admiral Dennis Blair, head of the U.S. Pacific Command. “It’s not normal practice to play bumper cars in the air.”

BY MONDAY MORNING, SOME 36 HOURS HAD passed without progress. Bush met with Powell, Rice, Rumsfeld and Vice President

Dick Cheney and agreed that it was time for him to make a statement and turn up the pressure on Jiang. But there were domestic political pressures at play as well. The White House was keen to show that Bush was in charge, setting the tone, weighing the options. Cheney would spend the week conspicuously busy on Capitol Hill, worrying about the budget. As for Rumsfeld and Powell, now playing tug-of-war with their second generation of Bush Presidents, it was the more moderate Powell who had the lead. “It’s our air crew—they are military people,” Pentagon spokesman Craig Quigley said. “But if you think of a military solution to this, that’s not the way ahead. The way ahead is a diplomatic one.” Rumsfeld, known to favor a hard line, was ever the good soldier. “Right now he agrees with everything that’s being done,” a close Rumsfeld aide said. “He’s been involved with this thing from the beginning, but he has no desire to stand out.” And so it was Bush himself who went before the cameras on Monday to read a statement designed to sound firm but not threatening. The White House had decided not to attack

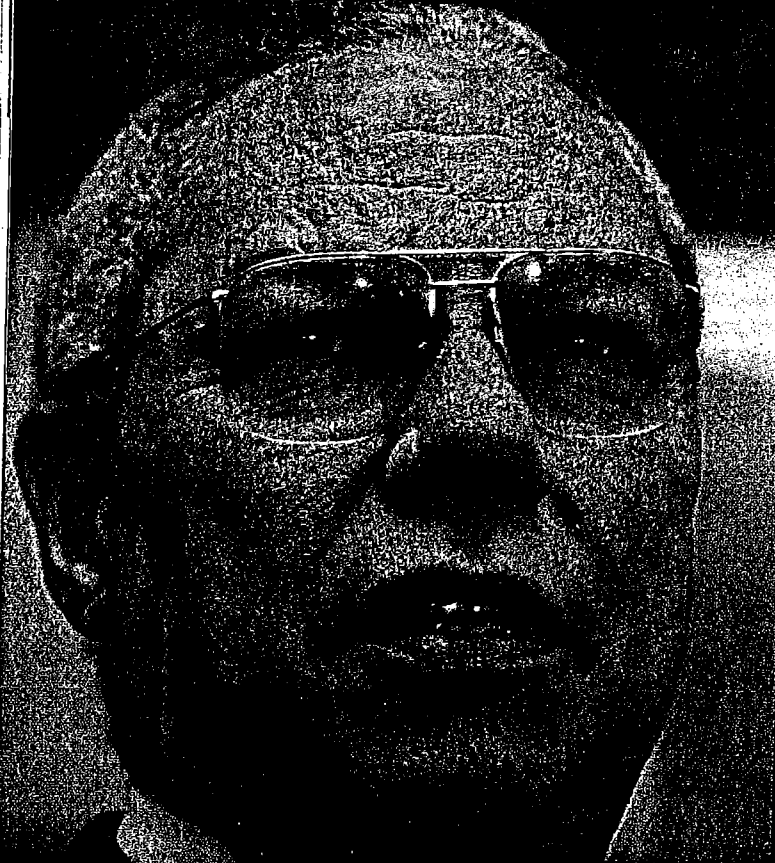
the Chinese pilot for hotdogging near the U.S. plane, and instead called the collision an “accident.” “Our priorities are the prompt and safe return of the crew,” Bush said, “and the return of the aircraft without further damaging or tampering.”

That put Bush front and center, but it was a risk. When those comments failed to win the crew’s release, the next move seemed to be anyone’s guess. “They put him out,” said a foreign policy veteran of the first Bush White House. “But when nothing happened, then it was like, ‘O.K., what do we do now?’”

By Tuesday, some in the Administration felt they were being stonewalled. Jiang continued to insist that the fault lay with the U.S. The Chinese President also called for an end to U.S. surveillance flights. At 2 p.m., Bush walked into the Oval Office and immediately asked Rice to get Brigadier General Neal Sealock on the phone. Sealock, the U.S. military attaché in Beijing, had finally been allowed in to see the crew, but for just 40 minutes under strict conditions: no recording devices, no individual conversations, the Chinese always present. The crew had been able to convey word that they had

THE AMERICAN TEAM

COLIN POWELL Bush’s top diplomat has led the talks with China. After some tough talk from Bush, Powell’s expression of “regret” cracked the ice



RICHARD ARMITAGE Powell’s old friend and deputy, Armitage has been negotiating in Washington with Chinese ambassador Yang Jiechi



CONDOLEEZZA RICE At Bush’s side to brief him after the plane landed on Hainan, Rice is his link to the foreign policy team

JOSEPH PRUEMER Leading the dialogue in Beijing, the U.S. ambassador is a retired four-star admiral who once commanded the Pacific Fleet



CHRISTOPHER HOGAN/REUTERS

ALEX WONG/NEWSMAFES

LARRY DOWNING—REUTERS

VINCENT YU—AP

wiped out much of the sensitive information before the Chinese had boarded the plane.

So at 4 p.m., after the markets closed, Bush walked into the Rose Garden and reminded China of the consequences of delay. "We have allowed the Chinese government time to do the right thing," he said. "But now it is time for our servicemen and -women to return home." The whole relationship was on the line. "This accident has the potential of undermining our hopes for a fruitful and productive relationship between our two countries."

Bush did open one tiny window. Once again he mentioned getting the plane back, but by now this was a bargaining chip. The Chinese were not likely to relinquish such a prize, yet by demanding it Bush might allow them to save some face by releasing the crew but keeping the plane. By the time Rumsfeld issued his first statement the next day, there was no mention of the plane. "The plane doesn't matter anymore," said a Bush adviser. "It's destroyed anyway."

As it returned the message, the Administration discussed even tougher options. Diplomatic meetings and military exchanges could be canceled. Bush could

drop his fall visit to Beijing. He could make dark noises about trade, even end normal trading status. The U.S. could get in the way of China's quest to hold the 2008 Olympics. Then there was the question of whether to sell advanced defensive weapons to Taiwan. "He's got a lot of sticks," a former Clinton Administration official says of Bush, "but the problem is, they're all too big."

Bush's Tuesday remarks left some old China hands dismayed. "You don't want to talk about harming the relationship until you know what sort of harm you may be inflicting," said J. Stapleton Roy, who was ambassador to Beijing under Bush's father and a top U.S. diplomat under Clinton. "I think it does reflect a certain amount of inexperience when you make statements like that." Roy blamed Bush's tone on Administration officials "who are unrealistic in their expectations of how China should behave in these circumstances."

And it wasn't long after Bush spoke that the Administration began to dial it back. A tantalizing question through the first tense days was how much the 43rd President was

huddling with the 41st. Bush gave no hint, even to some of his closest aides, that he was talking to his father, but everyone in the West Wing assumed he was. Dad's diplomatic alter ego, Brent Scowcroft, was in regular communication with Rice, his former protégé. Scowcroft worked quietly behind the scenes to tone down the initial response. Bush Sr., who spent part of last week in Europe but could have been in secure contact with the White House through embassy phone hookups, has always thought of himself as an old China hand. As President, Bush often told his aides, "I know the Chinese"—and then rang up Beijing for a friendly chat. The habit drove advisers like Scowcroft crazy, not only because they couldn't keep track of what he said but also because Bush Sr. had a tendency to soft-pedal problems. As tensions rose last week, Bush aides began to hope that a family powwow was taking place. One of the many West Wing officials who worked for both father and son put it this way: "God, I hope he is talking to his father."

China had so much to lose by putting

THE CHINESE TEAM

Continued on page 32

ZHANG WANNIAN

Grim-faced general on the Central Military Commission, Zhang is a stranger to diplomacy and deeply suspicious of the U.S.



QIAN QICHEN Vice Premier and top foreign policy maker, he has managed relations with the U.S., guiding China back from pariah status after Tiananmen Square



ZHU RONGJI

Responsible for China's trillion-dollar economy, Premier Zhu pushed hard for joining the World Trade Organization; he knows the conflict could hurt trade



ZENG QINGHONG

President Jiang Zemin's former political secretary, Zeng helps run the party behind the scenes. Has urged Jiang to develop closer ties with the U.S., so he has to look tough now or face the wrath of the hard-liners



HU JINTAO

Rising through the party by avoiding risk, Hu is not known for strong ideas. Expected to replace Jiang in 2002, he'll have to take a hawkish line or risk blowing his promotion



★ BUSH'S BIG TEST

A MIDAIR COLLISION...



The U.S. and China agree that two fighters were tracking the EP-3E Aries II when the collision occurred. Chinese pilot Wang Wei left

apparently parachuted to his death from his stricken plane. The EP-3E dropped 8,000 ft. (2,443 m) before the pilot regained control and flew to Lingshui air base. But what caused the crash and what should have happened afterward are in dispute.

■ THE U.S. SCENARIO

Judging from damage to the EP-3, experts believe Wang was flying directly underneath its left wing. He was apparently known to the U.S. as a maverick pilot who had been photographed flashing his e-mail address from his F-8 cockpit. Some Pentagon experts believe Wang was a victim of the **Venturi effect**—shrinking air pressure between two craft flying parallel and too close to each other caused the EP-3's wing to dip onto the F-8. Once issued a Mayday call, the EP-3, under international law, was allowed to land at the nearest airport without permission.

“The faster, more maneuverable aircraft has the obligation to stay out of the way... It's pretty obvious who bumped into whom.”

—Admiral Dennis C. Blair, commander in chief, U.S. Pacific Command



...STRANDS A SPY PLANE

The lumbering EP-3, dubbed the “flying pie” by its crews, is a signal intelligence gatherer. It is packed with highly sensitive equipment that collects electronic emissions by radar, airport control, weather devices, military commands and more— from coastlines to deep within foreign territory. Its mission is dangerous but essential: the EP-3 intercepts information that spy satellites cannot.

THE EP-3E ARIES II

Maximum range: 2,380 nautical miles (4,408 km)

Maximum speed: 403 mph (648 km/h)

Cost: \$36 million

Body tipping cost: \$2.100

Length: 28,300 ft (8,626 m)

THE CREW

The EP-3E carries 24 people, who fill 20 designated positions and provide a relief team onboard, in addition to the flight crew. Two teams, known as ELINT and COMINT, work on intercepting and interpreting various types of electronic and communications intelligence.

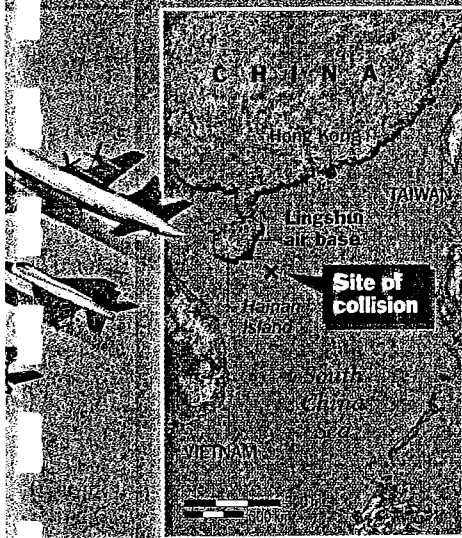


① ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE TEAM

This team identifies and locates radar using an extremely accurate antenna on the outside of the plane. The staff is believed to perform four main duties:

■ Monitor operation of radar characteristics to determine if they are friendly or hostile and determine how they are used.

■ Locate and identify signal collector, which can detect and intercept signals from the ground, sea, and air.

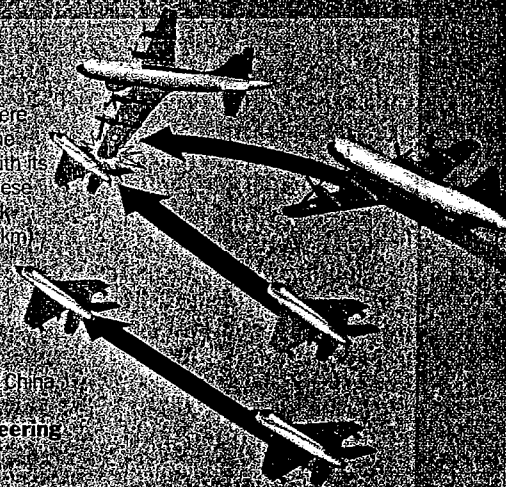


THE CHINESE SCENARIO

The surviving Chinese pilot says he and Wang Wei were flying to the left of the EP-3 when the American plane veered **left**, crashing into the tail of Wang's plane with its nose and left wing. (An earlier account had the Chinese planes flanking the U.S. aircraft.) The encounter took place beyond China's territorial limits, 12 miles (19 km) from the coast, that is recognized as **international airspace**. The EP-3, however, then violated China's national security by landing at Lingshui without permission. That illegal entry gives China the right to "investigate" the plane and hold its crew, and to negotiate with the U.S. about the losses incurred by China.

"It was directly caused by the U.S. plane veering at a wide angle toward our plane, making it impossible for our plane to avoid it."

—Zhao Yu, pilot of the second Chinese jet



2 COMMUNICATIONS-INTELLIGENCE TEAM

Cryptologists collect, analyze and interpret communications. Their duties are highly classified, and their equipment is always off during observer flights. However, the team is believed to intercept aircraft-to-aircraft and control tower radio communications, as well as telephone calls.

■ **Cryptologists** rarely speak a foreign language fluently, but they know key words associated with military activity, equipment and logistics. Using them, they annotate tapes made during a mission and send them to other intelligence agencies, such as the National Security Agency, which has headquarters in Fort Meade, Md.—for full analysis.

■ **Communications teams** are also believed to be trained in a system that intercepts an enemy radio transmission, alters its meaning and retransmits the communication in the original operator's voice. The Pentagon asserts that such "spoofing" is used rarely and cautiously.



KEEPING SECRETS

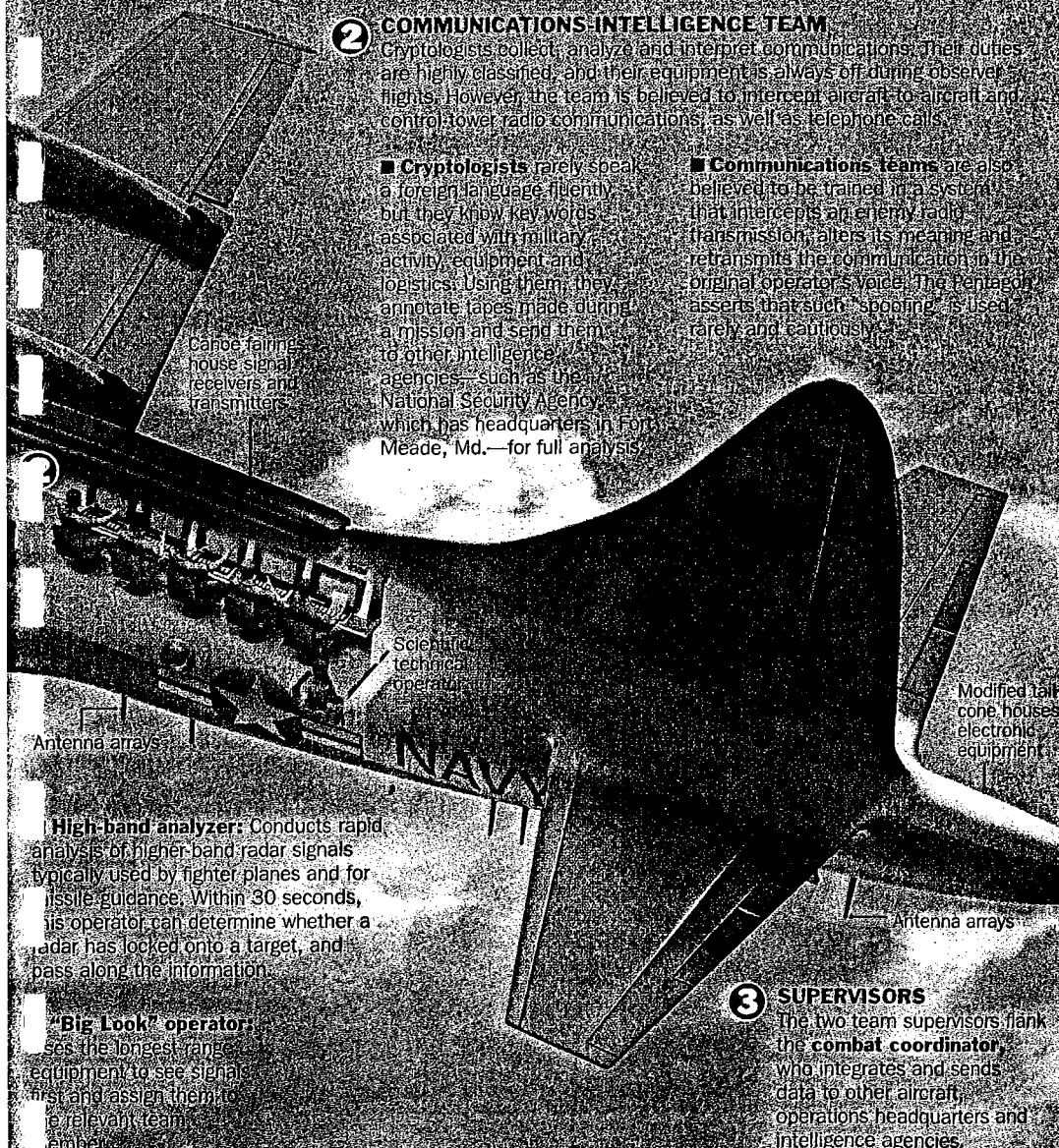
Every time the EP-3 lands, its crew must see the destruction of classified material mandated by the CIA if an aircraft has to land in an unfriendly territory. It is unclear whether the crew completely followed procedural orders when the plane was boarded.

■ High-powered magnets could have erased magnetic tapes, and the removal of hard drives and cryptologic equipment could also have been erased.

■ Sensitive documents and discs could have been shredded and dumped into the sea, or detonated with small grenades in special containers.

■ On a rough flight, more physical destruction—using hammers and hatchets to smash equipment or dumping gear in weighted bags—could be impossible.

■ The day after the crash, a cargo plane loaded with men and technical equipment was reportedly dispatched from Beijing to study the aircraft.



Cargo fairing house signal receivers and transmitter

Scientific technical operator

Modified tail cone houses electronic equipment

Antenna arrays

Antenna arrays

■ **High-band analyzer:** Conducts rapid analysis of higher-band radar signals typically used by fighter planes and for missile guidance. Within 30 seconds, its operator can determine whether a radar has locked onto a target, and pass along the information.

■ **"Big Look" operator:** Uses the longest range equipment to see signals first and assign them to the relevant team member.

3 SUPERVISORS

The two team supervisors flank the **combat coordinator**, who integrates and sends data to other aircraft, operations headquarters and intelligence agencies.

★ BUSH'S BIG TEST

Bush in a corner that U.S. analysts found it hard to figure Beijing's motives. Why would Jiang stake so much on one spy plane? He could have fed the U.S. crew a nice Chinese meal and sent them home, earning all kinds of Western goodwill. Instead, he kept raising the stakes, demanding an apology before anyone had a chance to investigate the incident or debrief the pilots on either side.

Jiang's hard line revealed the weakness of his position at home. The crisis hit at the most delicate moment in his career since he took power after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. More than anyone else, he was responsible for restoring U.S.-China relations after that uprising. But Jiang turns 75 this year and is likely to resign his position at a party conference in the fall of 2002. The question is, Who will replace him and his allies, and which, if any, of his current titles will he be allowed to keep? So far he has fared badly, failing to maneuver his followers into key spots or secure a po-

sition for himself. His opponents, especially among military hard-liners, consider him too soft, too willing to submit to U.S. demands. So when word of the midair collision reached his home in the cloistered Zhongnanhai leadership compound in central Beijing, Jiang seized his chance to consolidate power by acting tough.

He wasn't the only one who saw an opportunity and took it. The Chinese military has been feeling sensitive ever since a high-level officer defected to the U.S. last December. Jiang has forced the People's Liberation Army to withdraw from many of its lucrative business enterprises, though he has tried to raise morale by boosting defense spending 18% this year. But many officers still feel that China has grown too chummy with the U.S. They resent the U.S. surveillance flights along the Chinese coastline—something the U.S. would never tolerate on its borders—and they resent the fact that the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Japan

could defeat China's entire navy. "The military likes to have an enemy, and that's how it sees the U.S.," says a former Chinese official who had close contacts with the army. "It will insist that Jiang hang tough."

Though authoritarian leaders are supposed to be immune to polls and popular will, Jiang also had to worry about the Chinese public. Anger at the U.S. could easily twist into fury at him for failing to defend the motherland. "If Mao Zedong were the leader today, he would have shot down the American plane," says Li Hua, a physics student from Shanghai, who counts KFC as her favorite takeout. "But our leaders now don't have the guts to get in a fight." At first this incident looked like a reprise of the Belgrade embassy bombing. Anyone watching the official newscasts was led to believe that the U.S. plane had intentionally caused the collision. Variations on KILL THE IMPERIAL-IST AMERICAN PIGS littered Chinese Internet message boards. But during the street

■ THE HARD-LINERS

A "BLUE TEAM" BLOCKS BEIJING

The Chinese word for crisis, sinologists like to say, combines the characters for *danger* and *opportunity*. Despite the risks to U.S.-China relations, a small group of China specialists in Washington views the spy-plane incident as the best chance yet to alert the Establishment to Beijing's growing strategic threat to the U.S. "This basically puts a stake through the heart of appeasement," says Edward Timperlake, a former Marine fighter pilot and an author who worked in the Reagan Administration.

Timperlake is a member of the Blue Team, a loosely organized group of conservative congressional aides, experts and political operatives who reject not only the Clinton concept of a "strategic partnership" with China but also the mainstream Republican policy of trade-based engagement to encourage reforms.

TEAMMATES William Triplett, left, and Edward Timperlake

They think the communist regime should be contained and confronted, much as the Soviet Union was treated, and that Taiwan's democracy should receive robust military support.

Blue Team members, numbering perhaps 40, keep in touch via e-mail and sometimes gather for drinks at the American Tavern on F Street in Washington. Many prefer to operate behind the scenes, relishing their role as insurgents. "It isn't politically correct to be

with us," says William Triplett, a congressional staff member who coined the term Blue Team, after the code name that China gives its enemy in war games, and who wrote with Timperlake a book on China's military, *Red Dragon Rising*. Blue Teamers helped write and promote the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, a controversial bill that passed the House last year, and have succeeded in attaching riders to legislation that force the Pentagon to provide regular

updates on China's military strength. Their handiwork was evident last week in a letter signed by 82 House members urging President Bush to sell advanced destroyers to Taiwan. Says Ronald Montaperto, a former Pentagon expert on Chinese military affairs who has crossed swords with the Blues: "They're very passionate. Unlike them, many of us believe you can be suspicious of China but understand that it's necessary to get along."

Bush's handling of the spy-plane incident gets a grudging pass from most Blues, who would prefer more assertive actions but applaud the contrast to the previous Administration. "By this point Bill Clinton would have apologized three times to the world," says the Blue Team's Richard Fisher, a China expert at the Jamestown Foundation. While the Blues are encouraged by the new rightward tilt in Washington, they know the pro-engagement policymakers still hold sway. Timperlake vows that "history will put us in the mainstream." China makes the same prediction.

—By Jay Branegan



★ BUSH'S BIG TEST

demonstrations that followed the Belgrade bombing, the leaders learned how hard it could be to control a passionate crowd and feared that anger could turn inward. This time anti-U.S. demonstrations were forbidden and posters taken down.

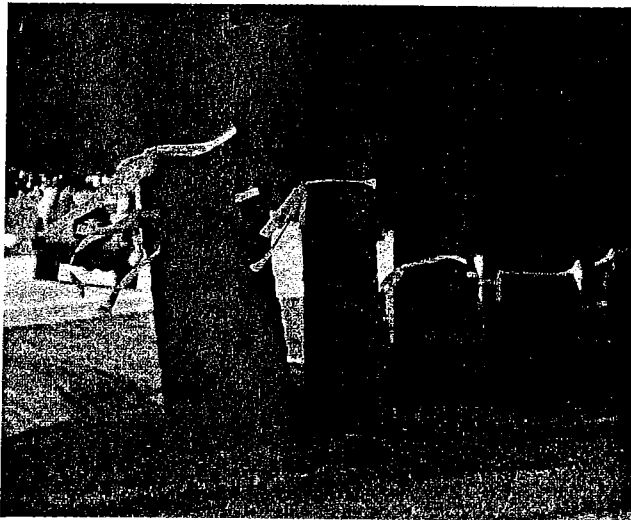
Even before the collision, anger at the U.S. was running high. Beijing felt that the Bush Administration had failed to give China credit for new policies designed to reach out to Washington. In November, China agreed to control its missile exports, but Bush condemned it for selling a communications cable to Iraq. In January, China adopted a less threatening policy toward Taiwan; Bush still might sell Aegis air-defense radar to the island. If he does, "relations with the U.S. could worsen permanently, and Jiang will lose the greatest pillar of his legitimacy," says an Asian diplomat in Beijing. Last month China dispatched foreign policy mandarin Qian Qichen to Washington to patch up relations; Bush chose to receive Japan's doomed Prime Minister first, underscoring Tokyo's privileged position. "I'm frustrated," says a Chinese foreign policy adviser criticized by leaders for being too pro-U.S. "China might pay a price, but the Bush Administration needs to be taught a lesson."

Of course, nothing is that simple. Last year Beijing enjoyed a trade surplus of \$83 billion with the U.S., its top export market, and U.S. businesses invested about \$4 billion in China. These investors have become Beijing's most useful lobbyists in Washington. They thwarted Clinton's initial plan to link China's trade status with human rights and helped win Washington's support for China's entry into the World Trade Organization. China needs that relationship because, to some extent, the leadership's power rests on rising living standards that depend on growing trade.

IF BUSH AND JIANG FACED SIMILAR INTERNAL crosswinds, they did so within very different time frames. The Chinese have been waiting 50 years for Japan to apologize for its conduct in World War II. Bush is living in a 24-hour news cycle, in which impatience is a virtue. "Bush's tough instincts were right," says a Republican lobbyist, "but they were counterproductive. He should have known that the Chinese don't respond well to bluster." It would have been better, say several C.O.P.

foreign policy veterans, to be belligerent in private and play a sweeter song in public. "By saying we won't apologize," says a veteran, "we set the bar way too high."

By Wednesday, you could hear the nuance sliding back into Washington's official statements. At a meeting that morning in the Oval Office, Bush told his advisers he wanted to find a "way out." Senior staff members brought up whether Bush should go ahead as planned and throw out the first pitch at a baseball game Friday. Would that look too frivolous if the servicemen and -women were still detained? "We're go-



VIGIL At a naval air station in Washington State, yellow ribbons for the detainees

ing," said Bush immediately. His advisers agreed. "He's sending a clear message that this is serious, but his schedule is not going to change," said a White House official. "Government business goes on."

It took until Wednesday night for the diplomats to finally get to work. "We aren't talking past each other anymore," said a senior State Department official. "We're not spitting in each other's faces quite so much." Officials were pulling all-nighters on both ends. Powell was called at 2:30 a.m. Thursday for an update.

It was Powell who finally splashed through the verbal puddles and repeated for the cameras his earlier, little noticed expression of "regret" for the loss of the Chinese plane and pilot. The letter that accompanied his statement signaled even more movement. It raised the possibility of a joint investigation into what had happened or an exchange of explanations. "Once we said 'regret' and 'exchange explanations,' they came back to us still saying 'apologize, investigate,' but also saying, 'Let's discuss how this can work.' Now

they're talking mechanisms," said the State Department official.

By Thursday, when Bush stood before a bundle of newspaper editors, he was broadening his vocabulary. While affirming that China was a "competitor," he added, "But that doesn't mean we can't find areas in which we can partner. The economy's a place where we can partner." Progress picked up Friday as the diplomats began hammering out language for an exchange of drafts of a letter that might pave the way for the crew's release. When Bush met with Rice and Cheney to dissect the regret/apology language for the letter to be signed by Ambassador Joseph Prueher, he wanted everyone in the room to know that he would have the final word on whatever they came up with. "If I don't like what the letter says, it's not going," he told Rice. Later, when Sealock briefed Bush and Powell on his latest talks with the Chinese, Bush made it clear that he didn't want to play the blame game. "We don't need to be pointing fingers," he said. "This is a delicate moment."

Still, the whole exercise put Bush at odds with some in Congress and the Pentagon who had no use for subtlety. "After we get our people out, we should de-

nounce all these equivocal statements we made to spring them," a senior Navy officer griped. "And then we should bomb the damn plane on the tarmac." The White House saw that it was also still dealing with competing constituencies on the Chinese end. After 48 hours of thaw, Vice Premier Qian Qichen declared Saturday that the expressions of regret were "still unacceptable." The U.S., he said, must "apologize to the Chinese people. This is the key issue to solving the problem."

Former U.S. ambassador to China James Lilley says the whole standoff reveals the fault line in U.S.-China relations: "They have extended sovereignty; we have forward deployment." Clashes like this are going to happen until an arrangement similar to the one between the Soviets and Americans can be worked out. "This could be therapeutic, especially if it forces both sides to work out rules of engagement," Lilley says. "They don't want this to happen again, and we don't want it to happen again." —Reported by Jay Branegan, Massimo Calabresi, John F. Dickerson and Mark Thompson/Washington, Hannah Beech/Hainan Island and Matthew Forney/Beijing



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HONOLULU ADVERTISER 12 APR 2001

'Welcome back and well done'

By Johnny Brannon
Advertiser Staff Writer

Amidst cheers from hundreds of well-wishers, 24 crew members of a Navy spy plane detained in China since April 1 arrived at Hickam Air Force Base shortly after dawn today.

"The first thing I'd like to say on behalf of the crew is that we're glad to be back and we thank you for your support," said Lt. Shane Osborn, the pilot and mission commander of the EP-3 surveillance aircraft that was forced to make an emergency landing on Hainan island after it collided with a Chinese fighter jet.

"Now that we're back, we definitely have some things to take care of," said Osborn, the only crewmember who spoke to well-wishers. "God bless America."

Several of the 21 men and three women broke into smiles as they stepped from an Air Force transport plane dubbed "The Spirit of Bob Hope," which they had boarded on Guam. One man waved and flashed the shaka sign to the hundreds of service personnel and military families who turned out for the brief ceremony, which included a Navy honor guard and band.

Well-wishers lined the tarmac waving flags and placards that read "Welcome Home" and "Aloha," and outside the plane the fliers were greeted with leis, made of ti leaves for the men and flowers for the women.

The freed fliers were greeted warmly by top military commanders and Hawaii's congressional delegation, then whisked to Pearl Harbor for two days of questioning about their ordeal. They will fly to their home base on Whidbey Island, Wash., on Saturday to be reunited with family members.

Admiral Thomas Fargo, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, told the crew their country was very proud of them and glad they had returned safely.

"We're lucky to have men and women like you protecting the interests of our nation," Fargo said.

"Welcome back and well done."

He then read a letter from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who also congratulated the crew.

"Throughout your days in detention you've conducted yourselves with honor and professionalism and held your heads high," the letter stated. "You put your lives at risk so that the citizens of a grateful nation can live their lives in peace and freedom."

Melaina Sanders, whose husband, Michael, is a Navy pilot stationed here, said she and many other military spouses were thrilled to see the crew return. "It's the best feeling in the world," she said. "Our husbands deploy all the time and there's a constant threat, but you can't concentrate on that. When something happens, we all come together. If it was our guys who had been in China, the wives of these men would be supporting us."

China allowed the crew to leave Hainan on a chartered commercial jet after the Bush administration released a carefully worded letter that said the US was "very sorry" that the Chinese fighter pilot had died and that the crippled American plane had landed on Chinese soil without express permission.

China had demanded a full apology for the incident, but the United States maintained that the U.S. plane had been operating legally in international airspace over the South China Sea and had not caused the collision.

The U.S. plane — filled with secret electronic surveillance equipment — remains held on Hainan, its fate now the focus of negotiations that are due to resume Wednesday.

U.S. officials believe the Chinese military has dismantled and carted off much of the plane's spy gear, though it is not clear whether that will compromise future U.S. intelligence gathering. The U.S. crew may have been able to destroy the plane's most sensitive equipment and data before it landed.

U.S. celebrates the return of its 'heroes'

By The Associated Press

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii — The 24 crew members of the U.S. spy plane touched down in Hawaii at dawn Thursday on the second leg of their journey home from China and got a flag-waving welcome from a cheering crowd and a brass band playing "God Bless America."

"We're definitely glad to be back," said Lt. Shane Osborn, the mission commander.

The weary crew members, who arrived aboard a military transport after a stop in Guam, face two days of debriefings with Pentagon investigators in Hawaii before being reunited with their families over the Easter weekend.

They left their damaged spy plane behind in China, which has refused to release the aircraft since its collision with a Chinese fighter jet April 1.

In Washington, President Bush held the crew blameless and told the nation they "did their duty with honor and with great professionalism."

"I know I speak for all Americans when I say welcome home to our flight crew," he said, adding that U.S. officials are eager to learn "exactly how the accident happened."

The crew awoke Thursday to their 11th day of captivity on the Chinese island of Hainan. Sixteen hours later, after crossing the International Dateline and stopping in Guam, a U.S. territory, their transport touched down at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. It was still Thursday.

Onlookers cheered as the uniformed crew members stepped down from the mammoth, windowless C-17 to salute and shake hands with a line of admirals, generals and Hawaii's U.S. senators and representatives.

"We're all healthy and ready to go home," said Osborn, who held a folded American flag presented by the crew of the military transport, the Spirit of Bob Hope.

Hundreds of well-wishers, some clutching small American flags, others with welcome-home banners, crowded near the crew. Several of the crew members' families had arrived in Hawaii on Wednesday.

"It's a great morning here in Hawaii and a great day for America," Adm. Thomas Fargo, Pacific

Fleet commander, told the crew and crowd. "May your reunion with family and loved ones be a joyous one indeed."

He read a letter from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who said: "You put your lives at risk so the citizens of a grateful nation can live their lives in peace and freedom."

The crew received flower leis before boarding two buses for the Pearl Harbor Naval Base, where they will answer questions from investigators about the collision.

The 21 men and three women are expected to leave Hawaii on Saturday morning for their home base on Whidbey Island, Wash.

In a telephone call to his mother, Osborn said the crew struggled to land the crippled Navy EP-3E surveillance plane after the collision.

"He said it took every bit of strength that he had. All the crew helped," Diane Osborn of Norfolk, Neb., told MSNBC. "He was well-trained by the Navy and I thank God he gave him the strength to get it down."

Pierre Frenay, a pilot on the chartered jet that flew the crew to Guam, told NBC that Osborn reported that the crew had considered bailing out of the stricken plane.

The Pentagon has said the crew destroyed as much of the top-secret codes and intelligence as they could before the Chinese came aboard.

The Chinese fighter jet crashed after the collision, and the pilot has not been found.

The spy plane, which used high-tech listening devices to monitor the Chinese military, remains on Hainan. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi said that Beijing holds the United States entirely responsible for the collision and is keeping the plane for investigation.

U.S. and Chinese officials are to meet April 18 to discuss the plane's fate.

America secured the release of the crew only after the U.S. government's official position went from expressions of "regret" to the word "sorry" to "very sorry" for the Chinese pilot's death and for the U.S. plane's landing in China without permission.

Crew Was Sure All Would Perish in Wild Plunge

Plane: Americans land in Hawaii. Family members hear harrowing accounts of parachutes being donned, and hurried destruction of secret data and equipment.

By MARLENE CIMONSTONY PERRY and SUSAN ESSOYAN, Special To The Times

HONOLULU—The returning crew members of a U.S. Navy spy plane, touching down in the United States after 11 days in Chinese detention, Thursday gave their families heart-stopping accounts of how they nearly ditched their plane in the South China Sea after colliding with a Chinese jet fighter.

Providing new details about the harrowing aftermath of the April 1 incident, crew members told relatives that they were convinced they would die after the EP-3 surveillance plane plunged thousands of feet in seconds. At one point, they frantically strapped on parachutes in hopes that they could leap free.

But "the way [the plane] was spinning, there was no way they could get out," James Coursen, the father of Navy Cryptologic Technician Operator 1st Class Shawn Coursen, said in an interview after talking to his son. "It was chaos in there. They thought they were all going to die."



Nicholas Mellos of Ypsilanti, Mich., an aviation machinist's mate on Navy plane, on disembarking in Honolulu. AP

The crew members also spoke with pride of how much surveillance equipment and data they were able to destroy before landing in China.

The plane, which was conducting a routine military surveillance flight off China's southern coast at the time of the collision, limped to Lingshui military air base on nearby Hainan island. After

Navy Lt. Shane Osborn, the pilot, landed the aircraft, it was immediately surrounded by Chinese soldiers who demanded that crew members leave the plane at once. The 24 Americans were taken into custody and detained until early Thursday.

After an agreement was reached between the U.S. and Chinese governments, the crew was flown to Guam, then taken on to Honolulu for a hero's welcome at Hickam Air Force Base.

With the crew freed, President Bush spoke harshly Thursday of what the Chinese had done and criticized the Beijing government's record on trade, human rights and religious freedom.

Appearing in the White House Rose Garden, Bush said "the kind of incident we have just been through does not advance a constructive relationship between our countries."

He said that, in a meeting between representatives of the two nations Wednesday to discuss the collision, he would direct U.S. officials "to ask the tough questions about China's recent practice of challenging United States aircraft operating legally in international airspace."

Reconnaissance flights, he said, "are a part of a comprehensive national security strategy that helps maintain peace and stability in our world."

During the crew's stop in Guam earlier Thursday, each member was given a cell phone and wasted no time calling family and friends to exchange messages of love and relief, and to describe their ordeal.

The American crew said the four-engine EP-3 was knocked into a dive after the Chinese F-8 fighter, flying close beneath it, struck its tail against the propeller of the engine on the outside of the left wing, according to U.S. officials who have knowledge of the crew's reports.

MORE

The collision caused the EP-3 to roll sharply to the left and nearly turned it over at one point, said the officials, who requested anonymity.

The collision damaged the spy plane's flaps, which are control surfaces on the rear edges of the wings that can increase lift and allow the aircraft to fly more slowly, the officials said. One engine was put out of commission, two

propellers were damaged and the nose cone, which held important instruments, was sheared off.

"My son said the crew did not know whether they were going to live or die; many started praying to themselves," said Ramon Mercado Sr. of Corona, father of Navy Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class Ramon Mercado Jr. "It was all very frightening."

But then, the elder Mercado said, "they realized they were going to come out alive and they all cheered a little bit."

"My son said that every day they were in captivity they thanked the pilot for getting them down and saving their lives," James Coursen said.

The crew considered ditching—landing the plane in the water—after the pilot regained control, the family members said, but feared that the damage might prevent them from slowing the aircraft enough to bring it down safely. The EP-3 had lost both airspeed indicators and, with the other damage, "everything you know about that aircraft has changed—you can't play with it to see how slow it will go," said John W. Comerford of Palos Verdes Estates, the father of Navy Lt. j.g. John Comerford and himself a pilot.

"They probably would have had to ditch in excess of 200 knots, which would have been suicide," said the elder Comerford. Ditching "would have been a very poor choice" because of the plane's limited capabilities, he said. "You're in a horrible situation, and you've got to get it down



Crowd at Hickam air base cheers crew members arriving from Guam.
Reuters

somewhere to save everyone."

Diane Osborn of Norfolk, Neb., said her son, the pilot and mission commander, struggled to bring the plane in. Just landing the plane "took every bit of strength he had," she told MSNBC television.

"Once he got control and realized he could fly the plane, they had to decide where to go," Comerford said. "They knew they were about 70 miles from this airport—so that's where they decided to go."

But family members reported that the crew members felt triumphant that in the roughly 15 minutes it took to reach Hainan island they had been able to destroy vital classified material and hardware that the plane was carrying.

Jeff Hanser of Billings, Mont., said his brother, Jason, a Navy cryptologic technician 2nd class, told of immediately beginning to destroy secret documents and equipment.

"He said they were breaking things, scrambling things and even throwing things overboard," Hanser said. "He told us he was very proud that the Chinese didn't get any of the good stuff. 'No way we were going to let that happen.' He said that they all just did what they were trained to do."

Darlene Edmunds of Davis, Calif., said her ex-husband, Navy Cryptologic Technician Interpretive 1st Class Josef Edmunds, had a premonition that the crew was headed for trouble. "He said that for several weeks, he felt his life was in danger" as the Chinese pilots grew bolder and flew closer to the slow-moving spy plane during missions, she said.

Wayne Westbrook of Rock Creek, Ohio, father of Navy Aviation Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Wendy Westbrook, said his daughter talked of being in the cockpit during the collision and of the harrowing minutes before the emergency landing.

"She said there was no panic, no alarm, just everybody doing what they'd been trained to do," he said. "She said, 'There was no time to be afraid, Dad.'"

Family members said they received calls when their loved ones reached Guam and, later, Hawaii. Many are accepting the Navy's invitation to travel, at the military's expense, to the crew's home base at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington state for a reunion Saturday.

"First thing I want to ask him is whether real Chinese food is better than California Chinese food," joked Mercado.

MORE

Coursen said his son "was glad to be alive" and had been treated well. But, he added, "he said he was tired of eating rice."

"He's already talking about the next mission he's going on," said Hanser of his brother, Jason. "He said, 'No way am I going to be scared off.'"

Liz Borland said, "Until I can hug my son [Navy Cryptologic Technician Seaman Bradford Borland], this nightmare won't really be over."

The crew members arrived at Hickam to the strains of "God Bless America" and to the cheers and whistles of a military crowd, emerged from an Air Force C-17 and crossed a red-tile "carpet."

"We're definitely happy to be back," said Osborn, ducking his head with a shy smile to acknowledge the applause. "We obviously have to get some business taken care of, and I'd like to start that process now so we can get home."

The welcome at Hickam was closed to the public and kept deliberately low-key because, according to officials, the crew's mission won't be considered complete until the two-day debriefing is complete late today. Officials want a detailed record of what happened to the crew before memories begin to fade, they said.

Shortly before Bush's statement in the Rose Garden on Thursday, the president spoke by telephone to Osborn.

"Welcome home," Bush said. "We appreciate you. You did your duty. You represent the best of America."

"As an old F-102 pilot," he added, "let me tell you, Shane, you did a heckuva job bringing that aircraft down. You made your country proud."

Osborn replied, "Thank you for getting us here."

The Chinese government, meanwhile, insisted that it had received the apology it had demanded and said it intended to continue pressing the United States on the issues raised by the incident.

"The incident has not been fully settled. We hope that the U.S. side will adopt a serious attitude toward China's standpoint on the incident and handle it properly," President Jiang Zemin, who is on a 12-day tour of Latin America, was quoted as saying by the state-run New China News Agency.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said China also might want to discuss compensation for its pilot, Lt. Cmdr. Wang Wei, who has been missing since the collision.

In Beijing, Premier Zhu Rongji said during a meeting with U.N. General Assembly President Harri Holkeri of Finland that "all responsibilities for the incident lie with the U.S. side," according to the news agency.

State media declared that a letter sent by the Bush administration saying that Washington was "very sorry" for the loss of the Chinese pilot was the apology sought by Beijing.

"The United States Finally Apologizes!" said the state-run Beijing Morning Post.

The U.S. letter did not refer to an apology and repeated the American position that the collision was an accident. It also said that Washington was "very sorry" the U.S. plane made an emergency landing afterward without advance permission.

Staff writer Cimons reported from Washington, staff writer Perry from San Diego and special correspondent Essoyan from Honolulu. Staff writer Paul Richter in Washington contributed to this report.

Yellow Ribbons Galore And Embracing All The Crew

By Evelyn Nieves

OAK HARBOR, Wash., April 12 — For 11 days, this Navy town took in the news of the 24-member spy plane crew detained by China like worried parents. Yellow ribbons were tied to nearly every lamppost and tree on Route 20, the main thoroughfare. Businesses, from real estate offices and banks to espresso stands and hotels, posted signs of support and prayer. The local news station kept a crew posted day and night by the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station here, home base of the crew.

Today, Oak Harbor had no cares. Signs around town read: "Welcome Home: God Bless America" and "Welcome Whidbey 24: What an Easter." The Antique Rose flower shop, just outside the base, still sold out its latest shipment of yellow ribbons, but this time for use in the celebration planned for Saturday.

That's when the crew, released by the Chinese on Wednesday, finally arrives here after a debriefing in Hawaii following their trip across the Pacific Ocean to Guam. The families of the 21 men and 3 women who endured a collision with a Chinese fighter jet, landed on a Chinese island, and then became the center of an international incident when the United States and China squabbled over who was to blame, will arrive here from all over the country before 4 p.m. on Saturday, when the celebration is scheduled.

Gates to the base will open three hours before the ceremony, when an expected 10,000 well-wishers, including much of the town of Oak Harbor (population 20,000) and the naval station (population 7,000 military) will greet the crew, along with the governor, Gary Locke, the commander in chief of the United States Pacific Fleet, Adm. Thomas Fargo, and other dignitaries.

President Bush, who expressed gratitude and respect for the crew today, was not expected. He had plans to spend a long Easter weekend in Texas, said Kimberly A. Martin, a spokeswoman for the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station. "As far as we know," she said, "that's where he'll be."

For Oak Harbor, whose bond with the naval station go back 50 years, there will be plenty to celebrate. Seven of the 24 crew members have

families here, but Oak Harbor claims the entire crew as its own.

"These are our sons and daughters," said Patty Cohen, the mayor, "so you can imagine the outpouring and the gratitude and the relief that this community is expressing."

If the town was relieved, relatives of the crew were absolutely elated to see their loved ones alight from their transport plane in Honolulu this morning.

"I just saw him on television, and the camera stayed on him a good long time," said Sandy Blocher of Charlotte, N.C., whose son Steven, 23, is an aviation electrician's mate third class on the crew. "I was able to see Steven quite closely," she said, clearly pleased, "and he looked good. They all looked good."

On Wednesday, Mrs. Blocher met the president, who was in North Carolina to discuss education. "He gave me a big hug, and I started to tear up and he got teary, too, and he had to wipe his eyes," Mrs. Blocher said. "He was very personal, very warm. He made us feel so comfortable. He said he was proud of the troops and proud of the way they conducted themselves."

In Show Low, Ariz., the parents of Brandon Funk said they were awaiting word on details of the trip to reunite with their 21-year-old son Saturday at the naval station. The crew is stationed there. "We don't know when we're flying out but we're already getting ready," said Carly Funk, who will be joined by her husband, Kevin, and their two other children.

Ms. Funk said she knew what she would do when she saw her son again: "I'm going to kiss him and hug him like I'll never let go."

The couple spoke to Brandon, a cryptologic technician, late Wednesday night for about 30 minutes in a call placed from Guam.

"He was very, very relieved and said he was tired," said Ms. Funk, who admitted to shedding a few tears during the conversation. "It was so good to hear from him. He said he couldn't wait to have a pizza."

Oak Harbor had planned to have a big parade on Saturday, but it was postponed until the end of the month so that the crew could spend time with their families.

U.S. Tape Is Said to Show Reckless Flying by Chinese

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

WASHINGTON, April 13 — The Pentagon today produced a grainy videotape of a close encounter between a Chinese fighter jet and an American spy plane that it said underscored a pattern of aggressive and reckless flying by China's Air Force in recent months.

The black and white videotape taken on Jan. 24 showed a Chinese F-8 — based on its number, the same jet lost in a collision on April 1 with an American spy plane — darting in front of another American EP-3E Aries II reconnaissance aircraft. "We got thumped!" an American is heard saying as the wash of the jet's engine rocked the aircraft.

In another instance, the Chinese jet cruised just feet from the American aircraft's left wing, struggling to stay even with the slower, propeller-driven reconnaissance aircraft. "He's inside of our wing tip," a crew member says.

The videotape of the previous midair encounter over the South China Sea was played today during a news conference by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld as part of the Bush administration's continuing effort to discredit China's account of the collision between a Chinese fighter jet and an American reconnaissance aircraft.

Discussing the 11-day confrontation with China for the first time publicly, Mr. Rumsfeld bluntly blamed the recklessness of the Chinese pilot for the accident in which the pilot died and the 24-member crew of the American spy plane had to make an emergency landing at a Chinese military airfield on the island of Hainan.

Although Mr. Rumsfeld and other Pentagon officials had no proof, they said they suspected that the pilot in the video shown today was Wang Wei, the Chinese lieutenant commander who was killed in the collision on April 1 and who has been lionized in official Chinese accounts of the incident.

"This guy's having a little bit of problems," an American is heard saying as the Chinese fighter jet bobbed in the air. "He's squirrely, not real steady."

Mr. Rumsfeld described the moments leading up to the collision on April 1 in detail, saying the Chinese F-8 had already swooped close by the EP-3E twice before clipping its leftmost propeller on a third pass. The collision broke the smaller jet apart, sending it into the sea, and badly damaged the American aircraft, forcing the emergency landing.

Many of the details had been disclosed before by officials briefed on interviews with the crew during and after their 11 days that the Americans were held in China. But Mr. Rumsfeld's pointed remarks — and the release of the previously classified videotape — amounted to a direct rebuttal to the Chinese after the days of muted remarks and delicate diplomacy that led to the release of the American crew on Thursday.

"For 12 days, one side of the story has been presented," Mr. Rumsfeld said. "It seemed to me that, with the crew safely back in the United States, that it was time to set out factually what actually took place."

Mr. Rumsfeld's tone was echoed today by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who sharply criticized official Chinese news accounts suggesting that the United States had apologized for the accident when in fact it had expressed sorrow for the death of the Chinese pilot and the failure to receive permission to land in Chinese territory.

"The Chinese are characterizing that as an apology," General Powell said as he flew home from a trip to the Balkans. "We should not be fooled by Chinese propaganda that says they got an apology."

Ever since the accident, Chinese officials have blamed the actions of the American aircraft for the collision. A Foreign Ministry spokesman, traveling with President Jiang Zemin during -MORE-

his visit to Cuba, reiterated that today.

The spokesman also said China would not return the American EP-3E, still on the military airstrip where it landed, until it had completed an investigation.

While the release of the crew eased tensions between China and the United States, much about the collision remains a source of sharp dispute, including the fate of the American plane, loaded with sophisticated electronic surveillance gear and worth more than \$80 million.

"Well, there's no question in my mind but that one of the things holding it up," Mr. Rumsfeld said of China's refusal to release the aircraft, "is they're accessing that aircraft to see what they can learn."

The aircraft's return — and the resumption of American surveillance flights — will be the focus of a meeting next Wednesday between representatives of the two governments, most likely in Beijing.

The United States had proposed conducting the meeting as part of a regularly scheduled forum in San Francisco under the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement that the two nations signed in 1998, but China balked and insisted in holding the meeting in China.

"We've got some things we want to raise," Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage said today, citing the aircraft and the Chinese interceptions. "This is not a meeting in which we go and sit."

Although Mr. Rumsfeld said American reconnaissance flights along China's coast had been routinely conducted for years, officials have said the pace of the surveillance had picked up since last fall — as had the frequency and aggressiveness of the Chinese interceptions.

Chinese fighter jets intercepted American patrols 44 times in recent months, Mr. Rumsfeld said, citing several dates this year. On Dec. 28 — "in the prior administration," he noted — the United States formally protested to the Chinese, but the close encounters continued.

Mr. Rumsfeld opened his remarks by disputing Chinese assertions that the American patrols were provocative. He also took issue with portrayals of the EP-3E, one of the most sophisticated electronics surveillance aircraft ever built, as a "spy plane," going to the point of citing dictionary definitions of spying versus reconnaissance.

"Our EP-3 was flying an overt reconnaissance and surveillance mission in international airspace in an aircraft clearly marked, 'United States Navy,'" he said. "It was on a well-known flight path that we have used for decades."

He also said that at least six other countries, including China, conducted similar reconnaissance patrols in Asia. In fact, officials said afterward, many more do, including the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and both Koreas.

Mr. Rumsfeld, a former Navy pilot who flew antisubmarine aircraft, said the Chinese had the right to intercept American patrols near their waters, but suggested that their pilots were not following common practices for military pilots flying in times of peace.

Those practices, however, are not explicitly codified, though the International Convention on Aviation Operations requires pilots to fly with "due regard" for safety of other aircraft.

At the end of the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union, whose pilots regularly engaged in the same sort of aerial confrontations, signed an agreement detailing procedures for peacetime encounters between their forces, though it did not specify distances intercepting aircraft should keep.

"We had every right to be flying where we were flying," Mr. Rumsfeld said. "They have every right to come up and observe our flight. What one does not have the right to do, and nor do I think it was anyone's intention, is to fly into another aircraft. The F-8 pilot clearly put at risk the lives of 24 Americans."

U.S. Says Spy Crew Wiped Out Secrets in Frantic Landing

By ERIK ECKHOLM

BEIJING, April 13 — As Chinese troops surrounded the crippled American spy plane on April 1, waving their guns and shouting, the crew spent 15 furious minutes after their emergency landing destroying secret materials before opening the hatch and surrendering, senior American officials and diplomats said today.

It is not clear precisely how much material was destroyed.

"The crew completed all of its checklist," one of the diplomats here said today when asked what share of the plane's sensitive items had been destroyed — an indication that the loss of American intelligence data and technology may not have been as great as feared.

When asked how much had been destroyed by the crew, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, in his first public comments, said today in a briefing in Washington: "With respect to the gear, the crew has a checklist. They went through that checklist and did an excellent job of doing everything that was, I believe, possible in the period of time they had."

He did not qualify what he meant by "excellent job," but added, upon further questioning, "The crew is being debriefed, and what we know at this present time is that they succeeded in doing a major portion of their checklist."

Two senior diplomats who played central roles in negotiations here to win the crew's release reasserted the United States' position today: the mid-air collision with the American plane was caused by reckless flying by the pilot of a Chinese fighter jet tailing the spy plane. Beijing's rejects that assertion.

After the collision, as the American plane approached a Chinese air base on Hainan island for an emergency landing, the crew sent 15 to 25 messages on standard international frequencies

warning of their imminent approach, but received no reply, the diplomats said, speaking on condition their names not be used.

The Chinese government insisted that because it heard no distress calls or requests for permission to enter Chinese air space, the landing was illegal and said that was an additional reason for holding the crew and plane and demanding an apology. The plane is still on Hainan.

Since the crew's release on Thursday, American officials have become eager to get out their side of the story. Senior officials in Washington and Beijing, expressing resentment at Chinese accounts that blame the Americans for the collision, have provided their interpretations.

While the release of the crew removes the most explosive element, the incident is far from closed, and what could become an acrimonious bilateral meeting is scheduled April 18 to discuss the causes of the collision, how to avoid future incidents and the return of the plane. The Chinese also insist on discussing whether the United States has the right to make surveillance flights near China's coasts.

Chinese officials have called for an end to the flights, which stay outside the 12-mile territorial zone but are near enough to monitor military secrets. The collision occurred 70 miles off Hainan, American officials say.

The United States insists such flights are legal and will not stop, and American officials are already debating how soon to resume them.

In today's briefing here, the diplomats elaborated on the circumstances of the collision and its frantic aftermath, as well as the secret day- and-night talks in Beijing and Washington that resulted in a contrite letter from the American ambassador in return for the crew's release.

According to their information, based largely on preliminary talks with the crew while they were still in Chinese custody, the large, propeller-driven

10 feet.

In a third pass, just after 9 a.m. on April 1, it zoomed in fatally fast and close. The jet's tail nicked a left engine of the larger plane, and the fighter jet broke into at least two parts, the officials said. The American crew did not see whether the pilot, Wang Wei, was able to eject. He is lost at sea and has been declared a national hero in China.

With the damage to the American plane, the flight commander, Lt. Shane Osborn, had a tense choice: to try a dangerous landing at sea, to have the crew bail out, or to attempt to land at the nearest field, in China.

The two officials praised the crew as heroes for stabilizing the plane after a steeply angled fall of perhaps 8,000 feet, landing it safely and carrying out prescribed procedures for reducing the loss of secrets. "They did everything right, in accordance with international procedures," one diplomat said. "The Chinese say they never heard any of these calls. It could be they weren't monitoring the guard frequencies," he said referring to frequencies that all air towers are supposed to monitor.

The American version of the collision, while flatly contradicting the assertion by a second Chinese jet pilot that the American plane caused it with a sudden, huge swerve, suggests the possibility of a genuine misunderstanding. That second pilot, in the split-second confusion, could have seen the

American plane banking and his comrade's jet breaking up and assumed the spy plane caused the crash.

If the American pilot did send several messages, this would undercut China's argument that the plane entered its territory illegally. Seeking to assuage that concern of the Chinese, who are exceptionally prickly about perceived infringements, the letter that Ambassador Joseph W. Prueher delivered here Thursday specifically said the United States was "very sorry" for the unauthorized entry.

Today, the diplomats indicated some doubt that the landing was a total surprise at the base. They said the pilot of a second Chinese tracking jet, seeing the collision, had landed at the same field 10 minutes earlier; that the runway appeared to have been cleared for the damaged plane's arrival, and that the Americans signaled their intent to land with a 280-degree "clearing turn" above the air base.

After landing, the plane was immediately surrounded by heavily armed soldiers, but the American crew spent 15 minutes running through a list of security procedures before emerging, the officials said. Soldiers peering through the windows yelled through bullhorns and pointed their weapons to "make it very clear" that the crew must stop, one said.

China Ends Search for Missing Pilot

By ELAINE KURTENBACH

The Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — After almost two weeks of intense searching, China on Saturday ended its hunt for the pilot elevated to the status of national hero after his fighter jet collided with a U.S. spy plane.

The search for pilot Wang Wei, lost when his plane plunged into the sea after the April 1 collision, ended at 6 p.m. Saturday, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

“Analysis of the situation from every angle indicated there was no chance he could have survived,” Xinhua said.

State media lionized Wang as a hero of national defense. China's navy had launched what it said was its biggest search ever to find him, using military and fishing boats and aircraft to comb 292,300 square miles of tropical ocean.

U.S. officials, in the days since the release of 24 crew members held following the collision, have said the American aircraft was flying straight and level when it was struck by the Chinese jet.

Chinese disputes that account, and accused U.S. officials of making “irresponsible” comments. In a statement read on state television Saturday evening, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue protested “various comments made by the American side.”

Despite the strongly worded statement, China abruptly eased up its campaign of anti-U.S. rhetoric Saturday, with state-run media featuring instead the anniversary of a long-dead Communist revolutionary.

Apart from a handful of human-interest reports about the pilot's family and articles claiming broad public support for Beijing's decision to release the detained crew of the spy plane, there were few mentions of the incident that had so inflamed China-U.S. tensions.

State-run television's news at noon devoted most of its attention to President Jiang Zemin's visit to Cuba, part of a 12-day Latin American tour that has kept him abroad during most of the crisis over the spy plane collision.

In his talks with Cuban President Fidel Castro on Friday, Jiang did not make direct mention of Beijing's contention that the United States was responsible for the incident, though in a statement he praised the Cuban people for “safeguarding state sovereignty and

independence and fighting against outside interference and subversion.”

Jiang's government used similar language to describe its handling of the spy plane incident.

Back home, the wholly state-run media shifted gears, devoting front-page and inside commentaries to commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Zhao Shiyuan, a founding member of the Chinese Communist Party.

Zhao, who led three major worker uprisings in Shanghai and more than 100 anti-imperialist strikes in the 1920s, symbolizes the country's struggle earlier this century with Western colonial powers and Japan. He was executed by the rival Nationalists in 1927.

“Comrades, Zhao Shiyuan left us more than 70 years ago, but his glorious achievements and honorable spirit remain like a monument in our hearts,” Li Peng, head of the national legislature and No. 2 in the party, wrote in an article carried by most official newspapers, including the party flagship People's Daily.

One tabloid-style newspaper ran an article reiterating China's continued objections to U.S. surveillance flights in international airspace off its coast.

“The Chinese people will not be trampled upon,” declared the Modern Weekly International.

Another tabloid, the Beijing Youth Daily, citing The New York Times, reported that the United States would resume spy flights and that this was likely to be a continued source of conflict.

In talks scheduled to begin Wednesday, China is expected to restate its objections to the flights, which it views as an infringement on national sovereignty.

The spy plane collision is one of many sources of rancor. A coming decision on U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, is another.

The English-language China Daily criticized Washington for sponsoring a resolution this week condemning Beijing's human rights record at the United Nation's Human Rights Commission.

“This spring is a troubled time for Sino-U.S. relations. If the United States cannot regain a sensible and pragmatic approach ... bilateral ties will suffer and the interests of both countries will be harmed,” the commentary said.

Japan Fears Loss of Code From U.S. Plane to China

By Shigehiko Togo

TOKYO, April 13 -- Military experts here are worried that Japan and the United States will have to change their secret communication system, at a cost of millions of dollars, as a result of Chinese scrutiny of top secret equipment aboard the U.S. EP-3E surveillance plane on Hainan Island.

Japan and the United States are close military allies and share intelligence through a coded system.

A top Defense Agency official said Japan is waiting for reports from the United States about how much of the communication system was destroyed by the crew of the U.S. Navy plane before its emergency landing in China on April 1.

If the system was compromised, "to renew the whole system would cost a huge amount of money and time," said the senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Japan has five EP-3s similar to the U.S. Navy aircraft, and conducts its own intelligence flights, collecting electronic signals and communications to gather information such as the operation of radar, early warning systems and troop movements in other countries. That intelligence-gathering is not threatened by the capture of the U.S. plane, said Ken Sato, deputy director general of the Defense Agency.

But Japan and the United States share the information and some operational codes through a communication system that might be in jeopardy, said Kazuhisa Ogawa, a leading military analyst.

The system has two components, according to Ogawa. A data-sharing system transmits information via computer, he said, and an IFF -- identification of friend and foe -- system makes it possible to differentiate allies and adversaries during combat.

If the American EP-3E crew did not have time to destroy the hardware and software aboard the

plane, it could have a serious effect on intelligence, Ogawa said.

The codes used are computer-generated, changing each time, and "it is simply impossible to decode it" no matter what the Chinese have found, Ogawa said. But it is possible Chinese experts could use the information to block the communication system.

"If China could acquire that information, they can fly their own [planes duplicating an] EP-3 on top of U.S. and Japanese ships, and effectively block their operations," Ogawa said.

The Japanese defense official said nothing will be done until American investigators determine the extent of the loss.

U.S. Faults China On Crash Account

By Edward Walsh and William Claiborne

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld accused the Chinese government yesterday of providing a misleading account of the collision between a Chinese jet fighter and a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, and vowed to continue surveillance flights off the coast of China despite the "aggressive contact" of Chinese interceptors.

Offering a preview of the position U.S. officials will take when they meet with Chinese officials next week to discuss the incident and its aftermath, Rumsfeld showed a video of an earlier interception of a U.S. surveillance aircraft by the same Chinese jet that collided with the EP-3E Aries II aircraft on April 1. The jet crashed in the South China Sea, killing the pilot.

"The reality is that the People's Republic of China for 12 days has been characterizing the collision in a way that is different from what our crew has reported to me," Rumsfeld said. "And those are facts. There's no spin. There's no adjectives involved. It's simply a factual presentation of what took place."

Rumsfeld's tone, and similar comments by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and other senior officials, suggested that the United States will take a hard line in talks with the Chinese now that the 24 American crew members have been freed after being detained 11 days. While the immediate crisis is over, their comments suggested tensions will remain between the United States and China over a host of issues and disagreements.

In the meeting next week, Rumsfeld and Powell said the United States will demand the return of the crippled EP-3E. It remains on Hainan Island in southern China, where it made an emergency landing after the collision.

"I have to assume that [the Chinese] have been all over it and on it," Powell said. "It is our plane. It has to be returned."

Chinese authorities said yesterday they have not decided what to do with the plane. At a news conference in Havana, where Chinese President Jiang Zemin was on an official visit, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said a decision would be determined by an investigation the Chinese are conducting.

Powell dismissed as "Chinese propaganda" the Chinese government's assertion that the United States had apologized for the incident. In a letter to Beijing, the United States said it was "very sorry" for the death of the pilot and for the U.S. aircraft's entry into Chinese territory without permission.

Noting the language of the letter had not changed substantially since Sunday, Powell asked: "If that was an apology, why were they demanding an apology for four days?"

Rumsfeld adopted a low public profile throughout the standoff with China. He appeared yesterday in the Pentagon briefing room to offer his version of the incident and to defend the practice of flying surveillance missions. He said he spoke on Thursday by telephone with the pilot of the downed U.S. aircraft, Navy Lt. Shane Osborn.

Rumsfeld said the crew had a checklist of what to destroy in such circumstances and "succeeded in doing a major portion of their checklist." That suggested the crew destroyed much -- but not all -- of the sensitive equipment and material on the plane before landing in Chinese territory.

Rumsfeld said the video he showed was of a Jan. 24 interception by a Chinese F-8 jet bearing the same identification number as the jet that was involved in the accident. He said there have been 44 interceptions of surveillance flights by Chinese jets in recent months, including two in which they came within 10 feet of U.S. aircraft.

In the video, the Chinese plane can be seen coming up from below the U.S. aircraft and flying

-MORE-

close beside it. Crew members aboard the U.S. plane can be heard on their radios estimating that the jet was about 20 feet away and noting that "he's having a hard time maintaining his airspeed."

According to Rumsfeld, on April 1 the Chinese pilot made two "aggressive passes" at the EP-3E, once coming within three to five feet. On his third pass the pilot approached too fast and flew his jet into the propeller of the U.S. aircraft, Rumsfeld said. Before the collision, Rumsfeld said, the U.S. plane was on autopilot and did not turn from its straight and level course.

Rumsfeld said after the collision the U.S. crew made 25 to 30 "Mayday" distress calls, but because of the noise inside the aircraft did not know whether the calls were acknowledged. When the plane landed on Hainan Island, the crew members "were greeted by armed guards."

Rumsfeld also said the Chinese government was aware of U.S. concerns about the "aggressive contact" by their interceptors because U.S. officials complained about these tactics on Dec. 28.

Rumsfeld did not respond directly to questions about whether U.S. fighters would escort the lumbering, turboprop surveillance planes on future missions. But he said the United States would continue to conduct the surveillance missions "for the safety of our forces, and for the interests and benefit of our friends and allies in the region."

Administration officials said six to eight U.S. officials, mostly from the Defense Department, will meet with Chinese officials -- probably in Beijing -- on Wednesday to discuss the April 1 collision and return of the American plane.

Despite the raw feelings between Beijing and Washington after the standoff over the detained crew, Deputy Secretary of State Richard A. Armitage said that there was "no prospect of a delay" in a major U.S. decision on what new arms to sell Taiwan. That decision is scheduled to be announced in two weeks, and Armitage said the administration would not back off from selling Taiwan any arms it needs for self-defense.

Administration officials say the arms package should not be linked to the standoff over the crew. But speaking to reporters as he was returning from a trip to Europe, Powell said: "Obviously, when the environment for such [arms sales] decisions becomes heated as it is right now as a result of the Chinese response to this incident of the airplane, it creates political pressure that we'll have to take into account."

As Rumsfeld and others gave their version of the collision, the 24 crew members who lived through it continued a demanding two-day regime of intelligence debriefings in Hawaii before preparing to depart for a festive homecoming today at their home base on Whidbey Island, Wash.

After a buffet breakfast at the bachelor officers' quarters at Hickam Air Force Base, the air crew split up singly and into small groups at 8 a.m. for a scheduled 14 hours of nearly nonstop questioning. Navy officials said the debriefings would continue until 10 p.m.

The questioning was conducted by 12 teams of three or four debriefing officers, with few rest breaks throughout the day. Particularly sensitive matters were discussed in a soundproofed and debugged "bubble" room called Sensitive Compartmental Information Facility (SCIF), officials said.

Navy officials said although the questioning sessions were conducted as collegially as possible, their format was decidedly investigative in nature. One Navy officer said the debriefings would closely follow the Judge Advocate General's investigative standards.

Topics were to include how crew members were treated in detention, how they interacted with their Chinese interrogators and how effectively they complied with standard procedures for destroying computers and other sensitive equipment used in airborne surveillance.

Navy officials said the air crew would leave Hawaii early today to fly to its home base of Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Oak Harbor, north of Seattle. About 10,000 people -- half of Whidbey Island's population -- are expected to turn out when the former detainees touch down about 4 p.m. (PDT) today.

Oak Harbor students signed a giant yellow ribbon that local officials plan to place in a hangar where the welcoming ceremony will be held, officials said. It is an oversized version of the thousands of yellow ribbons that have been displayed on trees and signposts in front of virtually every building in Whidbey Island since the EP-3E plane made an emergency landing on Hainan Island on April 1.

Spy plane's crew scrambled to destroy data

By PAULINE JELINEK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON -- As heavily armed Chinese soldiers shouted through megaphones and waved their arms outside, the crew of a downed U.S. spy plane frantically destroyed classified material for 15 minutes after landing at a Chinese military airfield, senior U.S. diplomats said yesterday.

"They made it clear they wanted us off that aircraft," U.S. diplomats in Beijing quoted Navy Lt. Shane Osborn, the pilot of the EP-3E reconnaissance plane, as saying.

"They boarded the aircraft," added Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at a Pentagon news conference. "They were armed and they invited the crew off the aircraft."

The U.S. version of the air collision and emergency landing that led to the 11-day detention of the crew in China was laid out in the greatest detail yet on both sides of the globe yesterday by officials from the State Department and Defense Department.

At the Pentagon, Rumsfeld played a dramatic videotape of previous close encounters between U.S. and Chinese planes off the China coast. "We got bumped. We got thumped," an American pilot is heard saying at one point.

"For 12 days one side of the story has been presented," said Rumsfeld. "It seemed to me, with the crew safely back in the United States, it was time to set out factually what actually took place."

The crew members were still in Hawaii being debriefed about the April 1 collision, in which they say they were hit by a Chinese F-8 fighter jet that had been monitoring them.

"The Chinese pilots have been maneuvering aggressively against our pilots for months," Rumsfeld said. He said there were at least 44 recent occasions of such behavior despite U.S. complaints to Beijing.

Rumsfeld said the American plane was flying straight and level over the South China Sea when it was struck by the Chinese jet.

Chinese officials vigorously dispute that, and what happened is likely to be a source of contention when the two sides meet Wednesday in Beijing.

"The U.S. reconnaissance plane had intruded into China's airspace and rammed a Chinese fighter," yesterday's official China Daily newspaper quoted Premier Zhu Rongji as saying. "The U.S. side must take the entire responsibility for the plane collision incident."

The 24 crew members were released after the Bush administration expressed regret and sorrow, but U.S. officials have said the Chinese were at fault. Characterizing the U.S. response as an apology was "Chinese propaganda," Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday.

U.S. officials say two Chinese interceptors took off from Hainan island to trail the U.S. plane, which was on a surveillance mission 64 miles off the island's coast.

One of the Chinese fighters drew close to the American aircraft three times, Rumsfeld said.

On the first two passes, it came within three feet of the left wing. On the third approach, the Chinese pilot apparently realized he was closing too fast and, instead of passing under the American plane, tried to swing his plane to cut speed, U.S. diplomats said quoting the crew.

His plane hit the outermost engine on the left wing, then the inner engine, then flipped up into the nose of the EP-3E, shearing it off. The impact broke the Chinese fighter in half and the debris spiraled into the sea, according to the U.S. version. The Chinese pilot has not been found.

China has said the U.S. plane swerved into its fighter.

After the collision, U.S. officials say, the U.S. plane plummeted 8,000 feet. **MORE**

"The way the plane was spinning, there was no way they could get out," James Coursen, the father of Navy Cryptologic Technician Operator 1st Class Shawn Coursen, told the Los Angeles Times after speaking to his son. "It was chaos in there. They thought they were all going to die."

Kristi Young, the sister of another crew member, Rodney Young, said her brother told her that the first moments after the collision were "like a disaster movie."

She told the New York Daily News that papers, pens and electronic instruments were flying around inside.

The crew made 25 to 30 attempts to broadcast distress calls and alert the Chinese about the emergency landing, Rumsfeld said. Chinese officials say they did not hear any call.

The crew put on parachutes and Osborn, the pilot, considered ordering them to bail out or ditching the damaged craft in the sea, U.S. officials say. But he decided to land at the Chinese air base on Hainan.

Before landing, he made a 270-degree turn around the field, a standard signal that he was out of contact with the control tower, the United States says.

The airfield was clear, indicating that the Chinese commanders were not taking any steps to discourage the American plane from landing, the U.S. diplomats said.

"When they landed, they were greeted with armed troops," Rumsfeld said, adding that he didn't know if the weapons were drawn.

The U.S. diplomats in Beijing said they couldn't confirm the second Chinese fighter pilot's claim broadcast on state television that he requested permission to shoot down the American plane. They had no evidence that shots were fired.

As the U.S. crew destroyed sensitive material and equipment, one diplomat said, the Chinese troops outside appeared to be "trying to get them to stop their procedures."

U.S. alleges aggression by China jets

Bush administration says dangerous interception used; 'Owe us an explanation'; Rumsfeld shows video of previous close encounters

From Wire Reports

Originally published April 14, 2001

WASHINGTON - A Pentagon-led delegation will accuse China next week of aggressive and dangerous interception and tracking of U.S. reconnaissance planes in what looms as another extended diplomatic standoff between Beijing and the United States.

In talks scheduled to open in the Chinese capital Wednesday, the Bush administration will insist the kind of reconnaissance conducted by a U.S. plane that made an emergency landing at a Chinese air base April 1 is routinely carried out by about a half-dozen Asian countries, including China, a senior U.S. official said yesterday.

Recent U.S. flights, however, have been intercepted by Chinese jets that maneuvered as close as three feet to surveillance aircraft, which prompted strong State Department complaints to Beijing in December and again in January, U.S. officials said.

"I think they owe us an explanation," Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage said in discussing with reporters preparations for the meeting in Beijing.

A joint commission established three years ago to improve air and maritime safety convenes April 23 in San Francisco and could become a forum for a tense airing of differences.

The plane's 24 crew members arrived Thursday in Honolulu and will fly to Whidbey Island, Wash., today to be home for Easter. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said yesterday that President Bush will not go to their homecoming ceremony. "He does not believe that politicians need to always insert themselves into tender moments," Fleischer told reporters in Crawford, Texas, where Bush was spending the weekend. "The military will know how to welcome people

back. He thinks that will be fitting and appropriate and just the right amount of hoop-de-la."

In Beijing, senior U.S. officials and diplomats said the crew spent 15 furious minutes after its emergency landing April 1 destroying secret materials before opening the hatch and surrendering.

"The crew completed all of its checklist," one of the diplomats said yesterday when asked what share of the plane's sensitive items had been destroyed - an indication that the losses of U.S. intelligence data and technology may not have been as great as initially feared.

When asked how much had been destroyed by the crew, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld said yesterday: "With respect to the gear, the crew has a checklist. They went through that checklist and did an excellent job of doing everything that was, I believe, possible in the period of time they had."

With the U.S. military crew of 21 men and three women back home after 11 days of detention and recounting in debriefings what happened to their crippled Navy EP-3E, the Bush administration has sharpened its rhetorical thrusts at the Chinese.

In tough language as he flew home from the Balkans, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said he fully expects China to return the plane, as the administration has demanded.

"I have to assume that they've been all over it, in it," Powell said. "But it's our plane, and we expect it would be returned."

Not an apology

Powell also said U.S. expressions of sorrow for the loss of the Chinese pilot in the collision and for making an emergency landing on Hainan island without permission "did not constitute an apology."

"The Chinese are characterizing that as an apology. We should not be fooled by **MORE**

propaganda that says they got an apology," Powell said.

In Havana, where Chinese President Jiang Zemin was visiting, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao continued to characterize the letter from the U.S. ambassador that ended the crew's detention as an apology.

"This affair has not ended," Zhu said at a news conference. The key to better U.S.-Chinese relations, he said, "lies in whether the government of the United States can adequately resolve this incident."

At the Pentagon, Rumsfeld said the U.S. reconnaissance plane was flying straight and level until it was struck by a Chinese jet fighter that was "maneuvering aggressively" in the skies above the South China Sea.

In his first public comments on the incident, Rumsfeld defended the U.S. crew and contradicted the Chinese version of the incident, which faulted the American plane for the crash. He insisted that surveillance flights would continue, despite Beijing's objections, but did not say when they would be resumed.

"We need to do so for the safety of our forces, and we need to do it for the interests and benefit of our friends and allies in the region," he said at a news conference.

U.S. side of story

As the crew was being debriefed for a second day, Rumsfeld fleshed out the U.S. side of the story.

He said Chinese pilots have harassed U.S. planes on at least 44 recent occasions despite U.S. complaints to Beijing. Rumsfeld played audio and video tapes of previous close encounters between U.S. and Chinese planes.

"We got bumped. We got thumped," an American pilot was heard saying. A U.S. pilot also reported that a Chinese plane was "squirrely. Not real steady."

"The Chinese pilots have been maneuvering aggressively against our pilots for months," Rumsfeld said. "The F-8 pilot clearly put at risk the lives of 24 Americans."

He took exception to the characterization in U.S. and Chinese media that the Navy EP-3E aircraft was spying.

"Our EP-3 was flying a reconnaissance and surveillance mission ... in international airspace in an aircraft clearly marked as U.S. Navy," he said. "It was on a well-known flight path that we have used for decades.

"Many countries use such flights," he said pointedly, "including China."

"For 12 days one side of the story has been presented," Rumsfeld said. "It seemed to me, with the crew safely back in the United States, it was time to set out factually what actually took place. Ultimately, the truth comes out."

Rumsfeld suggested that China's recent pattern of flying jet fighters too close to U.S. surveillance planes led to the in-flight collision.

"It was clearly an accident," he said, referring to the Chinese jet clipping the Navy plane. "You've got to know that no pilot intentionally takes his horizontal stabilizer and sticks it in the propeller of an EP-3. He did not mean to do that; I am certain of that."

With Powell, Rumsfeld and Armitage stepping forward to defend the American crew, insist on recovery of the plane and declare U.S. reconnaissance flights will not be stopped, the Bush administration clearly was engaged in a public relations, as well as diplomatic, initiative aimed at the American and Chinese people and governments around the world.

During the tortuous negotiations to free the crew, President Bush and other top U.S. officials spoke with relative restraint. With their return, the gloves came off.

Engagement encouraged

Sen. Craig Thomas, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Asia, encouraged the administration to remain engaged with China but predicted members of Congress who backed normal trade arrangements may oppose extending them now.

What could make the difference, the Wyoming Republican said in an interview, is how the Chinese respond to U.S. demands to return the aircraft and U.S. insistence on continued surveillance flight.

'They Are Us, and We Are Them,' so Islanders Prepare Welcome for Crew

■ Celebration: 24 Americans' return today to Whidbey, Wash., base gives town--entwined with the military for 60 years--cause to throw a party.

By JULIE CART, Times Staff Writer

OAK HARBOR, Wash.--If ever there was a company town, this is it.

Although not strictly existing to support the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station, this tidy seaside community has for 60 years operated symbiotically with the military base that straddles it to the north and south.

So, as the Navy prepared Friday to welcome home the 24 crew members of the surveillance plane detained for 11 days in China, it seemed that the citizenry of Whidbey Island likewise labored furiously, sprucing up to receive treasured family members.

In a community where military personnel and civilians live, play and pray side by side, the distinction between the two sectors is simply not made.

"They are us, and we are them," said Priscilla Heidecker, executive director of the Greater Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce.

Her sentiments were echoed elsewhere here, where busy ferries run tourists to other islands in the San Juan chain and spruce and pine trees hug the two-lane highway that runs like a spine from the north to the south of the 35-mile-long island in the Strait of San Juan de Fuca.

Those trees have been bedecked, as have most foliage, car antennas, light poles and front doors, with miles of yellow ribbon. In fact, the island's ribbon supply has been exhausted. Thin plastic surveyor's tape was wound around the necks of town dogs and other willing beasts in Friday's rush to put the finishing touches on the island's celebration for the returning crew.

Fourteen of the 24 crew members make their homes here. The others are based here temporarily.

Today's ceremony is to be held in Hangar 6 at what is surely one of the nation's most picturesque military installations. The views of Skagit Bay, Rosario Strait and the mouth of Puget Sound--leading to Seattle 60 miles to the south--are

unmatched.

"I think people would be surprised to find a naval base surrounded by bald eagle populations and so much natural beauty," said Krista Blackburn, assistant to Mayor Patricia Cohen. "I'll tell you the truth--this really is a storybook kind of place. Oak Harbor would not be the same place without our military."

The focus here Friday was on preparations for the crew's triumphant return. Navy officials set aside their usual duties and scrambled to organize a "simple but dignified" ceremony. Planning was so extensive and laborious that the base commander was compelled to call the proceedings a "production," which he detailed to a throng of international reporters much as a Broadway impresario might describe an upcoming musical.

"It's been a Team Whidbey production effort," said Capt. Larry Salter, the harried base commander. Salter did not hesitate to declare the event the usually quiet base's most extravagant.

The Whidbey Island Naval Air Station began as a staging point for seaplanes during World War II and, as it grew, took over nearby farm fields. Today, it is regarded as the largest electronic warfare base in the world, home to some of the U.S. military's most sophisticated surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft. In addition to the EP-3E Aries like the one still in Chinese custody, the base has squadrons of EA-6B Prowlers, electronic warfare planes designed to scramble enemy communications and a group of P-3 sub hunters.

The military presence is both physical--more than 7,700 military personnel, 11,000 family members and 1,300 civilian employees--and personal. Local officials estimate that the base drives 75% of the area's economy. Although Oak Harbor, with a population of 21,000, and the surrounding communities have sought to diversify their economic base with artsy enclaves designed to draw tourists, the business of the area is the Navy.

While such town-and-base dynamics can create tensions elsewhere, no one here seems to begrudge the friendly relationship.

Island County Commissioner William "Mac" McDowell came here 25 years ago flying Navy planes and left active duty so that he could stay.

"The community is totally integrated with the military," he said. "The relationship the Navy has with the town is incredible. The Navy people volunteer. They coach our Little League and our peewee football teams. On an official level, we have agreements between their fire department and ours,

our law enforcement and theirs. We back each other up at every level."

Town officials have deferred to the Navy for today's ceremony. They plan to honor the 24 crew members in their own way, making them grand marshals at the annual Holland Holidays parade April 28.

"We like to say the people who founded this island were the Dutch and the Navy," said Carol Clark, a hotel manager. "That's what the Navy means to us."

Whidbey clears the decks for a huge homecoming

By DAVID FISHER
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

OAK HARBOR -- As many as 10,000 people will throng Hangar 6 at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station this afternoon, all to welcome the famous crew of squadron VQ-1.

In case anyone misses the action live, the site will be jammed with TV and radio crews from all three major networks, along with CNN, Northwest Cable News and nearly every major-market broadcast station in the Pacific Northwest.

Inside the public maelstrom will be the 24 crew members, reunited with their families after 11 days of captivity on a Chinese island and two days of intense debriefings on an American Air Force base.

Military officials and counselors say they're hoping to keep them there -- inside the maelstrom, but not part of it -- until they get a chance to fade from the world stage and back into their Oak Harbor living rooms.

Coming home may be the easiest thing the crew has done since April 1, when a Chinese fighter jet collided with their plane, killing the Chinese pilot and sending the Americans' lumbering EP-3E Aries II into a near death-spiral over the South China Sea. After an emergency landing, the crew was detained on China's Hainan Island.

Given the intense public attention, coming home might be among the crew's toughest challenges, the base's chief counselor, Chuck Niedzialkowski said.

Depending on how it is handled.

The Navy's goal with the intentionally short, formal and dignified homecoming reception it has planned today, is literally to get the crew back to mowing their own lawns as soon as possible.

"Once the media is gone and the pressure is off, there can be a sense of 'what do we do now?'" said Lt. Jon Conroe, a base chaplain. "And our answer is, 'what would you be doing if all of this hadn't have happened?'"

As soon as the crew's transport lands at 4 p.m. at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station, they'll get a chance to greet their families for the first time -- sure to be an emotional experience for most. Then, they'll sit inside the flag-bedecked hangar and listen to some speeches from Navy brass, a few local politicians and -- possibly -- from one of their own.

Then the Navy will send them home to begin short convalescent leaves.

That's about it.

There will be no parade through town streets -- at least, not until April 28 when Oak Harbor throws its annual and long-scheduled Holland Happening parade anyway.

There will be gift baskets from local businesses and plenty of welcoming signs and ribbons in the streets. But counselors have already advised friends and family to avoid smothering the crew's homes with attention.

"I don't think this is a hero's welcome. This is a 'welcome home, we're glad you're back' welcome," said Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Bender, a Navy spokesman. "I don't think they would want to be up on the pedestal of being heroes. They were doing their jobs."

The approach is rooted in research gleaned from the aftermath of past conflicts and past prisoner-of-war situations.

None of the cases in the military's "lessons learned" manuals are exactly parallel to the Whidbey crew's situation, said Niedzialkowski, chief of clinical services for the base's Fleet and Family Support Center. But one of the most recent cases of captured troops -- three Army soldiers who were captured during the Gulf War and held up as trophies in front of the world's television cameras -- comes close.

The three were hailed as heroes and made the circuit of major talk shows and network news shows when they returned, Niedzialkowski said. But within six months, all three were out **MORE**

The military learned that it's tough for most troops to merge with their families again, even after a routine six-month deployment.

A traumatic experience can tempt family and friends to treat the returnees like "damaged goods" who have to be pampered and protected, which makes it harder for them to readjust.

"Let them get back to changing the diapers and mowing the lawn," Conroe said. "Don't feel like you have to take care of all that stuff."

"Raising the bar" with hero labels can cause friction with colleagues and cause personal doubts, Niedzialkowski said.

The crew aboard VQ-1's downed EP-3 faced risks that weren't any greater than other surveillance planes that have been buzzed near the Chinese coastline in recent months. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld put the number of recent close calls at 44 yesterday.

To a certain extent, the notoriety "is just the luck of the draw," Niedzialkowski said, so the hero moniker can be tough to wear.

The military also learned that people who stick with the service after a traumatic incident tend to suffer fewer emotional problems as time goes on than people who get out, Niedzialkowski said.

The reason: other military people tend to understand the risks of their trade and the

consequences that follow better than the civilian world does. So they make a better support network.

That's not to say that the Whidbey crew's last flight wasn't heroic.

The plane's pilot, 26-year-old Lt. Shane Osborn, put in "a Herculean effort just to get that aircraft on the ground," Capt. Bill Marriott, commander of Patrol Reconnaissance Wing 10, said yesterday. "And it was absolutely the right decision for him to do that."

According to Marriott, Osborn is ready for more. He apparently asked his debriefers if he could get back in the air on Monday to log his required monthly flight time.

"That shows you the frame of mind he's in," Marriott said. "He wants to get home and fly again, and that's fantastic."

The crew will get up to a month of leave, Marriott said, although the exact amount hasn't been determined yet.

They will likely be allowed to get back to work earlier, if that's what they want to do.

Meanwhile, despite the hoopla and the talk shows to come, there will be the usual joys and frictions of a return home, Niedzialkowski said -- even from a deployment that ended unexpectedly three months early. Things like who balances the checkbook; who disciplines the kids; who makes dinner and who mows the yard.

Crew returns, and a town rejoices

By Dean Paton Special to The Christian Science Monitor

In the middle of her business day, Patti Carter starts crying.

She hasn't been fired, and there's not an angry customer in sight here at her mailing service on Pioneer Way. But when she stops to talk about the return of the reconnaissance crew that calls this town home, her voice cracks.

"We've all been tied up emotionally in this mess," says Ms. Carter, unashamed by her tears. "There's almost no separation at all between the air station and the town."

You can see that at the local churches, where deployment boards are carved in the shape of aircraft carriers, reminding people to pray for those overseas. You can see it at Eric King's printing shop, where "Welcome Home" signs are rolling off the presses. Come Saturday, the whole nation will see it, when this tiny Puget Sound port town sandwiched between two military bases holds a homecoming celebration for the 24 men and women finally freed from the Chinese island of Hainan.

People here know the military life. Nearly everyone has served in the armed forces - or has a son, daughter, or husband who has - and they see the safety of the servicemen and women assigned to Naval Air Station Whidbey Island as a collective charge, not a military matter. So it is only now, two weeks after the EP-3 reconnaissance plane made its emergency landing on a remote Chinese airstrip, that people are releasing emotions pent up over days of waiting and watching.

"So many of us who are now in the civilian community used to be on the other side of the fence," says Carter. "My husband was career military. He had over 20 years in when he retired. The military was part of my life. I know what it means to feel the support of this community."

Since the crisis began, that support has been overwhelming - and decidedly yellow. Across the northern half of Whidbey Island, most businesses, trees, fences, and signs sport yellow bows or sashes, a symbol that this community would not forget its crew.

In local restaurants and businesses, waitresses, bank tellers, and clerks at K-mart wear yellow

ribbons. A cyclone fence at the elementary school is awash in yellow, with arrays of ribbons and homemade signs of support.

"It's kind of like extended family," says Dave Johnson, senior vice president at Whidbey Island Bank. "If something happens to your family, what do you do? You pull together.

"Even though you may not know the actual person involved, you pull together and do whatever you can," he says. "You pray.... You give as much comfort and support as you possibly can."

Jubilation and eggs

By early Wednesday morning, word of the crew's imminent release swept through Mitzel's out on Highway 20, where the Rotary Club was eating breakfast.

"Everyone was jubilant," said Mike Sullivan, a resident here for 28 years.

Mr. King of Whidbey Printing certainly left the breakfast in good spirits. Soon after he arrived at the shop, the Navy veteran was taking orders for "Welcome Home" signs. "And even today," he says, "more yellow ribbons are going up."

Shows of solidarity have taken other forms, too. On Monday, when it looked like the crew might not return for weeks, the Rev. David Lura of First United Methodist Church began a ritual to deepen the community's spiritual resolve: Every day at noon, he rang his church's bell 24 times - once for each member of the crew - then led a brief prayer service.

Although he has been the town's Methodist pastor for 13 years, Mr. Lura only retired from the Navy five years ago, and he says the military and the town are inextricably intertwined. "I feel like an active-duty chaplain in civilian clothes," he quips.

Lura urged residents to set the alarms on their wristwatches to buzz at noon, "so that they could be reminded to pray." On the church readerboard he spelled out the following:

Prayers and candles
Bells and more
For the Whidbey 24.
Done this before

Praying for men and women dispatched to faraway places is nothing new in Oak Harbor. Most

-MORE-

of the town's churches have deployment boards that list the names of service personnel stationed here but dispatched around the globe.

The board at First Baptist is cut from wood in the shape of an aircraft carrier. The United Methodist version is about three feet square, with a hand-painted aircraft carrier plying ocean waves and names listed below.

"We have folks out on deployment all the time," Lura explains.

"Really, we have an ongoing prayer vigil, so what we've done these past few days isn't out of the ordinary - though I might add that our prayers have included the Chinese pilot who died and his family," he says.

Oak Harbor, in fact, is surrounded by the military - not only figuratively, but literally. The Naval Air Station here is two facilities, with a seaplane base south of town and a larger air base to the north. "Most bases ... are surrounded by their

towns," Lura notes. "Our town is surrounded by the base."

The sound of freedom

That means the people of Oak Harbor are never far from the Navy. To some, that hasn't always been good. A few have complained about the incessant whine of jet engines, as Prowlers and other aircraft takeoff and land above the forest and fertile farmland of north Whidbey. But the community has always rallied around its troops.

For decades here, not far from the air station, a red, white, and blue sign has proclaimed: "Pardon our noise - it's the sound of Freedom."

On Saturday, when the 24 members of the spy plane are expected to return home after two days of debriefing in Hawaii, it won't be Navy jets that people hear in Oak Harbor. Most likely, it will be a rally, with honking horns and cheering citizens.

That, too, will be the sound of freedom.



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Monday, April 2, 2001

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER 2 APR 2001

Admiral blames Chinese recklessness

'Pattern of unsafe behavior' behind collision, Pacific commander says

By JAYMES SONG THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONOLULU -- The top-ranking U.S. military officer in the Pacific blamed the collision of a Navy surveillance plane with a Chinese fighter jet on a "pattern of increasingly unsafe behavior" by China's military in the South China Sea.

Adm. Dennis Blair, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, criticized China in a news conference yesterday at Camp Smith in Honolulu.

"I must tell you that the intercepts by Chinese fighters over the past couple of months have become more aggressive to the point that we felt they were endangering the safety of the Chinese and American aircraft," Blair said.

U.S. military officials had "launched a protest at the working level" before yesterday's incident but did not receive a satisfactory response, he said.

"We went to the Chinese and said your aircraft are not intercepting in a professional manner. There's a situation here," Blair said.

"It's not a normal practice to play bumpercars in the air," he said.

The EP-3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet sent to intercept it over the South China Sea early yesterday and made an emergency landing in China. The Chinese government said the fighter crashed and its pilot was missing.

The American plane landed at a military airfield on Hainan, a Chinese island. Chinese

officials assured the United States the crew members were safe.

But the United States has had no contact with the 24-member crew since it reported that it landed safely with no injuries, Blair said.

"We just don't know" what has happened to them, Blair said.

If a Chinese plane were to make an emergency landing in Hawaii, the United States would put the crew in touch with its base and make arrangements for the repair and return of the aircraft.

"We are waiting right now for the Chinese government to give us the kind of cooperation that is expected of countries in situations like this," Blair said.

China blamed the U.S. aircraft for the collision, but Blair said the larger, slower American plane was more likely to have been hit by the nimble Chinese fighter.

"It's pretty obvious who bumped who," he said.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, also blamed China's military for the collision. He spoke after being briefed by the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington.

"This is a tragic military accident that could have been avoided if Chinese pilots had respected the laws of international airspace," Warner said.

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APRIL 02, 02:22 EST

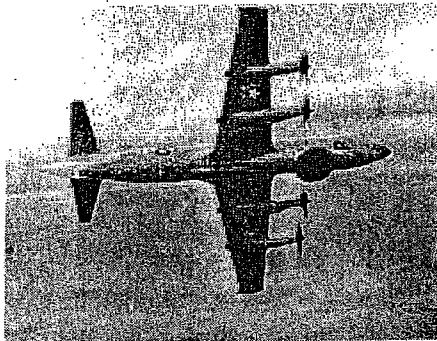
US Officials On Way to China Island

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN
Associated Press Writer

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. diplomats traveled Monday to an island in the South China Sea where a U.S. Navy surveillance plane landed after colliding with a Chinese fighter jet. More than a day after the accident, it remained unclear where the 24 crewmembers were.

Chinese state-run media accused the United States of causing Sunday's collision between the EP-3 plane and the F-8 fighter, forcing the plane to make an emergency landing on Hainan island.

U.S. Embassy officials in Beijing would not say whether the American delegation of consular and embassy officials traveling to Hainan was expected to meet with the EP-3's crew upon arrival at Hainan.



EP-3E Aries II
AP/ [11K]

officer and one Marine, he said.

China has accused the U.S. plane of intruding on Chinese air space by landing without Chinese permission. It says it has made "proper arrangements" for the crew members.

"We've been assured all crew members are safe," said a U.S. Embassy spokesman in Beijing, speaking on condition of anonymity. He said he was unaware of any contact between the crew and U.S. officials since the plane landed at a military airfield on Hainan.

"We've emphasized our expectation that (China) will respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well being and safety of the crew in accordance with international practice," the spokesman said. The United States is asking China to expedite repairs and immediately



U.S. Ambassador to
China Joseph Prueher
AP/Greg Baker [21K]

A U.S. military spokesman in Japan said the unarmed, four-engine, propeller-driven plane had taken off from the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, and was conducting a routine surveillance flight in international airspace when two Chinese F-8 fighters intercepted it Sunday morning.

The American plane was damaged and made an emergency landing at the Chinese air base on the island as permitted under "commonly accepted principles of international law," the spokesman said on condition of anonymity. Its crew included 22 Navy personnel, one Air Force

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return the plane and crew.

The United States has offered to help China search for the one Chinese F-8 fighter that Beijing says crashed after the collision over the South China Sea.

The fighter jets were sent up to track the plane as it approached Chinese airspace. Nick Cook, an aviation expert with Jane's Defense Weekly in London, said the U.S. military routinely sends surveillance aircraft such as the EP-3 to monitor China's military.

The incident comes as relations between Washington and Beijing have entered a delicate stage. China has been cool toward the Bush administration's more cautious approach to relations with Beijing, and warned the administration that ties could suffer over the announcement this month of new arms sales to Taiwan, the island China considers its own territory.



Spy capabilities
AP/ [27K]

Washington also has protested China's recent detention of two scholars with links to the United States.

China has blamed the U.S. aircraft for the collision off the southern Chinese island. But the U.S. military said the cause of the accident is under investigation, and the commander of U.S. Pacific military forces said the faster and more nimble Chinese plane had bumped into the larger, slower U.S. plane.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement Sunday saying the U.S. plane veered suddenly into the Chinese jet. The U.S. side has "total responsibility for this event," the

ministry said. State television repeated the accusation on its noon broadcast Monday.

Foreign and defense ministry spokesmen did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

Officials at Hainan government offices and the military airport where the plane landed refused to comment, saying they had been ordered by superiors not to provide information to reporters. The airport is located near the town of Lingshui on the southern part of the island.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said the collision occurred at 9:07 a.m., 62 miles southeast of Hainan. U.S. officials said it happened 58 miles southeast of the island.

The collision appeared to be an accident, and Chinese planes did not force the American plane to land, U.S. officials said.

Speaking to reporters in Hawaii on Sunday, Adm. Dennis Blair, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, criticized what he called unsafe intercepts of U.S. planes by Chinese fighters.

U.S. military officials had "launched a protest at the working level" before Sunday's incident, but did not receive a satisfactory response, he said.



U.S.
Ambassador
to China
Joseph
Prueher.

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"It's not a normal practice to play bumpercars in the air," Blair said.

The U.S. military spokesman in Japan said the American aircraft enjoys sovereign immune status, which prohibits Chinese officials from searching, inspecting or detaining the plane without U.S. consent. No Chinese official is allowed to board the plane without permission from its commander, he said.

The EP is about the size of a Boeing 737 passenger plane. Most of its space is taken up by sophisticated equipment for monitoring radio, radar, telephone, e-mail and fax traffic, according to defense experts.

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China blames U.S. for collision

By Paul Wiseman, USA TODAY

HONG KONG — The fate of 24 crewmembers forced to land their spy plane on a Chinese island remained in doubt Monday as U.S. military officials demanded their safe return. More than a day after the accident, it remained unclear where the 24 crewmembers were, and no contact had been made between the crew and U.S. Navy officials. "As time goes on, it's increasingly worse," said Adm. Dennis Blair, commander of the U.S. forces in the Pacific. "We're talking about a place that has telephones."

The collision of the Navy surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter over the South China Sea is the latest example of what military officials call increasingly provocative Chinese tactics against U.S. forces in the disputed region.

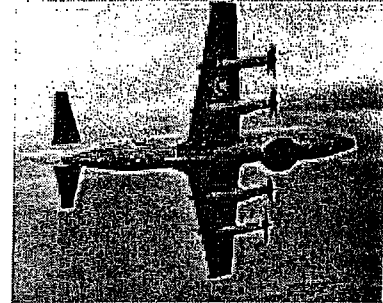
Pentagon officials say the U.S. plane, which made an emergency landing on a Chinese island, is protected by international conventions from being boarded, inspected or detained.

Officers from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing headed to Hainan Island to see the plane's crew of the EP-3 "Aries."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry, in a statement read on state television, said the Chinese F-8 crashed after being rammed by the U.S. plane and that its pilot was missing. "The U.S. side has total responsibility," the statement said. It said China has lodged a protest.

U.S. officials said the unarmed, four-engine propeller plane was on a "routine surveillance" mission. Blair blamed the collision on one of two Chinese fighters dispatched to intercept the U.S. plane.

"It's not a normal practice to play bumper cars in the air," Blair said.



AP/U.S. Navy

The U.S. Navy's EP-3E Aries II airplane. A similar plane collided with a Chinese aircraft Sunday.

Pentagon officials said U.S. surveillance aircraft flying near China often are shadowed by Chinese military craft.

A U.S. military map put the collision about 80 miles southeast of Hainan, outside the 12-mile territorial sea and airspace. China claims most of the South China Sea as its territorial waters — a claim rejected by countries that use the vast expanse of ocean for shipping.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer called for a prompt release of the crew. "That is the standard practice. We would expect them to follow it," Fleischer said.

U.S. officials said they also expect China to "respect the integrity" of the aircraft, help repair the plane and allow it to leave the island as soon as possible. The EP-3 has high-tech surveillance equipment used to hunt and track submarines and collect intelligence.

The incident comes amid rising U.S.-China tensions. Beijing's security services are holding two Chinese-born academics with U.S. citizenship, and China is anxiously awaiting a decision by President Bush on whether to sell advanced defensive arms to Taiwan.

U.S. sends mission to recover plane, crew

By Nic Hopkins
 CNN.com Writer

HONG KONG, China -- U.S. diplomats have landed on China's Hainan Island to try to negotiate the return of a downed spy plane and its 24 crew members.

A spokesman for U.S. Pacific Command told CNN the three-person team was expected to meet local Chinese government officials of the island, off China's south coast, after landing around midday local time (0500 GMT).

Naval Attache Bradley Kaplan and Defense Attache Neal Sealock boarded a mini-van at Haikou airport on the north end of the island for the two- to three-hour trip to the Lingshui military airport near the southern city of Sanya, a Reuters photographer said.

They were due to meet a third diplomat -- understood to be a U.S. consul general -- who arrived on Hainan Island earlier Monday.

The U.S. aircraft made an emergency landing Sunday in China after it collided in mid-air with a Chinese fighter jet early on Sunday morning, the Pentagon said. China is blaming the U.S. for the collision, which the U.S. says happened over international waters.

The crew is thought to be safe and unharmed, although the Chinese jet ditched into the South China Sea and its pilot remains missing, according to Beijing.

No word

The consular mission was sent to Hainan Island with the task of negotiating the return of the crew and its aircraft.

"They were supposed to be there right about now, but we have not heard from them yet," said the spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command in Honolulu, Lt. Cmdr. Sean Kelly.

"Their first task is to get down there and make contact with the crew and the craft, and then negotiate the safe return of both," Kelly said.

He added that no contact has been made with the crew since it landed at an air base at Lingshui, on the southeast tip of Hainan Island. It is not known whether the crew has remained on board the high-tech Navy EP-3 Aries II.

Kelly says under international guidelines, the aircraft -- which operates out of Japan -- is considered sovereign U.S. territory and China "cannot seize, board or inspect the aircraft without the permission of the U.S. government".

Most of the next of kin of the crew have been notified, and Kelly said it might soon be possible to release some of the names of the crew.

Classified equipment

The spokesman also confirmed that there is classified equipment on board the plane, which is used to fly missions along the edge of Chinese airspace monitoring electronic activity inside China.



Defense Attache Neal Sealock, left, and Naval Attache Bradley Kaplan of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing leave for Hainan Island on Monday

He said it was a regular mission by one of about 24 such aircraft in service in the U.S. Navy, and intercepts by Chinese aircraft were also common. However, the U.S. government recently protested that Chinese pilots had become "less professional" in their intercepts.

"I must tell you though that the intercepts by Chinese fighters over the past couple months have become more aggressive to the point we felt they were endangering the safety of Chinese and American aircraft," said Adm. Dennis C. Blair, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command told a press conference shortly after the incident.

"And we launched a protest at the working level. This is not a big deal, but we went to the Chinese and said, 'Your aircraft are not intercepting in a professional manner. There is a safety issue here.' So, this was a pattern of what we considered to be increasingly unsafe behavior."

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Confusion

It remains unclear exactly how the collision occurred. The U.S. officially considers it an accident, but China has blamed the U.S. aircraft's pilot.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said two Chinese military planes were following the U.S. plane to monitor it.

The Chinese planes "were flying normally" about 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of the Chinese island of Hainan when "the U.S. plane suddenly turned toward the Chinese plane," he said, in a statement.

"The head and the left wing of the U.S. plane bumped into one of the Chinese planes, causing it to crash."

The Pentagon has said China's response to the incident is "unsatisfactory".

Quick resolution

Meanwhile, Japan has urged both the United States and China to resolve quickly their differences over the collision, saying the Sino-U.S. relationship was crucial to Asia.

"Good relations between the United States and China are important to peace and stability in the

Asia-Pacific region," top government spokesman Yasuo Fukuda told a news conference.

"Our government hopes that the safety of the crew will be ensured and the issue will be resolved smoothly and promptly," Fukuda said.

U.S. lawmakers warned the incident could strain diplomatic relations if not resolved quickly.

"We are at a very important and delicate point in our relationship with the People's Republic of China and how this is handled will go a long way as to the future of that relationship," U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel said in an interview with CNN.

Earlier, aviation expert Jim Eckes, managing director of Indoswiss Aviation, dismissed China's claim that the incident was the fault of U.S. pilots.

"Aviation protocol demands that the quicker plane take steps to avoid the larger, slower aircraft, which in this case was the EP-3 belonging to the U.S.," said Eckes.

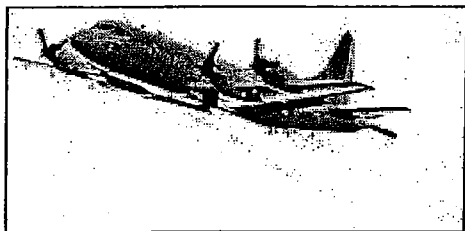
The downed U.S. surveillance aircraft represents one of the most technologically advanced aircraft owned by the military, according to Eckes.

"This is a very, very sensitive piece of equipment and one the U.S. will not want sitting in Chinese territory," he told CNN.

Reuters contributed to this report.

U.S. squadron leader says Chinese flier got too close

By CHRIS MCGANN



An EP-3E Aries II based at Whidbey Naval Air Station practices landings and takeoffs at the base yesterday.

Jeff Larsen / Seattle Post-Intelligencer

The squadron commander of the U.S. surveillance plane involved in yesterday's collision with a Chinese fighter jet said the blame falls on the Chinese pilot, who was flying too close and lost control of the jet.

"The Navy crew did absolutely nothing to endanger the Chinese pilot," said Bernard Lessard, the VQ-1 squadron commander, at his Anacortes home yesterday.

He balked at China's accusation that the huge American plane, called an EP-3, "veered suddenly" and caused the smaller Chinese F-8 to crash.

"The crew wouldn't have made any abrupt changes. (Flying the EP-3) is like driving a Cadillac. It's a very stable flying aircraft, where a high-performance jet is more unstable -- especially if it's flying slowly."

Lessard said the EP-3 planes routinely monitor the South China Sea where the incident occurred, and it's not uncommon -- or illegal under international law -- for Chinese fighters to fly up next to them and take a look. But it wasn't safe.

"I'm confident it was purely an accident and probably pilot error (on the Chinese fighter's part) and almost certainly a lack of regard for our plane.

"You just shouldn't get that close to another aircraft," said Lessard, adding, "the crew wouldn't have done anything that would be at all antagonistic."

Lessard explained that the EP-3, a propeller-driven surveillance plane with a nearly 100-foot

wingspan, flies at 250 to 300 knots, which is fairly slow compared to the two high-performance fighters that flew up alongside the American plane.

"The problem as I see it is: We're a prop (propeller-driven plane). We create a different kind of airflow. For a pilot that doesn't fly around that kind of aircraft, especially if they're trying to fly close ... they could have control problems. Jets almost have to go faster to get lift. Just like everything, that creates different types of wind patterns. If they get close to you, they might lose control," Lessard said.

The Chinese disagree.

According to a Chinese Foreign ministry statement, the Chinese military aircraft were engaged in normal pursuit and monitoring activities of the U.S. military surveillance plane near China's coast, in accordance with international practice.

The statement also asserted that the nose and left wing of the U.S. plane hit the Chinese plane and caused it to crash.

Lessard said the Chinese pilot lost control and ran into the U.S. plane's propeller.

Lessard said he was concerned about the Chinese pilot but didn't know his condition.

"There certainly is no ill will to the pilot or anyone else," Lessard said. "He made a mistake."

While the incident is likely to further strain U.S.-China relations, already on edge in the wake of last year's accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the recent defection of a high-ranking army official, Lessard said his main concern is for his crewmen and the aircraft.

Lessard emphasized that despite recent tensions, Hainan -- the island in the South China Sea where the U.S. plane made its emergency landing -- is not hostile territory, nor is China an enemy of the United States.

"I'm optimistic that they would understand and certainly appreciate the situation. It's obviously very sensitive, but we're optimistic that they will do the right thing and return the plane and the crew as soon as possible."

MORE

Lessard said he had been informed that U.S. diplomats were working to negotiate U.S. permission to access the island, which he expects sometime today.

The U.S. Pacific Command in Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, issued a news release last night stating that it expects "that the PRC Government will respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well-being and safety of the crew in accordance with international practices, expedite any necessary repairs to the aircraft, and facilitate the immediate return of the aircraft and crew."

National security interests associated with the classified surveillance equipment aboard the reconnaissance plane could also be at stake.

But Lessard said the plane is considered sovereign property which, under international law, should be protected.

"It would be no different than a Chinese ship coming into Seattle. They (the U.S. plane) made an approved precautionary landing. I can't say if the Chinese are on the aircraft, but by international law they aren't permitted on the aircraft," he said.

The unarmed U.S. plane left on its mission from Kadena Okinawa, a U.S. naval base, to provide security information for the 7th Naval Fleet.

Lessard said on such missions in international airspace, a kindred spirit and curiosity often draw other aircraft in close to take a friendly look.

"These guys come up and wave, and we've had them show us their e-mail address. It's purely curiosity."

But he added, "Good common sense would tell you not to do that. You're really taking big chances when you go and try to check out somebody like that."

U.S.-China Plane Collision Raises Tensions As Bush Considers Weapons Sale to Taiwan

By GREG JAFFE and CHARLES HUTZLER
Staff Reporters of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

A U.S. spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet collided over the South China Sea Sunday, increasing tensions at a time when U.S. officials are considering weapons sales to Taiwan.

China said the fighter jet crashed and its pilot was missing. The U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance plane made an emergency landing on Hainan island in southern China. The 24 American crew members weren't injured, said a spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii.

According to the Navy, the EP-3 maritime patrol aircraft was on a routine surveillance mission in international airspace when there was contact between it and one of two Chinese F-8 fighters on an interception mission. Although it is common for Chinese fighter jets to interfere with American spy planes in the area, the incident was the first time a U.S. military plane collided with a Chinese aircraft and was forced to make an emergency landing.

"The U.S. side has total responsibility for this event," China's foreign ministry said in a statement read on state-run television.

The incident comes as the U.S. is wrapping up weapons-sales deliberations in Washington. China has drawn a hard line opposing Taiwan's request that the U.S. sell it four destroyers equipped with the sophisticated Aegis air-defense and battle-management system.

U.S. officials said they will be monitoring how the Chinese respond to the collision. "A lot will depend on how cooperative the Chinese are over the next few days. Do they return the plane and the crew quickly?" a Pentagon official said. The spy plane was equipped with numerous classified surveillance devices.

Within hours, the two sides were presenting sharply divergent versions of the story. U.S. officials said the two planes bumped into each other and no problems were anticipated in retrieving the U.S. crew. Meanwhile, China's official news agency quoted foreign-ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao as

saying, "The U.S. plane suddenly turned toward the Chinese jets, resulting in its bumping into and damaging one of the two Chinese jets." The report said the U.S. plane intruded into China's airspace without permission.

China opposes the sale of Aegis-equipped destroyers to Taiwan because it fears the U.S. could link the ships into a regional missile-defense network. U.S. officials discount this, saying the U.S. is years away from developing a missile-defense system capable of defending its own troops, let alone Taiwan's. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is expected to make a recommendation to President Bush in the next couple of weeks.

One factor in the U.S. administration's deliberations will be a confidential study concluding that Taipei needs the Aegis air-defense and battle-management system. That system, however, won't be ready until 2010. As a stopgap measure, the study, which was first reported in Sunday's editions of the New York Times, recommends that the U.S. sell Taipei Kidd-class destroyers, which could be used to defend the Taiwanese Navy from antiship missiles. The study was begun by the Clinton administration last year when it declined to sell Taiwan the Aegis-equipped destroyers. The Aegis system is capable of countering a larger number of antiship missiles than the Kidd-class destroyers. A second difference between the two systems has to do with their ability to be adapted later to carry out theater ballistic-missile defense. When the U.S. Navy does develop theater missile programs, they will be based on the Aegis system. If Taiwan had Aegis platforms they could conceivably be upgraded with missiles, software and hardware to handle theater ballistic missiles.

The position of many in the Pentagon to sell the Taiwanese Kidd-class destroyers represents a compromise. The Kidd-class ships would allow the Taiwanese to begin training on sophisticated radar systems so they would be better equipped should they later acquire the Aegis-equipped ships, Adm. Dennis Blair, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week.

MORE

He said the Kidd-class ships could be delivered in two to three years, giving the Taiwanese an effective air-defense capability far sooner than the Aegis ships.

Sunday's collision, and the arms-sales deliberations, come at a difficult time for U.S.-China relations in other respects. Beijing has stepped up detentions of Western-trained Chinese scholars, some with U.S. residence or citizenship. Over the weekend there were reports that two more people were detained; diplomats in Beijing say that since last year at least five overseas scholars have been detained and released.

Beijing also is concerned about the Bush administration's tougher line toward China and its pledges to strengthen alliances with Japan and South Korea and to show greater support for Taiwan. Meanwhile, the U.S. is again seeking China's censure before the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, although Beijing is likely to successfully defeat the measure. Adding to the tension is a looming debate in Congress on whether to extend China's trading rights for another year.

China's domestic politics also play a part. Though Chinese leaders know steady ties with the U.S. keep their economy growing, they are involved in politicking to choose a new leadership in 18 months. None of the contenders or their political backers can appear to look soft on either Taiwan or the U.S.

The crash calls up worries that it could turn into a replay of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999. Then, the U.S. called the bombing accidental; the Chinese government has consistently said the bombing was deliberate. The disagreement sparked sometimes-violent protests outside U.S. consulates across China, including the stoning of the U.S. embassy in Beijing and the cutting off of cultural and military exchanges.

One factor that may mute the invective over the crash is Beijing's bid for the 2008 Olympics. If China's state media fan street protests against the U.S. Embassy and consulates, this could jeopardize Beijing's chances at the Olympics selection meeting in Moscow in July.

More angst between China, US

US spy plane landed in China yesterday, after collision with jet

By Robert Marquand and Ann Scott Tyson
BEIJING AND WASHINGTON

It's not clear yet who bumped whom in midair.

But China is claiming that a US reconnaissance plane is "wholly responsible" for a downed Chinese fighter in an incident above the South China Sea yesterday morning. The damaged US aircraft was forced to land on a Chinese island.

The collision suddenly gives the new Bush administration a difficult diplomatic

and military challenge, at a time when rhetoric between Beijing and Washington is already heating up.

"This is a real test for US-China military-to-military relations," says David Shambaugh, a China specialist at George Washington University. "We have been trying under Clinton to build trust. Pretty much all the channels are there to defuse the crisis."

A hotline was set up in 1998 between Chinese president Jiang Zemin and Clinton, and in the past two years direct links have been established between the US Pacific Command and the Chinese ministry of defense, as a result of the engagement policy and the 1996 Taiwan Strait incident.

At press time, Chinese officials said their fighter jet had crashed and the pilot was missing. The US flight crew of 24 reportedly landed their aircraft near the Lingshui Airbase on Hainan, an island off the southern coast of China.

A spokesman for the US Pacific Command says the incident took place in international airspace, adding that "we don't know what caused the incident. We are saying that a PRC aircraft

made contact with an American aircraft. The No. 1 engine and underside of the US aircraft are damaged."

According to Chinese official reports, at 9:07 a.m. (Beijing time) two Chinese fighters were following a US EP-3 intelligence gathering plane when the "US plane all of a sudden turned, and clipped the left wing of one jet, forcing it to crash," said Chinese spokesman Zhu Bangzao, who also stated that the US plane entered Chinese airspace "without permission" in order to make an emergency landing.

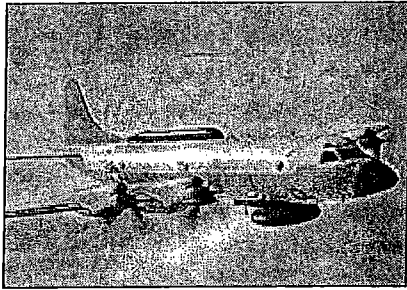
US officials have requested a recovery of the EP-3 and pilots, loaded with state-of-the-art telemetry; but it unclear as of this writing how the Chinese plan to handle this question.

"[There is] a great risk in [the Chinese] getting close to the aircraft," says Mr. Shambaugh. "If they try to remove the crew from the aircraft at gunpoint, the crew will be under instructions to stay in the aircraft, they are armed and probably have instructions to defend the aircraft. If [the Chinese] forced the crew off and went on to examine it, that could quickly become an international incident."

"The question is whether the Chinese will cooperate and allow US officials to deal with the pilots and plane - or whether this will turn into some kind of tougher game," says one Western source in Beijing.

In recent years, China has made significant new claims over the South China Sea. The US aircraft landed on China's Hainan Island, where the Chinese have a major naval base. The EP-3, a radar plane, "soaks up" most of the transmissions in the area through which it passes.

MORE



US SURVEILLANCE: The Navy's EP-3 aircraft.
US NAVY/REUTERS

Asked if there is a different definition of the airspace between the US and China, a US Pacific Command spokesman replied, "there



STAFF

kind of seems to be, doesn't there?"

Some experts here wonder whether hawks in the Chinese military are responding in kind to the tougher US hawks they perceive as newly positioned in the Bush administration.

Whatever the reason, the incident comes at an especially sensitive time in US-China relations, with a significant wing of the China hawks (often called "blue team" members) taking high-ranking positions in the Bush administration. The tougher position on a possible "threat from China" taken by the hawks is in contrast with the more conciliatory view on China championed by Clinton administration officials, sometimes called "red team" members - who characterized relations between the US and China as a "strategic partnership."

In recent weeks, US-China rhetoric has sharpened over a rash of contentious issues between the two sides. US officials suggested that Chinese telecom firms were helping Saddam Hussein rebuild his radar defenses. The Chinese have issued stern warnings about high-tech weapons sales to Taiwan, which it considers part of its territory - particularly

the sale of the Aegis-equipped destroyer, which could eventually become part of a theater missile defense system. China sent its top foreign policy diplomat, Qian Qichen, to Washington for talks with Bush last month that included efforts to block the Aegis system.

Adding to the tension between the two sides is a US effort at the UN in Geneva to officially condemn China's human rights record. In the past week, also, three cases of detained Chinese scholars holding permanent US residency permits have come to light - with China claiming it is holding at least one of the scholars on spy charges.

One Washington-based China watcher urged caution in ascribing calculated or scheming motives to this aircraft incident: "I would not tend to think this has anything to do with the arms sales or the Qian visit... It's not as though we don't send out surveillance planes all the time, and they don't come check us out." But this expert adds, "We [may] want to attribute [this] to some grander scheme, but ... it could be a hot-headed pilot, an inexperienced pilot."

Even before Chinese spokesman Zhu reported the Chinese version of events, the Chinese Internet chat rooms were lit up with angry comments condemning the US. Not since the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 has such a release of angry anti-US statements been seen so quickly.

"I only care about our own pilots, I don't care about the Americans," said one Chinese writer at the Sina.Com site. Another stated, "We should have done this much earlier. If we aren't serious, they will think our sky is their own backyard." Another added: "We should keep the 24 Americans as hostages."

Some specialists say the controversy over yesterday's incident may boil down to different views over the South China Sea.

U.S. Spy Plane, Chinese Fighter Collide Over Sea

Asia: American craft with a crew of 24 lands safely on China's Hainan island, while the other reportedly crashes. Incident strains already shaky bilateral relations

By HENRY CHU and PAUL RICHTER

BEIJING--A U.S. Navy spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet collided Sunday over the South China Sea, causing the American craft to make an emergency landing in China and the Chinese plane to crash, U.S. and Chinese officials said.

The 24 crew members aboard the EP-3 U.S. reconnaissance plane were unhurt, but U.S. defense officials said they have been unable to establish contact with the crew since the craft came to ground on Hainan island, a Chinese province off the country's southern coast. The pilot of the downed Chinese jet was reported missing.

American diplomats from Beijing were to arrive this morning on Hainan to press for the release of the crew and plane, but it remained unclear how the Chinese would respond. The incident puts more strain on increasingly shaky Sino-U.S. relations.

U.S. officials said they would not be able to determine responsibility for the incident until they talked to crew members. They also warned the Chinese not to enter the top-secret aircraft, which the Americans insisted was "sovereign territory."

China blamed the U.S. for the crash, which occurred about 9:15 a.m. Sunday in China (5:15 p.m. Saturday PST).

Two Chinese F-8 fighters were conducting "normal flight operations" about 65 miles southeast of Hainan when the American EP-3 suddenly veered toward one of the Chinese jets, a statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

"The nose and left wing of the U.S. plane hit the Chinese plane and caused it to crash," the statement said, adding that rescue crews were searching for the downed Chinese pilot.

"The U.S. should bear full responsibility,"



Adm. Dennis Blair gives details in Honolulu of where the collision between a U.S. Navy surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet.
AP

declared Zhu Bangzao, a Foreign Ministry spokesman.

But Adm. Dennis Blair, chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, said "common sense" suggests that the lighter, faster Chinese jets caused the collision with the heavier, clumsier EP-3, which is about the size of a Boeing 737.

"Big airplanes like this fly straight and level on their path. Little airplanes zip around them," Blair told reporters in Honolulu. "It's pretty obvious who bumped into who. I'm going on common sense now because I haven't talked to our crew."

According to U.S. officials, the American craft was on a routine surveillance mission out of Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, when the two fighter jets came up alongside the EP-3 and "intercepted" it.

MORE

Although the intentions of the Chinese pilots were unclear, when "two fighter jets come up on [you], they're generally not coming up to say hi," said Lt. Cmdr. Sean Kelly, a spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command.

Kelly said the EP-3 and one of the Chinese planes bumped into each other, causing enough damage that the pilot of the American craft issued a mayday distress signal and landed the disabled plane at an airfield on Hainan.

Kelly said that under international convention, "any military aircraft is essentially sovereign territory of its owner. So it cannot either be boarded, seized or inspected without the express permission of the U.S. government."

U.S. defense officials said they expected China to "respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well-being and safety of the crew" and to facilitate the repair and return of the EP-3. Beijing said "proper arrangements" had been made for the U.S. crew but did not say where they were.

Sunday's collision is likely to complicate already edgy relations between Washington and Beijing, including on the military front. A few months ago, a high-level People's Liberation Army officer defected to the U.S. in an embarrassing setback for Beijing. In China, authorities have arrested two scholars with U.S. ties and charged one with spying.

This month, the Bush administration is to decide on an arms package for Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory. Supporters of Taiwan on Capitol Hill have urged the White House to sell the island advanced weapons, including several naval destroyers, to increase its ability to fend off any attack from the mainland.

U.S. officials said the air maneuvers leading up to Sunday's crash are not uncommon, with an intercept by Chinese planes occurring in about one of every three U.S. patrol flights along the Chinese coast. But Blair said that the intercepts "have become more aggressive" over the last couple of months. The U.S. has protested about the "pattern of increasingly unsafe behavior" but "did not get a satisfactory response," he said.

U.S. Aircraft Belongs to Sophisticated Class

The collision appeared to be the first between Chinese and American military planes.

The EP-3 belongs to a sophisticated class of land-based, long-range, anti-submarine patrol aircraft. Military analysts say that it contains top-of-

can intercept telephone calls and e-mail as well as radar and fax data.

Military analysts said the crew members would be able to erase all data and disable the surveillance equipment if such moves were deemed necessary.

Defense officials said the U.S. military sought to contact the downed EP-3 on Sunday but was unsuccessful. Rear Adm. Craig Quigley, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said that could have meant that the plane's communications gear was broken as a result of the collision or that the crew had left the plane.

Quigley said he was unaware of any policy that would require crew members to remain on a plane to guard classified equipment after a landing on foreign soil.

"We are waiting right now for the Chinese government to give us the kind of cooperation that is expected of countries in situations like this," Blair said. "But as time goes on, it's increasingly worse, and it's been 18 hours that we don't have a phone call yet from our crew. We're talking about a place that has telephones."

American Military an Irritant to Many

Some China experts predicted that the disabling of the U.S. plane would be read by many in China as a small victory against the powerful U.S. military, which is an irritant to many in the country.

Bates Gill, a China expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said that from China's perspective, "you've sent the message about intruding in airspace. You forced [the plane] to land. You've got your hands on it."

Reaction in some Chinese Internet chat rooms was bellicose, echoing the angry response following the North Atlantic Treaty Organization bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1999, which set off anti-American riots across China.

"This is another armed provocation following the bombing of our embassy," wrote one Internet user who signed his posting as Common Man No. 689. "Interrogate the U.S. pilots, confiscate the plane, and compensate us for our losses."

Security around the U.S. Embassy was tightened, but no untoward incidents were reported by midmorning today.

MORE

State Department officials said that on Sunday, Joseph Prueher, the U.S. ambassador to China, and China's vice foreign minister held an "initial meeting to resolve the situation."

A retired Navy admiral, Prueher was head of U.S. forces in the Pacific before Blair and has close knowledge of U.S. military strategy and tactics in the region. In Washington on Sunday, State Department spokeswoman Michelle King said: "We've been intouch with the Chinese since last night and throughout the day. We have been assured by the Chinese government that the crew are safe and well."

President Bush, who returned to the White House on Sunday afternoon from Camp David, was briefed on the incident shortly after it occurred, White House officials said.

"We are monitoring the situation," said Gordon Johndroe, a White House press aide.

U.S. military officials said it is routine for China's planes to swoop alongside American planes flying off its coast, just as it is for U.S. planes to approach foreign military aircraft that fly in airspace off the United States. The purpose is to let the visitors know that the home nation is aware of their presence, and to test reactions.

The EP-3 is about 106 feet long. In a collision, the craft has the potential to do great damage to a smaller plane. One U.S. defense official said Sunday's collision would be akin to a crash between a BMW and an 18-wheeler truck.

Of the 24 crew members on board the EP-3, all but a pilot and co-pilot were probably in the rear of the plane, involved in the electronic eavesdropping operation, defense officials said. The group included 22 Navy personnel, plus one Marine and one Air Force service member.

The Navy plane is part of the VQ-1 electronic countermeasures squadron based at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington state.

Beijing claims a broad swath of the South China Sea as Chinese waters, but other countries dispute those claims.

Hainan island, which is close to Vietnam and the disputed Spratley Islands, is dotted with military bases.

U.S. lawmakers appearing on Sunday TV talk shows underscored the sensitivity of the matter and the impact its resolution might have on Sino-U.S. relations.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the airplane "should not be inspected or entered by any Chinese authorities because of the nature of the equipment on board."

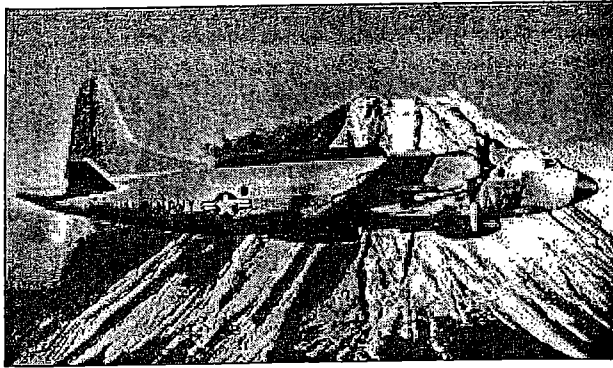
Noting the recent tensions over Taiwan and the Chinese crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement, McCain added, "This could be another episode in a series of problems that we're having in our relations with China."

"It's obviously serious whenever a military collision like this takes place," former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on CNN's "Late Edition."

Albright said the incident pointed to the importance of keeping diplomatic channels open with China so that incidents between the two nations "can be dealt with quickly and peacefully."

Chu reported from Beijing and Richter from Washington. Times staff writer Megan Garvey in Washington contributed to this report.

China holds US spy plane crew



The US says the plane was on a routine mission

The US has criticised the Chinese authorities for continuing to hold the crew of a US surveillance plane which made an emergency landing after colliding with a Chinese fighter jet.

The US ambassador to Beijing, Joseph Prueher, told journalists in the Chinese capital that so far, US officials had not been allowed to see the plane or its 24 crew members.

He said there was no legal basis for this, and described it as "inexplicable and inexcusable".

The Americans say the aircraft - an EP-3 surveillance plane - is sovereign US "territory" and should not be boarded by Chinese officials.

The American plane, which is packed with sensitive monitoring equipment, is now on the southern Chinese island of Hainan.

Strong words

In an escalating row over the incident, the commander of the US Pacific military forces rejected Beijing's claim that the American plane rammed the Chinese jet on Sunday and caused it to crash.

Admiral Dennis Blair said that in fact the Chinese planes were at fault and sharply criticised China for more "aggressive" tactics in intercepting US planes.

"It's not a normal practice to play bumper cars

” “
It's not a normal practice to play bumper cars in the air

Admiral Dennis Blair

US military officials have warned the Chinese not to "seize, board or inspect" the plane without US permission.

None of the American crew were hurt, but rescue parties are searching for the Chinese pilot whose whereabouts are not known.

Admiral Blair said that US officials had had no contact with the crew since its initial report that it landed with no injuries.

"We just don't know" what has happened to them, Admiral Blair said.

As American officials travelled to Lingshui military airport, on Hainan Island, US Lieutenant Commander Sean Kelly acknowledged that Chinese officials might refuse to see the delegation.

Analysts have said Beijing's statements over the collision are among the strongest heard for almost two years and say the standoff could be a long one.

'Proper arrangements'

China's Foreign Ministry has said that "proper arrangements" had been made for the crew, but did not say where they were.

The ministry has put all the blame on the US aircraft for causing the collision.

"A Chinese aircraft was conducting normal flight operations 10km (6 miles) south of Hainan Island when a US plane suddenly veered towards it," Chinese state television quoted the Foreign Ministry as saying.



US officials are hoping to secure the release of the plane's crew

” “
The entire aircraft is considered sovereign US territory, and the Chinese are not to seize, inspect or board it without US permission

Lt Commander Sean Kelly



*Admiral Blair
described China's tactics
as aggressive*

The ministry said it had lodged a protest with US authorities and reserved the right to seek damages.

The BBC's correspondent in Washington, Richard Lister, says the US is moving swiftly to try to defuse what could become a major diplomatic row.

Strained relations

Experts say run-ins between Chinese and US aircraft are quite common along the Chinese coast, although it was the first time an aircraft had made an emergency landing.

"It's very regular for the American navy to have their planes intruding into Chinese airspace," Yan Xuetong, an international studies expert at Beijing's Tsinghua University said.

"The Chinese then send up fighters and chase them out."

It comes at a time when Sino-American relations are under increasing strain.

US plans to develop a national missile shield - the so-called "son of star wars" - are a particularly contentious issue.

Lack of Contact Called 'Inexplicable'

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN

Associated Press Writer

BEIJING (AP) — As American diplomats flew to an island in the South China Sea where a U.S. Navy surveillance plane landed after a collision with a Chinese fighter jet, the U.S. Ambassador on Monday called it "inexplicable and unacceptable" that American officials had been unable to contact the 24 crewmembers. The accident was more than a day earlier.

The plane landed early Sunday on Hainan island after a midair collision that China blamed on the U.S. pilot.

American officials insist the Chinese have no right to enter or examine the EP-3 plane, which contains sophisticated monitoring equipment, without U.S. permission. There was no indication Monday that Chinese experts had boarded the aircraft.

Three American diplomats had arrived on Hainan and were making their way to the airfield, U.S. Ambassador Joseph Prueher said at a news conference in Beijing.

The ambassador complained that Chinese officials had given only minimal responses to queries about the plane and its crew. He said he had discussed the matter six times with Secretary of State Colin Powell.

"It is inexplicable and unacceptable and of grave concern to the most senior leaders in the United States government that the air crew has been held incommunicado for over 32 hours," Prueher said at a news conference. "The Chinese so far have given us no explanation for holding this crew."

Chinese officials have assured the United States the crew is safe and uninjured, according to U.S. officials.

The U.S. plane was standing empty at the military airfield where it landed in the town of Lingshui, said a Chinese sailor contacted by telephone at an adjacent naval facility. The sailor, who refused to give his name, said the crew had been moved to a military guesthouse.

A salvage ship sent from the Chinese mainland had joined a military search for the Chinese F-8 fighter, which Beijing says crashed after the

collision, according to a Hainan provincial maritime official. Chinese officials say the pilot is missing.

"They have not found anything," said the maritime official, who would give only his surname, Wang.

The United States has offered to help China search for its missing fighter.

The unarmed propeller-driven plane took off from the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan. Its crew is made up of 22 Navy personnel, one Air Force officer and one Marine.

The U.S. military says the plane was on a routine surveillance flight in international airspace when two Chinese F-8 fighters intercepted it Sunday morning.

China has accused the U.S. pilot of intruding into Chinese air space and landing without permission.

However, a U.S. Embassy spokesman in Beijing insisted the American pilot was following "commonly accepted principles of international law" when the plane made its emergency landing.

The United States is asking China to expedite repairs and immediately return the plane and crew.

The incident comes at an uneasy time in relations between Washington and Beijing. China has been cool toward the Bush administration's more cautious approach to relations with Beijing, and warned the administration that ties could suffer over the announcement this month of new arms sales to Taiwan, the island China considers its own territory.

Washington also has protested China's recent detention of two scholars with links to the United States.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement Sunday saying the U.S. plane veered suddenly into the Chinese jet. The U.S. side has "total responsibility for this event," the ministry said. State television repeated the accusation on its noon broadcast Monday.

But the U.S. military said the cause of the accident is under investigation. Adm. Dennis Blair, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, said the faster, more nimble Chinese plane had bumped into the larger, slower U.S. plane.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said the collision occurred at 9:07 a.m. some 62 miles southeast of Hainan. U.S. officials said it happened 58 miles southeast of the island.

The collision appeared to be an accident, and Chinese planes did not force the American plane to land, U.S. officials said.

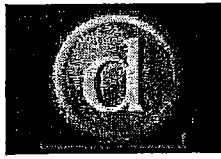
Speaking to reporters in Hawaii on Sunday, Adm. Dennis Blair, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, criticized what he called unsafe intercepts of U.S. planes by Chinese fighters.

"We went to the Chinese and said, 'Your aircraft are not intercepting in a professional manner. There's a situation here,'" Blair said.

"It's not a normal practice to play bumpercars in the air."

The EP-3 is about the size of a Boeing 737 commercial jetliner and carries equipment capable of monitoring radio, radar, telephone, e-mail and fax traffic, according to defense experts.

The U.S. military spokesman in Japan said the American aircraft enjoys sovereign immune status, which prohibits Chinese officials from searching, inspecting or detaining the plane without U.S. consent.



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From the Los Angeles Times

U.S. spy plane lands in China after colliding with jet

By Henry Chu and Paul Richter
Times Staff Writers

Published April 1 2001, 9:47 PM EDT

BEIJING -- A U.S. Navy spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet collided today over the South China Sea, causing the American craft to make an emergency landing in China and the Chinese plane to crash, the U.S. military and Chinese media said.

Chinese officials blamed the United States for the crash, and U.S. defense officials responded with warnings that the Chinese should not enter the top-secret aircraft, which the Americans insisted was "sovereign territory."

The 24 crew members on board the U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance plane were said to be unhurt. But the incident added a new strain to increasingly shaky U.S.-Chinese relations.

The collision occurred about 9:15 a.m. Sunday in China (8:15 p.m. Saturday EDT) near Hainan island, a province of China off the country's southern coast. After issuing a mayday distress signal, the disabled plane landed safely on an airfield on the island, officials said.

U.S. diplomats from Beijing were to arrive early Monday morning on Hainan island to press for release of the crew and the plane, but it remained unclear late Sunday how the Chinese would respond to these requests. U.S. officials said they would not be able to

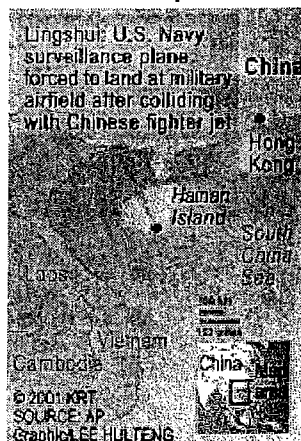
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U.S. military official emerges from U.S. Embassy in Beijing

(AP/Greg Baker)

Map

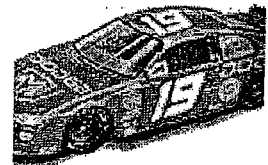


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TRAVEL

determine who was to blame for the accident until they talked to crew members, who had been unreachable since the plane went down.

The Chinese F-8 fighter aircraft was conducting "normal flight operations" about 60 miles southeast of Hainan island when a U.S. plane suddenly veered toward it, a statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

"The nose and left wing of the U.S. plane hit the Chinese plane and caused it to crash," the statement said.

"The U.S. should bear all the responsibility," said Zhu Bangzao, a Foreign Ministry spokesman.

According to U.S. officials, the American craft was on a routine surveillance mission out of Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, when two Chinese fighter jets came up alongside the EP-3 and "intercepted" it. Lt. Col. Dewey Ford, a spokesman for U.S. Pacific Command, said the EP-3 was 50 nautical miles southeast of Hainan at the time.

Although the intentions of the Chinese fighter pilots were unclear, when "two fighter jets come up on (you), they're generally not coming up to say hi," said Lt. Cmdr. Sean Kelly, a spokesman.

Kelly said the EP-3 and one of the Chinese planes bumped into each other, causing enough damage that the pilot of the U.S. craft sent out the distress signal.

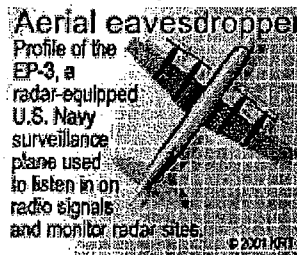
He said that under international convention, "any military aircraft is essentially sovereign territory of its owner. So it cannot either be boarded, seized or inspected without the express permission of the U.S. government."

The collision appeared to be the first ever between Chinese and American military planes.

The incident is likely to complicate already edgy relations between Washington and Beijing, including on the military front. A few months ago, a high-level People's Liberation Army officer defected to the United States in an embarrassing setback for Beijing. In China, authorities have arrested two scholars with U.S. ties and charged one with spying.

This month, the Bush administration is to decide on an arms package for Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory. Supporters of Taiwan on Capitol Hill have urged the White House to

Graphic



Profile of EP-3 plane

(KRT)

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sell the island advanced weapons, including several naval destroyers, to increase its ability to fend off an attack from the mainland.

The EP-3 belongs to a sophisticated class of land-based, long-range, anti-submarine-warfare patrol aircraft. Military analysts say that it contains top-of-the-line electronic data-gathering equipment that can intercept telephone calls and e-mail as well as radar and fax traffic.

Military analysts said the crew members would be able to erase all data and disable the surveillance equipment if such moves were deemed necessary.

State Department officials said that on Sunday, Joseph Prueher, the U.S. ambassador to China, and China's vice foreign minister held an "initial meeting to resolve the situation."

"We've been in touch with the Chinese since last night and throughout the day," said State Department spokeswoman Michelle King. "We have been assured by the Chinese government that the crew are safe and well."

President Bush, who returned to the White House on Sunday afternoon from Camp David, was briefed on the incident shortly after it occurred, White House officials said.

Beijing claims a broad swath of the South China Sea as Chinese waters, but other countries dispute those claims.

Defense officials said the U.S. military had sought to contact the EP-3 on Sunday but had been unsuccessful.

U.S. military officials said it is routine for China's planes to swoop alongside American planes flying off its coast, just as it is for U.S. planes to approach foreign military aircraft that fly in airspace off the United States. The purpose is to let the visitors know that the home nation is aware of their presence, and to test reactions.

U.S. planes patrolling off the coast of China are intercepted in this way during about one of every three flights, a Navy official said.

The U.S. reconnaissance aircraft is far larger, heavy and slower-moving than the Chinese F-8 fighter. More than 106 feet long, the EP-3 is equivalent in size to commercial planes that contain 150 seats.

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U.S. Navy plane, crew remain in Chinese custody

By Karen Blakeman
Advertiser Staff Writer

A U.S. surveillance plane and its 24 crew members remained in Chinese custody today after being forced to make an emergency landing Saturday, and military authorities here at U.S. Pacific Command headquarters grew increasingly concerned as time passed.

They want their high-tech electronic surveillance plane and its crew back, and they want it now.

The crewman are reported safe and uninjured. "It's been 18 hours now and nothing has happened," Adm. Dennis C. Blair said this morning at Camp H.M. Smith. "We are waiting, right now, for the Chinese government to give us the kind of cooperation that is expected of countries in situations like this."

Late this evening, military authorities were still waiting.

Blair, commander in chief of U.S. Pacific Command, the military command with jurisdiction over the incident, said he expects the Chinese to stay away from the aircraft, to allow its crew to contact its unit and make arrangements for repairs.

Instead, he said, military officials had not heard from the crew of the Navy plane since moments after it landed, when the pilot radioed that all crew members had arrived safely.

"If a Chinese aircraft had been 70 miles off Kane'ohe here in Hawai'i, and had had some sort of collision or damage, and declared an inflight emergency and said it was coming in to Kane'ohe, we would have assisted," he said. "We would have talked it in, had a crash crew out on the ramp in case it had trouble, and then we would have provided assistance to the crew of that aircraft to get in touch with their home base or their government. We would have respected the immunity of the aircraft.

"That's what the international obligations of all of us are in situations like this. You hear a lot of talk, especially from the Chinese, about about a Cold War mentality. This is an example to me of how the Chinese can show this is not a Cold War mentality."

Military authorities at U.S. Pacific Command headquarters said late this evening that U.S. officials still had not seen the plane or had contact with the crew.

Blair and his staff were watching the incident closely as U.S. diplomats and military attaches in China are traveling to the Chinese airfield tonight to see what could be done.

"The lights are burning bright up at Camp Smith tonight," said Navy Commander John Singley, U.S. Pacific Command spokesman.

The U.S. plane, a Navy EP-3 out of Whidby Island, Washington, and temporarily operating out of Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, was forced to make an emergency landing Saturday on an island in the South China Sea. The crew reported a Chinese F-8 fighter jet had bumped into its wing at about 3:15 p.m. Hawaii time.

Two Chinese F-8 aircraft had intercepted the EP-3 about 70 miles off of Hainan Island above the South China Sea. Blair said the EP-3 was flying in international air space.

U.S. planes routinely fly surveillance missions off the coast of China, and Chinese planes routinely fly close intercept missions around them, Blair said.

Chinese news agencies are blaming the Navy EP-3 for causing the collision, but Blair said common sense dictates the smaller, faster and more maneuverable Chinese F-8s, similar to American F-16s, were at fault. The EP3 is slower moving, propeller driven aircraft about the size of a 737.

Blair also said that Chinese aircraft on intercept missions off the coast of China have been increasingly aggressive toward U.S. planes, flying closer and closer during the past two months, to the point that he and other U.S. officials had complained to the Chinese about unsafe practices.

The collision Saturday, he said, was most likely accidental but the result of increasingly unsafe practice.

"The intercepts by Chinese fighters over the past couple of months have become more aggressive to the point we felt they were endangering the safety of Chinese and Americans aircraft," he said. "This was a pattern of what we considered to be increasingly unsafe behavior."

China is reporting that the pilot of the F-8 involved in the crash is missing. U.S. officials say they have no direct information about the fate of the F-8 or its pilot.

China Blames American Plane for Fighter Crash

By Paul Eckert



Undated file photo of an EP-3E Aries II, assigned to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One (VQ1). A U.S. Navy EP-3 assigned to VQ1, similar to this one and currently operating out of Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa, Japan, was involved in a midair collision with fighter aircraft from the Republic of China April 1, 2001. China accused the U.S. spy plane of ramming its fighter in mid-air Sunday in a military incident that threatened to blow up into a political storm. The fighter plane crashed after the collision over the South China Sea and rescuers were searching for the pilot, China said. The U.S. aircraft made an emergency landing on China's southern island of Hainan without permission. U.S. officials immediately scrambled to try to secure the release of the 24 crew, who were all reported safe, along with the plane and its sensitive surveillance equipment. (Reuters - Handout)

BEIJING (Reuters) - China said one of its fighters crashed Sunday after being rammed in mid-air by a U.S. aircraft, which landed on the southern island of Hainan without permission.

A Foreign Ministry statement said China had made "a solemn representation and protest" over the incident and reserved the right to seek damages.

According to the U.S. Navy version of the incident, one of its EP-3 Marine patrol aircraft was on a "routine surveillance" mission over the South China Sea when it brushed one of two Chinese fighters on an interception mission.

The four-engine propeller plane carrying 24 crew made an emergency landing on Hainan, the

But China laid the blame squarely on the U.S. plane.

"A Chinese aircraft was conducting normal flight operations 10 km (six miles) south of Hainan island when a U.S. plane suddenly veered toward it," Chinese state television quoted the Foreign Ministry statement as saying.

"The nose and left wing of the U.S. plane hit the Chinese plane and caused it to crash," the statement said. "China is now searching for the crew," it added.

The Chinese statement also threatened further "representations" over the U.S. plane entering Chinese air space and landing without permission.

China was making "proper arrangements" for the 24 crew, the statement added, without giving any details.

The U.S. government said it expected China to return the crew.

"That is our expectation. That is the standard practice. We would expect them to follow it," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Intelligence Treasure Trove

A U.S. statement called on China to "respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well-being and safety of the crew in accordance with international practices, expedite any necessary repairs to the aircraft and facilitate the immediate return of the aircraft."

"There was contact between one of the Chinese aircraft and the EP-3, causing sufficient damage for the U.S. plane to issue a 'mayday' signal and divert to an airfield on Hainan Island," the U.S. statement said.

It added that the U.S. had "communicated our concerns" to the Chinese government.

It was not immediately known whether the U.S. plane was in international air space at the time. Japan's Kyodo news agency said it was based in Kadena Air Base in Okinawa.

A U.S. Navy spokeswoman said the plane was believed to be carrying one member of the Air Force, one Marine, and 22 Navy personnel.

MORE

"There were no injuries that we know of related to the landing, they landed safely. But we have not received any communication since the landing," she said.

Aerial Cat-And-Mouse Routine

Robert Karniol, Asia/Pacific editor of Jane's Defense Weekly, said aerial cat-and-mouse games by air forces were routine -- even though they rarely led to collisions.

"These kinds of spying activities go on all the time by all sides concerned, not just the Americans and the Chinese," Karniol said by telephone from Bangkok.

"The key question is whether the Chinese will respect the integrity of the aircraft," he said. "The Chinese would be very pleased to get on this aircraft."

"In legal terms, the Chinese have the right to board anything that's on their territory," he said.

Karniol said the plane was most likely fitted for electronic intelligence gathering.

He said aerial interceptions and challenges were commonly used to practice reactions, warn off intruders and to learn about other countries' activities.

China claims sovereignty over the entire South China Sea, including islands also claimed wholly or partly by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

The United States officially takes no position on the territorial disputes, but insists that freedom of navigation must be maintained in the important sea route.

The collision comes amid a period of uncertainty and strain in China-U.S. relations under the new U.S. administration of President Bush. There are concerns in Beijing that the new U.S. administration is more pro-Taiwan, inclined to stress ties with Japan over China and adopt a more confrontational approach on human rights.

China is particularly worried about possible U.S. sales of high-tech weaponry to Taiwan, including the Aegis radar system, and the prospect that Washington will press ahead with an anti-missile defense shield.

China Jet Intercepts U.S. Navy Plane

By JOE McDONALD, Associated Press Writer

BEIJING (AP) - A U.S. Navy surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet sent to intercept it over the South China Sea on Sunday and made an emergency landing in China. The Chinese government said the fighter crashed and its pilot was missing.

China blamed the U.S. aircraft for the collision off the southern Chinese island of Hainan. But the commander of U.S. Pacific military forces said the Chinese planes were at fault, sharply criticizing China for more "aggressive" tactics in intercepting U.S. planes.

"It's not a normal practice to play bumpercars in the air," Adm. Dennis Blair told reporters at Camp Smith in Honolulu.

The American EP-3 plane landed at a military airfield at Lingshui on the southern end of Hainan, and China assured the United States that the 24 crewmembers were safe. The U.S. Pacific Command asked for the return of the crew and aircraft.

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing said Monday that a group of U.S. diplomats had left for Hainan, but it could not say if they would see the crew. The embassy did not say when the diplomats were expected to arrive.

Blair said U.S. officials had had no contact since the crew since its initial report that it landed with no injuries. "We just don't know" what has happened to them, Blair said.

"We are waiting right now for the Chinese government to give us the kind of cooperation that is expected of countries in situations like this," he said. "But as time goes on, it's increasingly worse and it's been 18 hours that we don't have a phone call yet from our crew. We're talking about a place that has telephones."

China's Foreign Ministry said earlier that "proper arrangements" had been made for the crew, but did not say where they were.

The incident comes at an uneasy time in U.S.-Chinese relations. The Bush administration has taken a warier attitude toward Beijing, and the president is reportedly leaning toward selling Taiwan much of the high-tech weapons it seeks - a

The U.S. plane was on a routine surveillance flight in international airspace when two Chinese fighters intercepted it, said Col. John Bratton, a spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command. Officials in Honolulu showed a map that put the collision about 80 miles southeast of Hainan, well outside the 12-mile territorial sea and airspace.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its territorial waters - a claim rejected by countries that use the vast expanse of ocean for shipping.

"The U.S. side has total responsibility for this event," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement, adding that it had made a "serious" protest.

It said two Chinese fighters were sent up to track the plane as it approached Chinese airspace. "The U.S. plane abruptly diverted toward the Chinese planes, and its head and left wing collided with one of the Chinese planes, causing the Chinese plane to crash," it said. It said rescuers were searching for the missing Chinese pilot.

But Blair blamed the Chinese fighters, which he said were similar to F-16s, fly much faster and have more maneuverability than the EP3, which is about the size of a Boeing 737.

"Big airplanes like this fly straight and level on their path, little airplanes zip around them," he said. "Under international airspace rules, the faster more maneuverable aircraft has obligation to stay out of the way of the slower aircraft."

"It's pretty obvious who bumped into who," Blair said. "I'm going on common sense now because I haven't talked to our crew."

He said the collision was likely an accident - but that it reflected a "pattern of increasingly unsafe behavior" by the Chinese military. He said U.S. officials had protested to Beijing earlier about the behavior but "did not get a satisfactory response."

"Intercepts by Chinese fighters over the past couple months have become more aggressive to the point that we felt they were endangering the safety of the Chinese and American aircraft," he said.

Distrust has risen between Beijing and Washington in recent weeks, exacerbated by China's recent detention of two scholars with links to the United States. China, in turn, has been protesting the prospect of the United States' selling new arms to Taiwan, which Beijing views as a renegade Chinese province.

Cmdr. Rex Totty, another spokesman for the Pacific Command, said U.S. planes routinely run reconnaissance missions in the area and "it is routine for Chinese aircraft to respond by intercepting and shadowing us." He denied U.S. aircraft enter Chinese airspace.

The EP-3 - an unarmed four-engine propeller-driven plane - can pick up radio, radar, telephone, e-mail and fax traffic, said Nick Cook, an aviation expert with Jane's Defense Weekly in London.

The U.S. plane took off from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, the U.S. military said. It is based at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington

state and was flying with a crew of 22 Navy personnel and one each from the Air Force and the Marines.

Bates Gill, a China expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said China was acting like any military power by trying to ward off "activities aimed at its airspace."

The collision with the American plane is a "small victory" from China's perspective, Gill said. "You've sent the message about intruding in airspace. You forced it to land. You've got your hands on it."

Cook noted a similar collision in the 1980s between a Soviet fighter jet and a Norwegian P-3 - similar to the EP-3 - over the Barents Sea, which lies north of Norway and Russia. Both planes landed safely, he said.

US navy aircraft damaged after contact with Chinese plane: official

WASHINGTON, April 1 (AFP) -

A US navy aircraft was damaged and a Chinese military jet had crashed after the two collided over the South China Sea, US and Chinese officials said Sunday, giving differing details of the incident.

The US plane was forced to make an emergency landing in China, the US Pacific Command said, while China's foreign ministry said one of its pilots was missing from the crashed jet.

"At approximately 8:15 pm Eastern Standard Time (0015 GMT), Saturday, March 31 ... a US Navy EP-3 maritime patrol aircraft on a routine surveillance mission over the South China Sea was intercepted by two People's Republic of China fighter aircraft," the US Pacific Command said.

"There was contact between one of the Chinese aircraft and the EP-3, causing sufficient damage for the US plane to issue a 'Mayday' signal and divert to an airfield on Hainan Island," it said in a statement, issued from Camp Smith in Hawaii.

None of the 24 crew members were injured in the incident, which occurred in international air space, according to the command.

In Beijing late Sunday, China said one of its jet fighters had crashed and the pilot was missing after a collision with a US surveillance plane in the South China Sea.

The US surveillance plane had approached China's airspace southeast of the island province of Hainan, and two Chinese military jets scrambled to track the plane, foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said, according to the Xinhua state-run news agency.

At 9:07 am (0207 GMT), 65 miles (104 kilometers) southeast of Hainan Island, the US plane suddenly turned towards the Chinese jets, resulting in its bumping into and damaging one of them, Xinhua quoted Zhu as saying.

The United States had expressed its concern about the incident to the government of China, both via its embassy in Beijing and the Chinese Embassy in Washington, the Pacific Command said.

"We expect that the (Chinese government) will respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well-being and safety of the crew in accordance with international practices, expedite any necessary repairs to the aircraft, and facilitate the immediate return of the aircraft and crew," the Pacific Command statement said.

US embassy personnel from Beijing were immediately dispatched to Hainan Island to monitor the situation, spokesman Frank Neville told AFP in Beijing.

Full details of damage to the US aircraft, a four-engine reconnaissance aircraft outfitted with hi-tech electronic surveillance equipment, were not immediately available.

"At this point we really don't know the full extent of the damage," US Commander Rex Totty told AFP. "We know that the number one engine and the underside of the EP-3 were damaged."

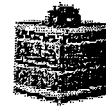
The incident comes as US President George W. Bush stands on the threshold of a momentous policy decision -- one which could shape US-China relations for the rest of his presidency -- of whether to sell high-tech arms to Taiwan, despite Beijing's vehement opposition. That decision is expected in the next few weeks.

China's leadership and the new US administration are just getting acquainted, but relations are already testy amid sharp words from Washington over the detention of two US-based scholars in China, and the embarrassing defection of a top colonel of the People's Liberation Army to the United States.



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Sunday April 1 12:23 PM ET

U.S. Ambassador Meets Chinese Official About Plane

[Photos](#)



Reuters Photo

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. ambassador to China met with the Chinese vice foreign minister in an attempt to resolve the situation of a U.S. Navy (news - web sites) plane that made an emergency landing after colliding with a Chinese fighter jet, a State Department spokeswoman said on Sunday.

"We've been in touch with the Chinese since last night and throughout the day, both in Washington and China," State Department spokeswoman Michelle King said. The U.S. surveillance plane with 24 crew members made an emergency landing after the plane sustained damage in the collision.

U.S. ambassador to China, Adm. Joseph Prueher, met with China's vice foreign minister on Sunday evening Chinese time "in an initial meeting to resolve the situation."

The U.S. embassy in Beijing is sending embassy officers and the consul general to Hainan Island, where the plane landed, in an attempt to see the crew on Monday local time. "We've been assured they are safe and well," King said.

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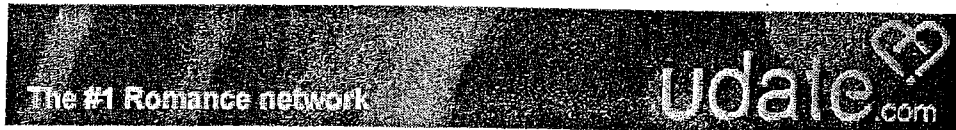
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World

04/01/2001 - Updated 06:09 PM ET

U.S. Navy plane collides with Chinese fighter

BEIJING (AP) — A U.S. Navy surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet sent to intercept it over the South China Sea on Sunday and made an emergency landing in China.

The Chinese government said the fighter crashed and its pilot was missing.

China quickly blamed the U.S. aircraft for the collision off the southern Chinese island of Hainan.

But the commander of U.S. Pacific military forces said that the slower U.S. plane was more likely to have been hit by the nimble Chinese fighter.

"It's pretty obvious who bumped who," said Adm. Dennis Blair in Hawaii.

The incident comes at an uneasy time in U.S.-Chinese relations.

The Bush administration has taken a warier attitude toward Beijing, and the president is reportedly leaning towards selling Taiwan much of the high-tech weapons it seeks - a sale bitterly opposed by China.

The American EP-3 plane landed at a military airfield on Hainan. None of the 24 crew members was injured, said Col. John Bratton, a spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii.

The status of the crew and control of the plane on the ground were unclear.

Chinese officials assured the United States the crew is safe, and American diplomats were going to Hainan to see them, said U.S. Ambassador Joseph Prueher.

He said he had talked several times with Secretary of State Colin Powell. President Bush was briefed on the episode Sunday morning, an administration official said.



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The U.S. plane was on a routine surveillance flight in international airspace when two Chinese fighters intercepted it, said Bratton.

In Honolulu, U.S. Pacific Command officials showed a map that put the collision about 80 miles southeast of Hainan, well outside the 12-mile territorial sea and airspace.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its territorial waters - a claim rejected by countries that use the vast expanse of ocean for shipping. "The U.S. side has total responsibility for this event," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement, adding that it had made a "serious" protest.

It said two Chinese fighters were sent up to track the plane as it approached Chinese airspace. "The U.S. plane abruptly diverted toward the Chinese planes, and its head and left wing collided with one of the Chinese planes, causing the Chinese plane to crash," it said. It put the accident about 62 miles southeast of Hainan.

It said rescuers were searching for the missing Chinese pilot. But Blair blamed the Chinese fighters. He told reporters that the fighters, similar to an F-16, fly much faster and have more maneuverability than the EP3, which is about the size of a Boeing 737 and basically flies in a straight path.

The EP-3 is an unarmed four-engine propeller-driven plane equipped to listen in on radio signals and monitor radar sites. The collision appeared to be an accident and the Chinese did not force the plane down, Bratton said.

The Pacific Command asked China to "facilitate the immediate return of the aircraft and crew," and Bratton said the Chinese appeared responsive to the U.S. requests. Blair, speaking about 4 p.m. ET, said the Navy spoke to the crew about 18 hours earlier.

Prueher, the U.S. ambassador, said it appears "the Chinese have lost an aircraft and we're sorry that occurred."

Distrust has risen between Beijing and Washington in recent weeks, exacerbated by China's recent detention of two scholars with links to the United States.

China, in turn, has been protesting the prospect of the United States' selling new arms to Taiwan, which Beijing views as a renegade Chinese province.

Nick Cook, an aviation expert with Jane's Defense Weekly in London, said the U.S. military routinely sends surveillance aircraft such as the EP-3 to monitor China's military.

The EP-3 can pick up radio, radar, telephone, e-mail and fax traffic, Cook said.

The U.S. plane took off from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, the U.S. military said. It is based at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington state and was flying with a crew of 22 Navy personnel and one each from the Air Force and the Marines.

Bates Gill, a China expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said China was acting like any military power by trying to ward off "activities aimed at its airspace."

The collision with the American plane is a "small victory" from China's perspective, Gill said. "You've sent the message about intruding in airspace. You forced it to land. You've got your hands on it."

One Chinese academic claimed that in-flight encounters were common with U.S. surveillance aircraft flying along China's coastline listening to its military. "It's very regular for the American Navy to have their planes intruding into Chinese airspace," said Yan Xuetong, an expert in international studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"The Chinese then send up fighters and chase them out." Totty, the U.S. military spokesman, confirmed that interceptions are common but denied that U.S. planes routinely intrude on Chinese airspace.

"Our aircraft routinely operate in international air space on reconnaissance missions and it is routine for Chinese aircraft to respond by intercepting and shadowing us," Totty said.

The EP-3 landed at a military airfield at Lingshui, a town on the southern end of Hainan, the statement said.

Totty said he had no information about whether either airplane had diverted course. "We want to know why contact was made," he said. "They were intercepting us on a routine mission, and during the intercept contact was made.

How it happened, we're not able to say at this time." Cook noted a similar collision in the 1980s between a Soviet fighter jet and a Norwegian P-3 - similar to the EP-3 - over the Barents Sea, which lies north of Norway and Russia. Both planes landed safely, he said.

