



March 1951, Strategic Air Command's Walker Air Force Base, Roswell, New Mexico

One of the world's largest flying aeroplanes, a C-124A Globemaster, sits on the flight line adjacent to the huge hangars of the 2nd Strategic Support Squadron. She is 130' nose to tail, just shy of 50' from wheel base to the vertical stabilizer tip, and her wingspan is 174'. She is a new aircraft, having entered service on 28 September 1950, and has only 324 flight hours. Half way up the giant red empennage are her tail numbers 9244, painted in black on a white background. The massive transport is loaded with cargo, 35 Air Force officers and enlistedmen bound for Lakenheath/Mildenhall Royal Air Force Base in England, and one officer and one civilian catching a hop to Barksdale AFB, Louisiana.

The England bound passengers are rotational B-50

Superfortress aircrews and maintenance personnel for the 509th Forward Detachment. All of the officers except one are recent recalls to active duty, all decorated combat aviators of WWII. They came to Walker AFB from across America: 1st Lt Jack R. Fife from California; Capts Walter T. Peterson, Lawrence E. Rafferty, Robert S. Vincent, Edwin D. Zabawa, and Frank Zalac from Illinois; to mention only a few. Capt Walter A. Wagner, the only active duty pilot, is the senior captain and officer in charge of the passenger detachment. Of the 13 crew members assigned to this flight, Cpl "Tommy" Thompson, is a no show. Flight Line Chief, MSgt Phelps, assigns Cpl Arthur F. Chute to the crew.

In the cockpit, Maj Robert S. Bell, Senior Pilot and Flight Commander, Capt Emmette E. Collins, Pilot, and 2ndLt Howard P. Mathers, Copilot, go thru the Pre-Start Checklist. On the flight deck immediately aft of the pilots, TSgt Charles E. Green and SSgt Robert D. Amsden, the Flight Engineers, complete their portion of the checklist as do the Navigators, Capt Francis N. Davis and 2ndLt Karl R. Armstrong, Jr., and the Radio Operator SSgt Homer Jones, Jr. On the tarmac in front of the giant transport, SSgt Bartin C. Bemis, the Ground Controller does an intercom check in and announces "Ready for engine start!"

TSgt Green and SSgt Amsden start the engines in sequence, 3, 4, 2, and 1. They check the gages and make adjustments so each R-4360-20W engine is running smoothly.

SSgt Bemis gets radio clearance from the Pilots and reenters the aircraft via the nose ladder, which he pulls up into the

aircraft and secures the hatch.

The Pilots radio Walker Ground Control and receive clearance to taxi to the run up area. After a successful run up and check on each engine the Flight Engineers radio the Pilots. The Flight Deck crew goes thru the Takeoff Checklist.

In the cabin, MSgt Everett D. Scarbrough completes his portion of the Checklist. His four enlisted crewmen check that all cargo tie downs are secure and passengers are seated with their safety belts on.

Finally, 9244, call sign "Air Force 5882", taxis onto the runway, her engines are placed at takeoff power. The C-124 gains speed, her nose wheels rise off the runway followed by her main landing gear. As the Globemaster climbs, her wheels retract into their wells and the metal clam shells close. Families of the departing airmen line the perimeter fence waving goodbye.

During the next three plus hours the passengers get to know one another, trading family stories, backgrounds, and war experiences. The flight is uneventful and lands at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana to pick up Brig Gen Paul T. Cullen and his staff: Col Kenneth N. Gray, Lt Col James I. Hopkins, Lt Col Edwin A. McKoy, and Maj Gordon H. Stoddard. Their mission is to stand up the newly activated 7th Air Division at South Ruislip, London, England. There is an unexpected, and very lengthy delay at Barksdale caused by an RB-45A Tornado crashing on takeoff. Cullen is America's top aerial reconnaissance expert and designer of the RB-45.

After loading the baggage, a wooden crate, the 7th Air Division Staff, and the rest of the passengers (minus the civilian, Oriento Anthony Buccigross, and AF Capt William Richardson), the Flight Crew of Air Force 5882 man their stations. Brig Gen Cullen, his staff, and five of the Captains are seated on the upper deck, the rest of the passengers occupy the troop seats on the cabin deck along the fuselage walls facing the cargo crates. The Aircrew, once again, go thru their checklists, start the engines, and finally taxi onto the active duty runway for takeoff. Air Force 5882 departs Barksdale, climbs to altitude and commences her long flight to Limestone AFB, Maine.

After flying East across the South, Air Force 5882 turns North and flies up the East Coast to Maine. She makes a long, slow, straight in approach, touches down on Limestone's active duty runway, taxis to the transient line, and shuts down. The passengers are unloaded and met by buses to transport them to the respective messing facilities. Brig Gen Cullen and staff are greeted by the base commander and taken to the officer's club for dinner.

Maj Bell and the flight deck crew, minus the flight engineers, head to base operations to file the flight plan, check the weather, and confirm radio frequencies for the last leg.

The flight engineers, TSgt Green and SSgt Amsden, remain at the plane to do their post flight checks. The enlisted Aircrew divide their duties among refueling, servicing, and post flighting the aircraft. Completing their tasks, the crew closes up the plane, and heads to the enlisted chow hall for dinner.

The Globemaster is left unattended on the transient line.

After dinner all hands gather at the transient line. Maj Bell and the Aircrew brief the passengers on emergency procedures. They proceed into the giant Globemaster and go over ditching procedures. The Aircrew point out the assigned stations, exit hatches, survival gear, and the location of the 9 life rafts. Once all questions and concerns are taken care of the Aircrew head to their stations and begin their checklists. From this point forward all hands wear their Mae Wests for the over water flight.

Friday, 23 Mar 1951, 1:23 A.M. Eastern Standard Time, Air Force 5882 lifts off the runway, climbs into the cold, dark sky, and finally levels off at cruising altitude and airspeed. They pass over check point Gander, Newfoundland, leave the East Coast behind, and set a course for Ocean Weather Station Charlie at 52°50'N, 35°32'W, manned by the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Casco. The Flight Deck Crew take turns catching some shut eye in the Crew Berthing Station. The passengers crawl into their sleeping bags and turn in for the night.

Friday, 23 Mar 1951, 5:54 A.M. International Time Zone 3, the sun peeks over the North Atlantic and reveals a clear, calm, beautiful day. Air Force 5882 continues on an easterly course sending hourly radio reports to Gander. At 8:00 A.M., Air Force Flight 5882 is 3 hours 20 minutes flying time west of Casco, radio contact is established between Ocean Weather Station Charlie and Air Force 5882.



Casco utilizes its powerful radar to track the large transport and confirms exact lat/long position reports from the C-124's Navigators Capt Davis and 2nd Lt Armstrong. 23 Mar 1951, 11:20 A.M., International Time Zone 2, Air Force 5882 passes directly over Casco and continues east. 6 hours and 57 minutes have elapsed since departing Limestone AFB, Maine. 12:00 Noon, International Time Zone 2, Air Force 5882 reports its positions, status, fuel on board, and estimated next position.

1 P.M. International Time Zone 2, Air Force 5882's main cabin deck, amongst the cargo crates is an olive drab footlocker, stenciled in black paint on the lid "T.O. 19-15C-4". The footlocker explodes and white hot fires erupt in the adjoining crates. The heat is intense. The Cabin Crew immediately notifies the Pilots and attempt to fight the fires with hand held extinguishers. The passengers quickly move to safety.

On Casco's bridge, LtCdr Kenneth H. Patts (ship's Captain) is notified that a distress call was received from Air Force 5882 at position 51°30'N, 27°05'W. Patts orders the ship to General Quarters. LtJG Dale J. Henderson, ship's Navigator, plots the

course from Casco to the aircraft's position. Patts orders the course set to 103° True Magnetic and increase to max speed of 15.5 knots. The distance separating Casco from Air Force 5882 is 315 nautical miles. There are approximately 5 hours and 15 minutes of daylight left.

265 nautical miles east/northeast of Air Force 5882, British ship Weather Explorer is at Ocean Weather Station Jig (52°N 20°W) and receives the same distress call. Weather Explorer does not depart Jig. She is shadowed by two Soviet Guard Ships, the Orel and Korshun.

The distress call is relayed to the 509th Forward Detachment at Lakenheath AFB and a single B-50 Superfortress is launched to join up with Air Force 5882. The Aircrew is from Capt Walter Wagner's 830th Bomb Squadron and is commanded by Capt Harold Muller, a close personal friend of Wagner. The bomber carries no rescue gear.



Aboard the Globemaster, the Cabin Crew stops using the hand held extinguishers because the spray only increases the intensity of the flames. Windows, vents, and appropriate hatchways are opened to allow fresh air in and smoke out. MSgt Scarbrough informs Maj Bell that the fire extinguishers are ineffective. Maj Bell gives the order to jettison the cargo. The Pilots and Flight Engineers reduce the airspeed to 130 knots as MSgt Scarbrough and his crew open the fuselage deck elevator hatch and rig the overhead crane to move the heavier crates. Per Emergency Procedures all cargo movements are coordinated with TSgt Green and SSgt Amsden to ensure the forward and aft center of gravity limits are not exceeded.

Air Force 5882 continues flying east, jettisoning cargo. The crates explode on impact with the ocean surface, leaving a

trail of debris following the aircraft's flight path. The Navigators continue to plot and forward updated position reports and status to Casco (& Explorer).

Even after the cargo is jettisoned, the oak flooring covering the Globemaster's main cabin deck continues to burn. With the sun low on the western horizon, Maj Bell makes the decision to ditch while there is still good visibility and passes the word to his crew. Before performing their portion of the Ditching Emergency Checklist, the Navigators send out a final position report, 50°22'N 22°20'W. Their position is now 132 nautical miles west/southwest of Weather Explorer and still the ship does not leave its station.

The Pilots align the plane's heading parallel to the moderate sea swells and ease the large aeroplane smoothly onto the ocean surface. As all forward motion stops, the Flight Engineers rapidly secure all four engines. The giant C-124 Globemaster is upright, in tact, and afloat. In the cabin there is no panic amongst the seasoned war veterans. Each man inflates his Bright Yellow A-5 Mae West life vest, grabs his sleeping bag and heads for the assigned emergency exit hatches. Survival gear, fresh water canisters, boxes of rations, flare guns and flares, and three ARC-13 survival radio transceivers are loaded into the 9 A-6B all weather, canopied, 6 man, life rafts. All 53 Airmen have survived and are safely in the liferafts. They paddle away from the huge transport, join up, and tether the rafts together. The Globemaster slowly takes on water and sinks.

Several hours pass before Capt Muller's B-50 arrives on site.

The survivors fire several flares to indicate their exact position. The B-50, landing lights on, circles and communicates with the survivors, then radios the status that all 53 survived the ditching and gives the exact lat/long location, 50°30'N 22°20'W. The B-50 is not equipped for search and rescue and has nothing to drop to aid the survivors. The plane remains on station until Bingo Fuel forces them to return to Lakenheath.

Casco continues steaming at full speed. Ship's Navigator, LtJG Henderson plots the course to the survivors of AF 5882 and Capt Patts orders the ship to 109° True Magnetic Heading. Midnight, 23/24 Mar, Casco is at 51°34'N 29°10'W, 265 nautical miles from the survivors.

4:04 P.M. Casco encounters the first of the debris from the jettisoned crates at 51°20'N 24°20'W. The deck crew retrieves the object. For the next 6 hours Casco performs zig zags maneuvers, searching for the survivors and picking up debris.

10:27 P.M., 50°29'N 21°19'W, Casco's deck crew hears gunfire. Capt Patts orders reduce speed to 1/3 and all quiet. The next fourteen minutes the crew watch and listen for more gunfire without success. At 10:41 P.M. Patts orders course change to 120° True Magnetic and standard speed (208 rpm). With no reports of further gunfire, the Captain orders return to full speed (250 rpm). Casco continues to zig zag and search. The Coast Guard Crew is well trained, qualified, rehearsed, and experienced in conducting thorough and intensive ocean search operations. The ship's giant spot lights sweep the area and the deck crew fires illumination rounds and parachute flares over the dark ocean.

As Casco continues the search thru the Midnight and wee hours of the 25th. The Watch Officer, Chief Charles J. Albanese makes the logbook entry: "Underway on course 105° pgc [Per Gyro Compass] full speed 236 rpms searching for the survivors of the AF5882 in the vicinity of 50°30'N 21°20'W with the following vessels in the area: Golden Eagle, General Muir, Weather Station Jig, and Submarine Thule." At 1 A.M.: "Aircraft 4510 relieved by 6444."

Casco searches throughout the remainder of Sunday, the 25th. Capt Muller and Crew fly their B-50 out to the site, the only thing they find and report is a deflated life raft.

Midnight 25/26 Mar, Casco's Watch Officer, Chief Albanese, records the presence of the ships: "General Muir, OTC, General Tayler, General Rose, Golden Eagle, HM Sub Thule, 4YJ, Coral Sea". The search operation is now under the command and control of Rear Admiral Upper Half Daniel V. Gallery, Commander Carrier Division 6, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. Gallery's flag ship is the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea (OTC), Ship's Captain James Sargent Russell. Unlike the Coast Guard, the Navy's primary mission is combat, not search and rescue; therefore, the operation takes on a spotty, haphazard, hit and miss approach.

Monday, 26 Mar, Casco covers the assigned search area, 50°24'N 21°22'W to 50°53'N 21°50'W. The cutter changes headings and speeds on a constant basis, blanketing the area, overlooking nothing.

Tuesday, 27 Mar, Casco is assigned a new search area, 50°16'N 20°40'W to 50°06'N 20°07'W. Nothing of significance is

sighted.

Wednesday, 28 Mar, Casco's search area is 50°00'N 20°16'W to 50°02'N 22°26'W. At 8:45 P.M. she maneuvers "on various courses and speeds to investigate an area containing an object". At 8:50 P.M. Captain Patts orders all stop and retrieval of the object, Captain Lawrence Rafferty's unburned and undamaged pilot valise.

Thursday, 29 Mar, Casco is ordered to search area 50°10'N 22°39'W to 50°13'N 23°27'W. This search is fruitless. At 10:55 P.M. Capt Patts maneuvers the Casco alongside the Coral Sea and delivers Capt Rafferty's valise.

Midnight 29/30 Mar, Casco departs from the rendezvous with the Coral Sea. Capt Patts orders heading 268° pgc, 2/3 speed; destination search area 50°17'N 25°18'W for "survivors of AF 5882".

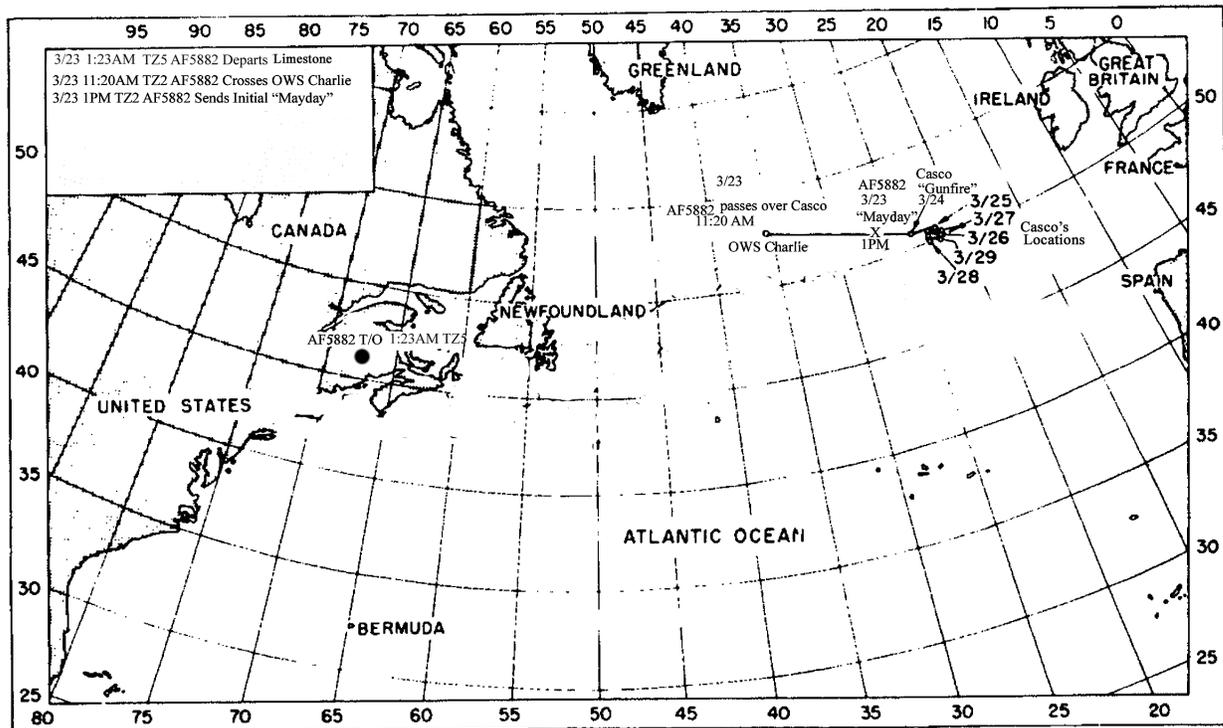
30 Mar, 7:20 A.M., Casco enters a debris field, maneuvers, changes speed, and launches "Number three (3) motor whale boat" to pick up "driftwood". 9:45 A.M., the whale boat is hoisted back aboard. Casco resumes searching, changing speed and heading on a constant basis.

30 Mar, 8 A.M., even though Casco is occupied with retrieving debris, orders come from RADM Gallery of the Coral Sea releasing Capt Patts and the Casco "from further search of missing aircraft AF 5882". Capt Patts orders heading 294 True Magnetic and return to Weather Station Charlie. The Captain does not receive orders to transfer the retrieved debris to Coral Sea or any other ship.

8:15 P.M., 30 Mar, RADM Gallery orders his ships to cease search operations and heads the carrier air group towards Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. All total, the Navy expended 4 days and 19 hours before calling off the search.

The 53 survivors from Air Force Flight 5882 have vanished. They were seen alive, in life rafts, at the ditching location and spoke via the transceiver survival radios to Captain Muller's B-50 crew. All 53 men wore inflated Bright Yellow A-5 Mae West life vests. After Capt Muller's B-50 departed the area, Casco's deck crew heard gunshots in that vicinity. On Sunday, 25 Mar, one partially deflated, unmanned, life raft was spotted by Capt Muller and crew. Soviet ships were active in this area and monitored all Transatlantic Military flights. The Soviets had no qualms about capturing and keeping American Airmen and Stalin knew they could do so with impunity.

Chart of AF 5882 (49244) and Casco:

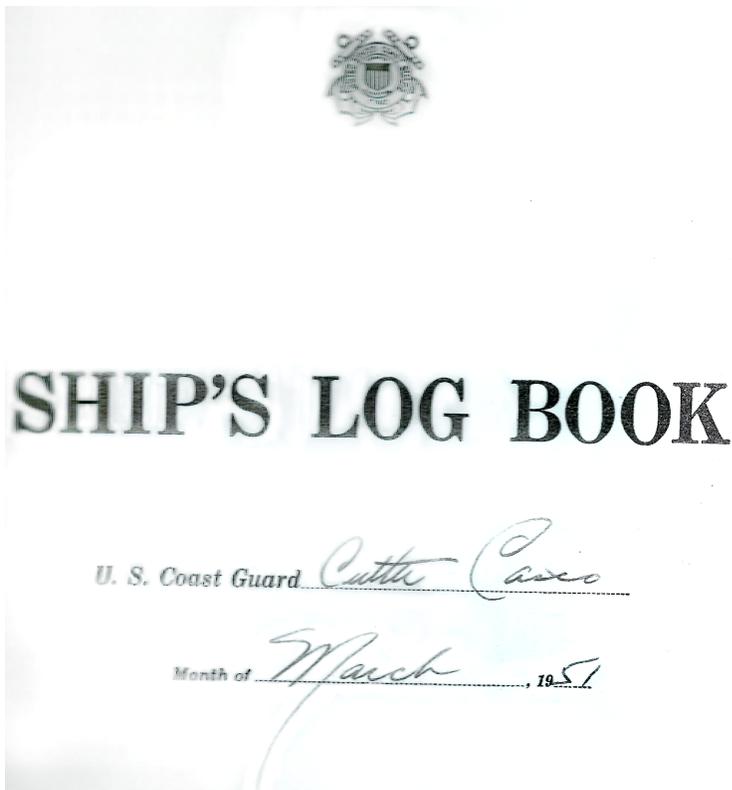


After the loss of the Globemaster and the 53 Airmen, an eyewitness saw around 50 U.S. Airmen brought to a Soviet Gulag outside Moscow. Later, another eyewitness saw and conversed with several U.S. Airmen at a Soviet military hospital. The Airmen were being treated for burns and a couple of broken bones.

In June 1951, Capt Muller returned from his deployment to England. He visited Capt Wagner's wife Geraldine at 1617 West Alameda in Roswell. Muller gave a full account of what he saw and knew.

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The USAF Accident Investigation File was "sealed" for nearly 50 years. When the file was finally released to Capt Wagner's son, Roy Wagner, it was missing innumerable enclosures and evidence. The Accident Report gives the U.S. Navy total credit for the entire search operation and the retrieval of all debris, including Capt Rafferty's Pilot Valise. There is no mention of the USCG Cutter Casco, as if the Cutter, her Captain, and Crew had little if anything to do with the tragedy of AF 5882 and the 53 missing Airmen. The Logbook of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Casco, Month of March 1951, reveals otherwise.



The Accident Report indicates that 49244 went missing & presumably blew up in the dead of night at 0100Z 23 Mar

1951 (1 A.M. Greenwich/Zulu) which is 11 P.M. 22 Mar 1951, International Time Zone 2, where Casco and 49244 were located. However, the Casco Logbook clearly indicates receiving AF 5882's (49244's) distress call in the light of day, on Friday, 23 Mar 1951, at 1 P.M., International Time Zone 2. The Accident Report claims there was bad weather and high seas; the Casco Logbook records good visibility, relatively clear skies, and calm seas.

The Accident Report contains none of the original filed flight plans; instead there is one recreated, type written plan for the flight leg Limestone to Mildenhall. It lacks the required signatures for filing a flight plan; however, it contains the stamp "certified true copy". The Accident Report states: "A flight plan has been reconstructed by Staff Personnel of the 2nd Strategic Support Squadron..." Furthermore, the plan is in "local time" vs zulu time, something an aviator and/or navigator would never do. The reason for this is not hard to discern: Aircraft flying within and thru different time zones must be on the same clock, the international Zulu clock. The flight plans for the legs Walker to Barksdale, and Barksdale to Limestone are missing.

The cargo load plan diagram included in the Accident Report is from C-124 #49133 and not from 49244. This is without explanation or reason; however, it could reveal that there was "special" cargo onboard the ill fated aircraft. So "special" that the Air Force did not want it ever revealed.

The Accident Report addressed the security issue at Limestone AFB with the following message: "Aircraft commander

requested no security assistance from this station."

The deflated life raft that Capt Muller spotted and reported on Sunday, 25 Mar, is mentioned in a doctored AF message and never addressed again. The message/memo is dated 24 Mar, yet it wasn't spotted until 25 Mar. There are no photos of the raft, no lab report examining it, nor is the raft among the Accident Report's list of recovered materials. Furthermore, the debriefing files and statements of Capt Muller and Crew are missing from the Accident Report.

The Accident Report constantly refers to the ditching as a "crash" and the recovered debris as "wreckage". However, the Douglas Aircraft Corporation and the Flight Safety Research Center both concur that the aircraft impacted the water under control (ditched) and did not break into pieces (otherwise there would have been floating aircraft parts and particularly inflated aircraft tires). The only aircraft "wreckage" recovered were two, small, burned pieces of the cabin floorboards.. Further proof that the Globemaster ditched (made a forced landing) and the Airmen survived is in this message:

***FROM CINCNELM
TO CINCLANTFLT
INFO COMCARDIV 6
COM 6TH FLT
DTG 251302Z
/R E S T R I C T E D/ RECOMMEND CORAL SEA PLUS 2 PLANE GUARDS BE DIVERTED
TO SCENE FORCED LANDING USAF TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT. POSITIVE SIGHTING
RAFT WITH SEVERAL SURVIVORS AT 242045Z. LAT 50 NORTH LONG 20 TE
WEST. CONTACT LOST.***

The Accident Report most conveniently does not address what

happened to the 53 Airmen nor does it speculate why no bodies were recovered.

Office of Special Investigation files and lab reports found chemical residue and metal fragments imbedded in the recovered, burned, cargo crate debris. Those chemicals and metal did not match anything in the aircraft, it's structure, nor it's cargo; however they did match with American manufactured incendiary bombs AN-M30 and AN-M50. All photos and labels in this series and the summation of findings state: "Sabotage". Yet the Accident Report Summation findings does not list Sabotage as a causative or contributing factor.

OBJECT NAME Counter Intelligence		ISSUANCE DATE 20 Dec 51	NUMBER D 47346	
		DATE 14 Nov 51	TYPE MR Out 1	
		FILE DESIGNATION 3 Incl		
SUMMARY (Incl) Crash C-124 off Wg-24, North Atlantic 23 March 1951 SABOTAGE				
DO NOT REMOVE THIS COPY				
TO 325	TO	TO	TO	TO
DATE 10 Nov 51	DATE	DATE	DATE	DATE
REFILED OR INDORSED TO	FILED (Place)	OTHER ACTION		

The following letter addressed to the then deceased Mother of Capt Wagner, is an example of what the Air Force sent to the

families of the 53 missing Airmen and is a fine example of the fabrications, and cavalier approach of the Air Force:



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

JUL 20 1951

Mrs. Nora M. Wagner
660 South Figueroa Street
Wilmington, California

Dear Mrs. Wagner:

I am writing to regretfully notify you of the termination of your son's missing status, which was a necessary action taken only after careful evaluation of all evidence bearing upon his case.

Captain Wagner was aboard the C-124 aircraft (Globemaster) which became missing in inclement weather en route to Mildenhall, England on 23 March 1951. The last radio contact with the plane revealed that it was over the North Atlantic ocean several hundred miles west of Ireland. When no further report was received and it became known that the aircraft was overdue, one of the largest air and sea organized search efforts ever instituted for a single plane was launched. No trace of any of the personnel was found in the vast area searched, although charred debris from the missing Globemaster was picked up, as well as personal items consisting of a sleeping bag and a valise. Examination of the debris by qualified experts revealed that the plane had apparently burned and exploded. Further indications were that because of the suddenness of the emergency and the unfavorable weather conditions, those aboard were unable to escape before the crash, or if they did manage to escape could not remain afloat until rescued. The extensive search was suspended on 16 April when it became evident that further efforts would be unavailing.

Consideration of these facts and the lapse of time during which no information has been received concerning the whereabouts of any person aboard this aircraft compels the regrettable conclusion that your son did not survive the accident. Accordingly, under the provisions of Public Law 490, 77th Congress, as amended, a final determination has been made that he died on 23 March 1951, and an official report announcing his untimely death has been issued.

I am extremely sorry that this message does not lighten the grief in your home. Please accept my deepest sympathy in your bereavement.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN H. MCCORMICK
Brigadier General, USAF
Director of Military Personnel

BG John H. McCormick was a "desk jockey" who rose thru the

ranks by serving in "staff" positions. During WWII he never set foot in a theater of combat operations; during the Korean War McCormick was once again absent from the fray. Unlike the 53 missing Airmen, BG McCormick never once went into harm's way. This letter is a very good indication of this Air Force General's lack of moral fiber and backbone. McCormick's letter was intended to settle the matter: 1. Bad weather; 2. Plane exploded and burned; 3. Everyone died; 4. Heroic 25 day search effort; 5. Sorry.

Little did McCormick, the Generals, and the Officers involved in this coverup ever imagine that the Accident Investigation file would see the light of day, that the truth would be revealed, and that a black mark would forever tarnish their legacies. Their turning a blind eye to sabotage in time of war was an act of treason. Their abandoning of the 53 Airmen was an act of cowardice.

To this day, the Air Force and the U.S. Government refuse to address the facts brought forth in this article.

I am Don Wagner, the son of Capt Walter A. Wagner, .Jr. I have been an aviator for 44 years and hold ratings in 10 military aircraft, fixed and rotary wing. I survived two plane crashes and innumerable in flight emergencies.

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Contact: donwagner@verizon.net

Post Script: In May 2016 the U.S. delegation to the 20th

Plenum specifically mentioned this flight and asked the Russians to examine their archives for any information about the flight and the Airmen.