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Interview #3

Interview of Colonel John A. Des Portes, Commander of the 4080th Strategic Wing, Major C. B. Stratton, General Power, Lt Col A. Leatherwood, and Lt Col J. R. King, 4028th SRWS, by Mr. Ron Caywood, HQ SAC, History, 25 May 1965.

Col Des Portes: Mr. Caywood, before we get into specific questions and particular areas of interest, I'd like to qualify my position on this information and tell you that I've had the wing for almost four years, and of course, I'll be most knowledgeable of things that occurred during that time period. However, it was a period of four years before my time which involved the B-57 aircraft, involved the development of the U-2 and the initial transition of the pilots in the U-2, which I'll ask some of the older people in the wing to come in and fill in for you since I don't have first-hand information on many of those things.

Mr. Caywood: Very good.

Col Des Portes: In my four years with the 4080th, from about 1962 to date, the activities of the wing have actually been the greatest as far as operational commitment is concerned. These operational commitments sort of peaked during late '62, early '63 time period to a point where there were times when there was only
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crews available at home station. So you can see that our commitments have fluctuated considerably during not only photographic legs and electronics intelligence, but we did a lot of sampling during this particular time period. Also, in the last year, this particular program has taken about 80 percent of our combined efforts in the 4080th Wing to keep it running. The amount of effort that is required is really out of proportion when you consider the number of aircraft involved with the U-2 side of the program.

Mr. Caywood: Excuse me, Col Des Portes, now when you mention something that is on a need to know basis, so that we will understand each other, I'm just going to jot down the subject that you mentioned as being on a need to know basis and then later, instead of putting it on this tape, I think you're going to tell me where I can find additional information on this separately, is that right?

Col Des Portes: That's generally correct. That's right.

years that we have flown what we call peripheral missions around areas of interest

DES PORTES

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There have been a couple of incidents, that I won't go into to any detail, where we've come a little close at times, and I assure you that it was inadvertant. Our missions are very specifically planned as peripheral missions. One incident that has been divulged in the magazines here recently by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, although he doesn't associate it with the 4080th Wing, was how much of a ruckus was created during the Cuban crisis when a U-2 inadvertantly flew over the Soviet Union. Well, it's sort of an interesting little sidelight, because I was extremely busy down at Orlando operating when I got a call from a staff

officer at SAC who asked me what in the hell I was doing with a U-2 over Russia? Well, I told him that he'd better ask somebody else because I had my hands full with what I was doing and I didn't know of a U-2 being over Russia. I later found out that one of my pilots on a sampling mission over the North Pole had picked up the wrong star for celestial navigation and it had thrown him off course, and that was the aircraft that caused this, I guess you would say, a minor international issue, although the way I read it in the magazine because of Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Khrushchev was pretty much concerned over the threat of that U-2 being over the western part of his country. But we do not intentionally overfly the Soivet Union. To the best of my knowledge, we never have. I did make mention of possibly a couple of cases due to the navigational capability of the U-2 where due to different, encountering unexpected winds and this type of thing at altitude where you may have infringed a little bit on the peripheral limitation that we're supposed to have observed.

Mr. Caywood:

Col Des Portes:

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