National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Press Release on Missing U.S. Plane

Washington May 5

One of NASA'S U-2 Research Airplanes, in use since 1956 in a continuing program to study gust-meteorological conditions found at high altitude, has been missing since about 9 o'clock Sunday morning, (local time) when its pilot reported he was having oxygen difficulties over the Lake Van, Turkey area.

The airplane had taken off from Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. The flight plan called for the first check point to be at 37 degrees, 25 minutes, North: 41 degrees, 23 minutes, East, and for a left turn to be made to the Lake Van Beacon, thence to the Trabazon Beacon, thence to Antalya, and return to Adana. The flight scheduled was estimated at 3 hours, 45 minutes, for a total of 1400 nautical miles. Takeoff was at 8 a.m. local time.

(The above-given times are the equivalent of 3 a.m. Sunday, and 2 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time.)

About one hour after takeoff, the pilot reported difficulties with his oxygen equipment. Using emergency radio frequency, he reported he was heading for the Lake Van Beacon to get his bearings, and that he would return to Adana.

As indicated above, his flight plan called for him to make a left turn at the Lake Van Beacon. His last report indicated he was attempting to receive that Beacon. It is believed he probably was on a northeasterly course, but there was no further word.

An aerial search was begun soon after receipt of the last communication. The Lake Van Area is mountainous and very rugged. No evidence has been sighted of the aircraft having crashed.

If the pilot continued to suffer lack of oxygen, the path of the airplane from the last reported position would be impossible to determine. If the airplane was an automatic pilot, it is likely it would have continued along its northeasterly course.

The pilot, as are all pilots used on NASA's program of upper atmosphere research with the U-2 airplane, is a civilian employed by the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, builders of the airplane.

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When the research program was begun in 1950 by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (predecessor to NASA), the Federal Agency did not have a sufficient number of pilots to operate the program, and so a contract was made with Lockheed to provide the pilots.

Overseas logistic support for NASA's continuing use of the U-2 is provided by air weather service units of the USAF.

NASA has procured a total of 10 U-2 airplanes. The airplane was originally built as a private venture by Lockheed to serve as a "Flying Test Bed". It is powered by a single Pratt & Whitney J-57 turbojet engine, and can maintain flight for as long as four hours at altitudes of up to 55,000 feet.

Since inception of the research program in 1956, the U-2 flying weather laboratories have operated from bases in California, New York, Alaska, England, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines.

The U-2 airplanes are presently being used in California (Edwards AFB, One), Japan (ATSUGI, Three) and Turkey (Adana, Four).

The instrumentation carried by the U-2 permits obtaining more precise information about clear air turbulence, convective clouds, wind shear, the jet stream, and such widespread weather patterns as typhoons, The airplane also has been used by NASA to obtain information about cosmic rays, and the concentration of certain elements in the atmosphere, including ozone and water vapor.

Instrumentation carried includes: Angular velocity recorder, to measure the airplane's rate of pitch; modified VGH recorder, to measure and record head-on gust components in flight; flight recorder model BB, continuous recorder of indicated airspeed, pressure altitude and normal acceleration; airspeed and altitude transducer to measure altitude and indicated airspeed; temperature and humidity measuring set AN/AMQ 7 to measure indicated free air temperature and indicated relative humidity; and vortex thermometer system, to measure true free-air temperature within one-half degree centigrade at high speeds.

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